Youth Challenges eBook

Youth Challenges

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

Contents

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Page 1

Title: Youth Challenges

Author: Clarence B Kelland

Release Date: May, 2004 [EBook #5797] [Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule] [This file was first posted on September 2, 2002]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

*** *Start of the project gutenberg* EBOOK *youth challenges* ***

Produced by Charles Franks and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

Youth Challenges

By

CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

AUTHOR OF

“The Little Moment of Happiness,” “The High Flyers,” “Sudden Jim,”
“The Source,” “The Hidden Spring,” *etc*.

CHAPTER I

Bonbright Foote VI arose and stood behind the long table which served him as a desk and extended his hand across it. His bearing was that of a man taking a leading part in an event of historic importance.

“My son,” said he, “it gratifies me to welcome you to your place in this firm.” Then he smiled. When Bonbright Foote VI smiled it was as though he said to himself, “To smile one must do thus and so with the features,” and then systematically put into practice his instructions. It was a cultured smile, one that could have been smiled only by a gentleman conscious of generations of correct antecedents; it was an aristocratic smile. On the whole it was not unpleasant, though so excellently and formally done.

“Thank you, father,” replied Bonbright Foote VII. “I hope I shall be of some use to you.”

“Your office is ready for you,” said his father, stepping to a door which he unlocked with the gravity of a man laying a corner stone. “This door,” said he, “has not been opened since I took my place at the head of the business—since I moved from the desk you are to occupy to the one in this room. It will not be closed again until the time arrives for you to assume command. We have—we Footes—always regarded this open door as a patent token of partnership between father and son.”

Young Foote was well acquainted with this—as a piece of his family’s regalia. He knew he was about to enter and to labor in the office of the heir apparent, a room which had been tenantless since the death of his grandfather and the consequent coronation of his father. Such was the custom. For twelve years that office had been closed and waiting. None had ventured into it, except for a janitor whose weekly dustings and cleanings had been performed with scrupulous care. He knew that Bonbright Foote VI had occupied the room for seventeen years. Before that it had stood vacant eleven years awaiting for Bonbright Foote VI to reach such age and attainments as were essential. Young Foote realized that upon the death of his father the office would be closed again until his son, Bonbright Foote VIII, should be equipped, by time and the university founded by John Harvard, to enter as he was entering to-day. So the thing had been done since the first Bonbright Foote invested Bonbright Foote II with dignities and powers.

Page 2

Father and son entered the long-closed office, a large, indeed a stately room. It contained the same mahogany table at which Bonbright Foote II had worked; the same chairs, the same fittings, the same pictures hung on the walls, that had been the property of the first crown prince of the Foote dynasty. It was not a bright place, suggestive of liveliness or gayety, but it was decorously inviting—a place in which one could work with comfort and satisfaction.

“Let me see you at your desk,” said the father, smiling again. “I have looked forward to seeing you there, just as you will look forward to seeing *your* son there.”

Bonbright sat down, wondering if his father had felt oppressed as *he* felt oppressed at this moment. He had a feeling of stepping from one existence into another, almost of stepping from one body, one identity, to another. When he sat at that desk he would be taking up, not his own career, but the career of the entity who had occupied this office through generations, and would occupy it in perpetual succession. Vaguely he began to miss something. The sensation was like that of one who has long worn a ring on his finger, but omits to put it on one morning. For that person there is a vague sense of something missing throughout the day. Bonbright did not know what he felt the lack of —it was his identity.

“For the next month or so,” said his father, “about all you can hope to do is to become acquainted with the plant and with our methods. Rangar will always be at your disposal to explain or to give you desired information. I think it would be well if he were to conduct you through the plant. It will give you a basis to work from.”

“The plant is still growing, I see,” said Bonbright. “It seems as if a new building were being put up every time I come home.”

“Yes, growing past the prophecy of any of our predecessors,” said his father. He paused. “I am not certain,” he said, as one who asks a question of his inner self, “but I would have preferred a slower, more conservative growth.”

“The automobile has done it, of course.”

“Axles,” said his father, with a hint of distaste. “The manufacturing of rear axles has overshadowed everything else. We retain as much of the old business—the manufacturing of machinery—as ever. Indeed, *that* branch has shown a healthy growth. But axles! A mushroom that has overgrown us in a night.”

It was apparent that Bonbright Foote VI did not approve of axles, as it was a known fact that he frowned upon automobiles. He would not own one of them. They were too new, too blatant. His stables were still stables. His coachman had not been transmuted into a chauffeur. When he drove it was in a carriage drawn by horses—as his ancestors had driven.

Page 3

“Yes... yes...” he said, slowly, with satisfaction, “it is good to have you in the business, son. It’s a satisfaction to see you sitting there. ... Now we must look about to find a suitable girl for you to marry. We must begin to think about Bonbright Foote VIII.” There was no smile as he said this; the observation was made in sober earnest. Bonbright saw that, just as his ancestors looked to him to carry on the business, so they looked to him to produce with all convenient dispatch a male successor to himself. It was, so to speak, an important feature of his job.

“I’ll send in Rangar,” said his father, not waiting for Bonbright to reply to the last suggestion, and walked with long-legged dignity out of the room.

Bonbright rested his chin on his palm and stared gloomily at the wall. He felt bound and helpless; he saw himself surrounded by firm and dignified shades of departed Bonbright Footes whose collective wills compelled him to this or prohibited that course of action.

Adventure, chance, were eliminated from his life. He was to be no errant musician, improvising according to his mood; the score he was to play was before him, and he must play it note for note, paying strict attention to rests, keys, andantes, fortissimos, pianissimos. He had been born to this, had been made conscious of his destiny from babyhood, but never had he comprehended it as he did on this day of his investiture.

Even the selection and courting of a mate, that greatest of all adventures (to the young), was made humdrum. Doubtless his mother already had selected the girl, and presently would marry him to her. ... Somehow this was the one phase of the situation that galled him most.

“I’ll see about that,” he muttered, rebelliously, “I’ll see about that.”

Not that marriage was of importance to him yet, except as a thing to be avoided until some dim future. Women had not assumed consequence to him; his relations with them had been scant surface relations. They were creatures who did or did not please the eye, who did or did not dance well, who did or did not amuse one. That was all. He was only twenty-three.

Rangar, his father’s secretary, and the man who stood as shield between Bonbright Foote VI and unpleasant contacts with his business and the world’s business, entered. Rangar was a capable man whose place as secretary to the head of the business did not measure his importance in the organization. Another man of his abilities and opportunity and position would have carried the title of general manager or vice president—something respect-carrying. As for Rangar, he was content. He drew the salary that would have accompanied those other titles, possessed in an indirect sort of way the authority, and yet managed to remain disentangled from the responsibilities. Had he suddenly vanished the elder Foote would have been left suspended in rarefied heights between heaven and his business, lacking direct contact with the mills and

machine shops and foundries; yet, doubtless, would have been unable to realize that the loss of Rangar had left him so. Rangar was a competent, efficient man, if peculiar in his ambitions.

Page 4

“Your father,” said he, “has asked me to show you through the plant.”

“Thank you—yes,” said Bonbright, rising.

They went out, passing from the old, the family, wing of the office building, into the larger, newer, general offices, made necessary by the vastly increased business of the firm. Here, in a huge room, were bookkeepers, stenographers, clerks, filing cabinets, desks, typewriters—with several cubicles glassed off for the more important employees and minor executives.

“We have tried,” said Rangar, “to retain as far as possible the old methods and systems. Your father, Mr. Foote, is conservative. He clings to the ways of his father and his grandfather.”

“I remember,” said Bonbright, “when we had no typewriting machines.”

“We had to come to them,” said Rangar, with a note of regret. “Axles compelled us. But we have never taken up with these new contraptions —fads—like phonographs to dictate to, card indices, loose-leaf systems, adding machines, and the like. Of course it requires more clerks and stenographers, and possibly we are a bit slower than some. Your father says, however, that he prefers conducting his business as a gentleman should, rather than to make a mere machine of it. His idea,” said Rangar, “of a gentleman in business is one who refuses to make use of abbreviations in his correspondence.”

Bonbright was looking about the busy room, conscious that he was being covertly studied by every occupant of it. It made him uncomfortable, uneasy.

“Let’s go on into the shops,” he said, impatiently.

They turned, and encountered in the aisle a girl with a stenographer’s notebook in her hand; indeed, Bonbright all but stepped on her. She was a slight, tiny thing, not thin, but small. Her eyes met Bonbright’s eyes and she grinned. No other word can describe it. It was not an impertinent grin, nor a familiar grin, nor a *common* grin. It was spontaneous, unstudied—it lay at the opposite end of the scale from Bonbright Foote VI’s smile. Somehow the flash of it *comforted* Bonbright. His sensations responded to it. It was a grin that radiated with well wishes for all the world. Bonbright smiled back, awkwardly, and bobbed his head as she stepped aside for him to pass.

“What a grin!” he said, presently.

“Oh,” said Rangar. “Yes—to be sure. The Girl with the Grin—that’s what they call her in the office. She’s always doing it. Your father hasn’t noticed. I hope he doesn’t, for I’m sure he wouldn’t like it.”

“As if,” said Bonbright to himself, “she were happy—and wanted everybody else to be.”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Rangar. “She’s competent.”

They passed outside and through a covered passageway into the older of the shops. Bonbright was not thinking about the shops, but about the girl. She was the only thing he had encountered that momentous morning that had interested him, the only thing upon which Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, had not set the stamp of its repressing personality.

Page 5

He tried to visualize her and her smile that he might experience again that sensation of relief, of lightened spirit. In a measure he was able to do so. Her mouth was large, he saw—no small mouth could have managed that grin. She was not pretty, but, somehow, attractive. Her eyes were bully; intelligent, humorous sort of eyes, he decided.

“Bet she’s a darn nice kid,” he concluded, boyishly. His father would have been shocked at a thought expressed in such words.

“The business has done wonders these last five years,” said Rangar, intruding on Bonbright’s thoughts. “Five years ago we employed less than a thousand hands; to-day we have more than five thousand on the payroll. Another few years and we shall have ten thousand.”

“Axles?” asked Bonbright, mechanically.

“Axles,” replied Rangar.

“Father doesn’t approve of them—but they must be doing considerable for the family bank account.”

Rangar shot a quick glance at the boy, a glance with reproof in it for such a flippancy. Vaguely he had heard that this young man had done things not expected from a Foote; had, for instance, gone in for athletics at the university. It was reported he had actually allowed himself to be carried once on the shoulders of a cheering mob of students! There were other rumors, also, which did not sit well on the Foote tradition. Rangar wondered if at last a Foote had been born into the family who was not off the old piece of cloth, who might, indeed, prove difficult and disappointing. The flippancy indicated it.

“Our inventory,” he said, severely, “five years ago, showed a trifle over a million dollars. To-day these mills would show a valuation of five millions. The earnings,” he added, “have increased in even greater ratio.”

“Hum,” said Bonbright, his mind already elsewhere. His thought, unspoken, was, “If we’ve got so blamed much, what’s the use piling it up?”

At noon they had not finished the inspection of the plant; it was well toward five o’clock when they did so, for Rangar did his duty conscientiously. His explanations were long, careful, technical. Bonbright set his mind to the task and listened well. He was even interested, for there were interesting things to see, processes requiring skilled men, machines that had required inventive genius to devise. He began to be oppressed by the bigness of it. The plant was huge; it was enormously busy. The whole world seemed to need axles, preferably Foote axles, and to need them in a hurry.

At last, a trifle dazed, startled by the vastness of the domain to which he was heir apparent, Bonbright returned to the aloof quiet of his historic room.

“I’ve a lot to learn,” he told Rangar.

“It will grow on you. ... By the way, you will need a secretary.” (The Footes had secretaries, not stenographers.) “Shall I select one for you?”

“Yes,” said Bonbright, without interest; then he looked up quickly. “No,” he said, “I’ve selected my own. You say that girl—the one who grinned—is competent?”

Page 6

“Yes, indeed—but a girl! It has been the custom for the members of the firm to employ only men.”

Bonbright looked steadily at Rangar a moment, then said:

“Please have that girl notified at once that she is to be my secretary.”

“Yes, sir,” said Rangar. The boy *was* going to prove difficult. He owned a will. Well, thought the man, others may have had it in the family before—but it has not remained long.

“Anything more, Mr. Foote?”

“Thank you, no,” said Bonbright, and Rangar said good evening and disappeared.

The boy rested his chin on his hand again, and reflected gloomily. He hunched up his shoulders and sighed. “Anyhow,” he said to himself, “I’ll have *somebody* around me who is human.”

CHAPTER II

Bonbright’s father had left the office an hour before he and Rangar had finished their tour of the works. It was always his custom to leave his business early and to retire to the library in his home, where daily he devoted two hours to adding to the manuscript of The Philosophical Biography of Marquis Lafayette. This work was ultimately to appear in several severe volumes and was being written, not so much to enlighten the world upon the details of the career of the marquis as it was to utilize the marquis as a clotheshorse to be dressed in Bonbright Foote VI’s mature reflections on men, events, and humanity at large.

Bonbright VII sat at his desk motionless, studying his career as it lay circumscribed before him. He did not study it rebelliously, for as yet rebellion had not occurred to him. The idea that he might assert his individuality and depart from the family pattern had not ventured to show its face. For too many years had his ancestors been impressing him with his duty to the family traditions. He merely studied it, as one who has no fancy for geometry will study geometry, because it cannot be helped. The path was there, carefully staked out and bordered; to-day his feet had been placed on it, and now he must walk. As he sat he looked ahead for bypaths—none were visible.

The shutting-down whistle aroused him. He walked out through the rapidly emptying office to the street, and there he stood, interested by the spectacle of the army that poured out of the employees’ entrances. It was an inundation of men, flooding street from sidewalk to sidewalk. It jostled and joked and scuffled, sweating, grimy, each unit of it eager to board waiting, overcrowded street cars, where acute discomfort would be

suffered until distant destinations were reached. Somehow the sight of that surging, tossing stream of humanity impressed Bonbright with the magnitude of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, even more than the circuit of the immense plant had done.

Five thousand men, in a newspaper paragraph, do not affect the imagination. Five thousand men in the concrete are quite another matter, especially if you suddenly realize that each of them has a wife, probably children, and that the whole are dependent upon the dynasty of which you are a member for their daily bread.

Page 7

“Father and I,” he said to himself, as the sudden shock of the idea impacted against his consciousness, “are *supporting* that whole mob.”

It gave him a sense of mightiness. It presented itself to him in that instant that he was not a mere business man, no mere manufacturer, but a commander of men—more than that, a lord over the destinies of men. It was overwhelming. This realization of his potency made him gasp. Bonbright was very young.

He turned, to be carried on by the current. Presently it was choked. A stagnant pool of humanity formed around some center, pressing toward it curiously. This center was a tiny park, about which the street divided, and the center was a man standing on a barrel by the side of a sign painted on cloth. The man was speaking in a loud, clear voice, which was able to make itself perfectly audible even to Bonbright on the extreme edge of the mass.

“You are helpless as individuals,” the man was saying. “If one of you has a grievance, what can he do?... Nothing. You are a flock of sheep. ... If *all* of you have a grievance, what can you do? You are still a pack of sheep. ... Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, owns you, body and soul. ... Suppose this Foote who does you the favor to let you earn millions for him—suppose he wants to buy his wife a diamond necklace. ... What’s to prevent him lowering your wages next week to pay for it?... *You* couldn’t stop him!... Why can an army beat a mob of double its numbers? Because the army is *organized*! Because the army fights as one man for one object! ... You are a mob. Capital is organized against you. ... How can you hope to defend yourselves? How can you force a betterment of your conditions, of your wage? ... By becoming an army—a labor army!... By organizing. ... That’s why I’m here, sent by the National Federation—to organize you. To show you how to resist! ... To teach you how to make yourselves irresistible!...” There were shouts and cheers which blotted out the speaker’s words. Then Bonbright heard him again:

“Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, is entitled to fair interest on the money it has invested in its plant. It is entitled to a fair profit on the raw materials it uses in manufacture. ... But how much of the final cost of its axles does raw material represent? A fraction! What gives the axles the rest of their value?... *Labor*! You men are paid two, three, some of you even four dollars a day—for your labor. Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, adds a little pig iron to your labor, and gives you a place to work in, and takes his millions of dollars a year. ... Do you get your fair share?... You do *not*, and you will never get a respectable fraction of your fair share till you organize—and seize it.”

There was more. Bonbright had never heard the like of it before and it fascinated him. Here was a point of view that was new to him. What did it mean? Vaguely he had heard of Socialism, of labor unions, of the existence of a spirit of suspicion and discord between capital and labor. Now he saw it, face uncovered starkly.

Page 8

A moment before he had realized his power over these men; now he perceived that these men, some of them, realized it even better than he. ... Realized it and resented it; resented it and fought with all the strength of their souls to undermine it and make it topple in ruin.

His mind was a caldron into which cross currents of thought poured and tossed. He had no experience to draw on. Here was a thing he was being plunged into all unprepared. It had taken him unprepared, and shaken him as he had never been shaken before. He turned away.

Half a dozen feet away he saw the Girl with the Grin—not grinning now, but tense, pale, listening with her soul in her eyes, and with the light of enthusiasm glowing beside it.

He walked to her side, touched her shoulder. ... It was unpremeditated, something besides his own will had urged him to speak to her.

“I don’t understand it,” he said, unsteadily.

“Your class never does,” she replied, not sharply, not as a retort, but merely as one states a fact to give enlightenment.

“My father,” she said, “was killed leading the strikers at Homestead. ... The unions educated me.”

“What is this man—this speaker—trying to do? Stir up a riot?”

She smiled. “No. He is an organizer sent by the National Federation. ... They’re going to try to unionize our plant.”

“Unionize?”

“Bonbright Foote, Incorporated,” she said, “is a non-union shop.”

“I didn’t know,” said he, after a brief pause. “I’m afraid I don’t understand these things. ... I suppose one should know about them if he is to own a plant like ours.” Again he paused while he fumbled for an idea that was taking shape. “I suppose one should understand about his employees just as much as he does about his machinery.”

She looked at him with a touch of awakened interest. “Do you class men with machinery?” she asked, well knowing that was not his meaning. He did not reply. Presently he said:

“Rangar told you you were to be my secretary?”

“Yes, sir,” she said, using that respectful form for the first time. The relation of employer and employee had been re-established by his words. “Thank you for the promotion.”

“You understand what this is all about,” he said. “I shall want to ask you about it. ... Perhaps you even know the man who is speaking?”

“He boards with my mother,” said she. “That was natural,” she added, “my father being who he was.”

Bonbright turned and looked at the speaker with curiosity awakened as to the man’s personality. The man was young—under thirty, and handsome in a black, curly, quasi-foreign manner.

Bonbright turned his eyes from the man to the girl at his side. “He looks—” said Bonbright.

“How?” she asked, when it was apparent he was not going to finish.

“As if,” he said, musingly, “he wouldn’t be the man to call on for a line smash in the last quarter of a tough game.”

Page 9

Suddenly the speech came to an end, and the crowd poured on.

“Good night,” said the girl. “I must find Mr. Dulac. I promised I would walk home with him.”

“Good night,” said Bonbright. “His name is Dulac?”

“Yes.”

Men like Dulac—the work they were engaged upon—had not fallen within the circle of Bonbright’s experience. Bonbright’s training and instincts had all been aristocratic. At Harvard he had belonged to the most exclusive clubs and had associated with youths of training similar to his. In his athletics there had been something democratic, but nothing to impress him with democracy. Where college broadens some men by its contacts it had not broadened Bonbright, for his contacts had been limited to individuals chipped from the same strata as himself. ... In his home life, before going to college, this had been even more marked. As some boys are taught arithmetic and table manners, Bonbright had been taught veneration for his family, appreciation for his position in the world, and to look upon himself and the few associates of his circumscribed world as selected stock, looked upon with especial favor and graciousness by the Creator of the universe.

Therefore this sudden dip into reality set him shivering more than it would another who entered the water by degrees. It upset him. ... The man Dulac stirred to life in him something that was deeper than mere curiosity.

“Miss—” said he, and paused. “I really don’t know your name.”

“Frazer,” she supplied.

“Miss Frazer, I should like to meet this Dulac. Would you be willing?”

She considered. It was an unusual request in unusual circumstances, but why not? She looked up into his boyish face and smiled. “Why not?” she said, aloud.

They pressed forward through the crowd until they reached Dulac, standing beside his barrel, surrounded by a little knot of men. He saw the girl approaching, and lifted his hand in acknowledgment of her presence. Presently he came to her, casting a careless glance at Bonbright.

“Mr. Dulac,” she said, “Mr. Foote has been listening to your speech. He wants to meet you.”

“Foote!” said Dulac. “Not—”

“Mr. Bonbright Foote,” said the girl.

Evidently the man was nonplussed. He stared at Bonbright, who extended his hand. Dulac looked at it, took it mechanically.

“I heard what you were saying, Mr. Dulac,” said Bonbright. “I had never heard anything like it before—so I wanted to meet you.”

Dulac recovered himself, perceived that here was an opportunity, and spoke loudly so that the staring, interested workingmen, who now surrounded them, could hear distinctly.

“I’m glad you were present,” said he. “It is not often we workingmen catch the ear of you employers so readily. You sit apart from your men in comfortable offices or in luxurious homes, so they get little opportunity to talk straight from the shoulder to you. ... Even if they had the chance,” he said, with a look about him, “they would not dare. To be respectful and to show no resentment mean their bread and butter.”

Page 10

“Resentment?” said Bonbright. “You see I am new to the business and to this. What is it they resent?”

“They resent being exploited for the profit of men like yourself. ... They resent your having the power of life and death over them. ...”

The girl stood looking from one man to the other; from Dulac, tall, picturesquely handsome, flamboyant, conscious of the effect of each word and gesture, to Bonbright, equally tall, something broader, boyish, natural in his unease, his curiosity. She saw how like he was to his slender, aristocratic father. She compared the courtesy of his manner toward Dulac with Dulac’s studied brusqueness, conscious that the boy was natural, honest, really endeavoring to find out what this thing was all about; equally conscious that Dulac was exercising the tricks of the platform and utilizing the situation theatrically. Yet he was utilizing it for a purpose with which she was heart and soul in sympathy. It was right he should do so. ...

“I wish we might sit down and talk about it,” said Bonbright. “There seem to be two sides in the works, mine and father’s—and the men. I don’t see why there should be, and I’d like to have you tell me. You see, this is my first day in the business, so I don’t understand my own side of it, or why I should have a side—much less the side of the men. I hadn’t imagined anything of the sort. ... I wish you would tell me all about it. Will you?”

The boy’s tone was so genuine, his demeanor so simple and friendly, that Dulac’s weapons were quite snatched from his hands. A crowd of the men he was sent to organize was looking on—a girl was looking on. He felt the situation demanded he should show he was quite as capable of courtesy as this young sprig of the aristocracy, for he knew comparisons were being made between them.

“Why,” said he, “certainly. ... I shall be glad to.”

“Thank you,” said Bonbright. “Good night.” He turned to the girl and lifted his hat. “Thank *you*,” said he, and eyes in which there was no unfriendliness followed him as he walked away, eyes of men whom Dulac was recruiting for the army of the “other side” of the social struggle.

He hurried home because he wanted to see his father and to discuss this thing with him.

“If there is a conflict,” he said to himself, “in our business, workingmen against employer, I suppose I am on the employer’s side. *They* have their reasons. We must have our reasons, too. I must have father explain it all to me.”

His mother called to him as he was ascending the stairs:

“Be as quick as you can, Bonbright. We have guests at dinner to-night.”

“Some one I know?”

“I think not,” His mother hesitated. “We were not acquainted when you went to college, but they have become very prominent in the past four years. ... Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm Lightener—and their daughter,”

Bonbright noticed the slight pause before the mention of the daughter, and looked quickly at his mother. She looked as quickly away.

Page 11

“All right, mother,” he said.

He went to his room with another disturbance added to the many that disquieted him. Just as certainly as if his mother had put it into words he knew she had selected this Lightener girl to be Mrs. Bonbright Foote VII—and the mother of Bonbright Foote VIII.

“Confound it,” he said, “it’s started already. ... Dam Bonbright Foote VIII!”

CHAPTER III

Bonbright dressed with a consciousness that he was to be on exhibition. He wondered if the girl had done the same; if she, too, knew why she was there and that it was her duty to make a favorable impression on him, as it was his duty to attract her. It was embarrassing. For a young man of twenty-three to realize that his family expects him to make himself alluring to a desirable future wife whom he has never seen is not calculated to soothe his nerves or mantle him with calmness. He felt silly.

However, here *he* was, and there *she* would be. There was nothing for it but to put his best foot forward, now he was caught for the event, but he vowed it would require more than ordinary skill to entrap him for another similar occasion. It seemed to him at the moment that the main object of his life thenceforward would be, as he expressed it, “to duck” Miss Lightener.

When he went down the guests had arrived. His mother presented him, using proudly her formula for such meetings, “Our son.” Somehow it always made him feel like an inanimate object of virtue—as if she had said “our Rembrandt,” or, “our Chippendale sideboard.”

Mrs. Lightener did not impress him. Here was a quiet, motherly personality, a personality to grow upon one through months and years. At first meeting she seemed only a gray-haired, shy, silent sort of person, not to be spoken of by herself as Mrs. Lightener, but in the reflected rays of her husband, as Malcolm Lightener’s wife.

But Malcolm Lightener—he dominated the room as the Laocoon group would dominate a ten by twelve “parlor.” His size was only a minor element in that impression. True, he was as great in bulk as Bonbright and his father rolled in one, towering inches above them, and they were tall men. It was the jagged, dynamic, granite personality of him that jutted out to meet one almost with physical impact. You were conscious of meeting a force before you became conscious of meeting a man. And yet, when you came to study his face you found it wonderfully human-even with a trace of granite humor in it.

Bonbright was really curious to meet this man, whose story had reached him even in Harvard University. Here was a man who, in ten years of such dogged determination as affected one almost with awe, had turned a vision into concrete reality. In a day when

the only mechanical vehicles upon our streets were trolley cars, he had seen those streets thronged with “horseless carriages.” He had seen streets packed from curb to curb with endless moving processions of them. He had seen the nation abandon its legs and take to motor-driven wheels. This had been his vision, and he had made it reality.

Page 12

From the place of a master mechanic, at four dollars a day, he had followed his vision, until the world acknowledged him one of her richest men, one of her greatest geniuses for organization. In ten years, lifting himself by his boot straps, he had promoted himself from earnings of twelve hundred dollars a year to twelve million dollars a year. ... He interested Bonbright as a great adventurer.

To Hilda Lightener he was presented last. He had expected, hoped, to be unfavorably impressed; he had known he would be ill at ease, and that any attempts he made at conversation would be stiff and stilted. ... It was some moments after his presentation when he realized he felt none of these unpleasant things. She had shaken hands with him boyishly; her eyes had twinkled into his—and he was at his ease. Afterward he studied over the thing, but could not comprehend it. ... It had been as if he were encountering, after a separation, a friend of years—not a girl friend, but a friend with no complications of sex.

She was tall, nearly as tall as Bonbright, and she favored her father. Not that the granite was there. She was not beautiful, not even pretty—but you liked her looks. Bonbright liked her looks.

At table Bonbright was seated facing Hilda Lightener. His father at once took charge of the conversation, giving the boy a breathing space to collect and appraise his impressions. Presently Mr. Foote said, impressively:

“This is an important day in our family, Lightener. My son entered the business this morning.”

Lightener turned his massive, immobile face toward the boy, his expression not inviting, yet the seeing might have marked the ghost of a twinkle in his gray eyes.

“Um. ... Any corrections, amendments, or substitutions to offer?” he demanded.

Bonbright looked at him, obviously not comprehending the sarcasm.

“Most young spriggins I take into *my* business,” said Lightener, “think a whole day’s experience equips them to take hold and make the whole thing over. ... They can show me where I’m all wrong.”

Bonbright smiled, not happily. He was not accustomed to this sort of humor, and did not know how to respond to it.

“It was so big,” he said. “It sort of weighed me down—yet—somehow I didn’t get interested till after the whistle blew.”

Lightener grunted.

“That’s what interests most of ’em—getting out of the place after the whistle blows.”

“Dad!” said Hilda. “What was it interested you then, Mr. Foote?”

“The men,” said Bonbright—“that great mob of men pouring out of the gates and filling the street. ... Somehow they seemed to stand for the business more than all the buildings full of machinery. ... I stood and watched them.”

Interest kindled in Lightener’s eyes. “Yes?” he prompted.

“It never occurred to me before that being at the head of a business meant-meant commanding so many men ... meant exercising power over all those lives. ... Then there were the wives and children at home. ...”

Page 13

Bonbright's father leaned forward icily. "Son," he said, coldly, "you haven't been picking up any queer notions in college?"

"Queer notions?"

"Socialistic, anarchistic notions. That sort of thing."

"I don't believe," said Bonbright, with utter honesty, "that I ever gave the workingman a thought till to-day. ... That's why it hit me so hard, probably."

"It hit you, eh?" said Lightener. He lifted his hand abruptly to motion to silence Mr. Foote, who seemed about to interrupt. "Leave the boy alone, Foote. ... This is interesting. Never saw just this thing happen before. ... It hit you hard, eh?"

"It was the realization of the power of large employers of labor— like father and yourself, sir."

"Was that all?"

"At first. ... Then there was a fellow on a barrel making a speech about us. ... I listened, and found out the workingmen realize that we are sort of czars or some such thing—-and resent it. I supposed things were different. This Dulac was sent here to organize our men into a union—just why I didn't understand, but he promised to explain it to me."

"*What*?" demanded Bonbright Foote VI, approaching nearer than his wife had ever seen him to losing his poise.

"You talked to him?" asked Hilda, leaning forward in her interest.

"I was introduced to him; I wanted to know. ... He was a handsome fellow. Not a gentleman, of course—"

"Oh!" Lightener pounced on that expression. "Not a gentleman, eh? ... Expect to find the Harvard manner in a man preaching riot from a potato barrel? ... Well, well, what did he say? How did *he* affect you?"

"He seemed to think the men resented our power over them. Just how correctly he stated their feeling I don't know, of course. They cheered his speech, however. ... He said father had the power to buy mother a diamond necklace to-morrow, and cut their wages to pay for it—and they couldn't help themselves."

"Well—could they?"

"I don't know. I didn't understand it all, but it didn't seem right that those men should feel that way toward us. I want to talk to father about it—have him explain it to me."

Lightener chuckled and turned to Mr. Foote. “I don’t suppose you appreciate the humor of that, Foote, the way I do. He’s coming to you for an unbiased explanation of why your employees—feel that way. ... Young fellow,” he turned to Bonbright again—“I could come closer to doing it than your father—because I was one of them once. I used to come home with grease on my hands and a smudge on my nose, smelling of sweat.” Mrs. Foote repressed a shudder and lowered her eyes. “But I couldn’t be fair about it. Your father has no more chance of explaining the thing to you—than my wife has of explaining the theory of an internal-combustion engine. ... We employers can’t do it. We’re on the other side. We can’t see anything but our own side of it.”

Page 14

“Come now, Lightener, I’m fair-minded. I’ve even given some study to the motives of men.”

“And you’re writing a book.” He shrugged his shoulders. “The sort of philosophical reflections that go in books aren’t the sort to answer when you’re up against the real thing in social unrest. ... In your whole business life you’ve never really come into contact with your men. Now be honest, have you?”

“I’ve always delegated that sort of thing to subordinates,” said Mr. Foote, stiffly.

“Which,” retorted Mr. Lightener, “is one of the reasons for the unrest. ... That’s it. We don’t understand what they’re up against, nor what we do to aggravate them.”

“It’s the inevitable warfare between capital and labor,” said Mr. Foote. “Jealousy is at the root of it; unsound theories, like this of socialism, and too much freedom of speech make it all but unbearable.”

“Dulac said they must organize to be in condition to fight us.”

“Organize,” said Mr. Foote, contemptuously. “I’ll have no unions in my shop. There never have been unions and there never shall be. I’ll put a sudden stop to that. ... Pretty idea, when the men I pay wages to, the men I feed and clothe, can dictate to me how I shall conduct my affairs.”

“Yes,” said Lightener, “we automobile fellows are non-union, but how long we can maintain it I don’t know. They have their eyes on us and they’re mighty hungry.”

“To-morrow morning,” said Mr. Foote, “notices will appear in every department stating that any man who affiliates with a labor union will be summarily dismissed.”

“Maybe that will end the thing this time, Foote, but it’ll be back. It ’ll be back.”

Hilda leaned forward again and whispered to Bonbright, “You’re not getting much enlightenment, are you?” Her eyes twinkled; it was like her father’s twinkle, but more charming.

“How,” he asked, slowly, “are we ever to make anything of it if we, on the employers’ side, can’t understand their point of view, and they can’t understand ours?”

Mrs. Foote arose. “Let’s not take labor unions into the other room with us,” she said.

Bonbright and Hilda walked in together and immediately engaged in comfortable conversation; not the sort of nonsense talk usually resorted to by a young man and a young woman on their first meeting. They had no awkwardness to overcome, nor was either striving to make an impression on the other. Bonbright had forgotten who this girl

was, and why she was present, until he saw his mother and Mrs. Lightener approach each other, cast covert glances in their direction, and then observe something with evident pleasure.

“They seem attracted by each other,” Mrs. Foote said.

“He’s a nice boy,” replied Mrs. Lightener. “I think you’re right.”

“An excellent beginning. Propinquity and opportunity ought to do the rest. ... We can see to that.”

Page 15

Bonbright understood what they were saying as if he had heard it; bit his lips and looked ruefully from the mothers to Hilda. Her eyes had just swung from the same point to *his* face, and there was a dancing, quizzical light in them. *She* understood, too. Bonbright blushed at this realization.

“Isn’t it funny?” said Hilda, with a little chuckle. “Mothers are always doing it, though.”

“What?” he asked, fatuously.

“Rubbish!” she said. “Don’t pretend not to understand. I knew *you* knew what was up the moment you came into the room and looked at me. ... You—dodged.”

“I’m sure I didn’t,” he replied, thrown from his equilibrium by her directness, her frankness, so like her father’s landslide directness.

“Yes, you dodged. You had made up your mind never to be caught like this again, hadn’t you? To make it your life work to keep out of my way?”

He dared to look at her directly, and was reassured.

“Something like that,” he responded, with miraculous frankness for a Foote.

“Just because they want us to we don’t have to do it,” she said, reassuringly.

“I suppose not.”

“Suppose?”

“I’m a Foote, you know, Bonbright Foote VII. I do things I’m told to do. The last six generations have planned it all out for me. ... We do things according to inherited schedules. ... Probably it sounds funny to you, but you haven’t any idea what pressure six generations can bring to bear.” He was talking jerkily, under stress of emotion. He had never opened his mouth on this subject to a human being before, had not believed it possible to be on such terms with anybody as to permit him to unbosom himself. Yet here he was, baring his woes to a girl he had known but an hour.

“Of course,” she said, with her soft, throaty chuckle, “if you really feel you have to. ... But I haven’t any six generations forcing *me*. Or do you think yours will take me in hand?”

“It isn’t a joke to me,” he said. “How would you like it if the unexpected—chance—had been carefully weeded out of your future?... It makes things mighty flat and uninteresting. I’m all wrapped up in family traditions and precedents so I can’t wriggle—like an Indian baby. ... Even *this* wouldn’t be so rotten if it were myself they were thinking about. But they’re not. I’m only an incident in the family, so far as this goes. ...

It's Bonbright Foote VIII they're fussing about. ... It's my duty to see to it there's a Bonbright Foote VIII promptly."

She didn't sympathize with him, or call him "poor boy," as so many less natural, less comprehending girls would have done.

Page 16

“I haven’t the least idea in the world,” she said, “whether I’ll ever want to marry you or not—and you can’t have a notion whether you’ll want me. Suppose we just don’t bother about it? We can’t avoid each other—they’ll see to that. We might as well be comfortably friendly, and not go shying off from each other. If it should happen we do want to marry each other—why, all right. But let’s just forget it. I’m sure I sha’n’t marry you just because a lot of your ancestors want me to. ... Folks don’t fall in love to order—and you can put this away carefully in your mind—when I marry it will be because I’ve fallen in love.”

“You’re very like your father,” he said.

“Rushing in where angels fear to tread, you mean? Yes, dad’s more direct than diplomatic, and I inherit it. ... Is it a bargain?”

“Bargain?”

“To be friends, and not let our mammas worry us. ... I like you.”

“Really?” he asked, diffidently.

“Really,” she said.

“I like you, too,” he said, boyishly.

“We’ll take in our Keep Off the Grass signs, then,” she said. “Mother and father seem to be going.” She stood up and extended her hand. “Good night, chum,” she said. To herself she was saying what she was too wise to say aloud: “Poor kid! A chum is what he needs.”

CHAPTER IV

Bonbright’s first day in the plant had carried no suggestion from his father as to what his work was actually to be. He had merely walked about, listening to Hangar’s expositions of processes and systems. After he was in bed that night he began to wonder what work would fall to him. What work had it been the custom for the heir apparent to perform? What work had his father and grandfather and great-grandfather performed when their positions were his position to-day?... Vaguely he recognized his incompetence to administer anything of importance. Probably, little by little, detail by detail, matters would be placed under his jurisdiction until he was safely functioning in the family groove.

His dreams that night were of a reluctant, nightmarish passage down a huge groove, a monotonous groove, whose smooth, insurmountable sides offered no hint of variety. ... As he looked ahead he could see nothing but this straight groove stretching into infinity.

Always he was disturbed and made wretched by a consciousness of movement, of varied life and activity, of adventure, of thrill, outside the groove, but invisible, unreachable. ... He strove to clamber up the glassy sides, only to slip back, realizing the futility of the *effort*.

He breakfasted alone, before his father or mother was about, and left the house on foot, driven by an aching restlessness. It was early. The factory whistle had not yet blown when he reached the gates, but already men carrying lunch boxes were arriving in a yawning, sleepy stream. ... Now Bonbright knew why he had arisen early and why he had come here. It was to see this flood of workmen again; to scrutinize them, to puzzle over them and their motives and their unrest. He leaned against the wall and watched.

Page 17

He was recognized. Here and there a man offered him good morning with a friendliness of tone that surprised Bonbright. A good many men spoke to him respectfully; more regarded him curiously; some hopefully. It was the occasional friendly smile that affected him. One such smile from an older workman, a man of intelligent face, of shrewd, gray eyes, caused Bonbright to move from his place to the man's side.

"I don't know your name, of course," he said, diffidently.

"Hooper," said the man, pleasantly.

"The men seem to know me," Bonbright said. "I was a little surprised. I only came yesterday, you know."

"Yes," said Hooper, "they know who you are."

"They seemed——almost friendly."

Hooper looked sharply at the young man. "It's because," said he, "they're pinning hopes to you."

"Hopes?"

"Labor can't get anywhere until it makes friends in the ranks of the employers," said Hooper. "I guess most of the men don't understand that—even most of the leaders, but it's so. It's got to be so if we get what we must have without a revolution."

Bonbright pondered this. "The men think I may be their friend?"

"Some saw you last night, and some heard you talk to Dulac. Most of them have heard about it now."

"That was it?... Thank you, Mr. Hooper."

Bonbright went up to his office, where he stood at the window, looking down upon the thickening stream of men as the minute for the starting whistle approached. ... So he was of some importance, in the eyes of the workingmen, at least! They saw hope in his friendship. ... He shrugged his shoulders. What could his friendship do for them? He was impotent to help or harm. Bitterly he thought that if the men wanted friendship that would be worth anything to them, they should cultivate his dead forbears.

Presently he turned to his desk and wrote some personal letters—as a distraction. He did not know what else to do. There was nothing connected with the plant that he could set his hand to. It seemed to him he was just present, like a blank wall, whose reason for existence was merely to be in a certain place.

He was conscious of voices in his father's room, and after a time his father entered and bade him a formal good morning. Bonbright was acutely conscious of his father's distinguished, cultured, aristocratic appearance. He was conscious of that manner which six generations of repression and habit in a circumscribed orbit had bestowed on Bonbright Foote VI. Bonbright was unconscious of the great likeness between him and his father; of the fact that at his father's age it would be difficult to tell them apart. Physically he was out of the Bonbright Foote mold.

"Son," said Bonbright Foote VI, "you have made an unfortunate beginning here. You have created an impression which we shall have to eradicate promptly."

"I don't understand."

Page 18

“It has been the habit of our family to hold aloof from our employees. We do not come directly into contact with them. Intercourse between us and them is invariably carried out through intermediaries.”

Bonbright waited for his father to continue.

“You are being discussed by every man in the shops. This is peculiarly unfortunate at this moment, when a determined effort is being made by organized labor to force unionism on us. The men have the notion that you are not unfriendly toward unionism.”

“I don’t understand it,” said Bonbright. “I don’t know what my feelings toward it may be.”

“Your feelings toward it,” said his father with decision, “are distinctly unfriendly.”

Again Bonbright was silent.

“Last evening,” said his father, “you mingled with the men leaving the shops. You did a thing no member of our family has ever done— consented to an interview with a professional labor agitator.”

“That is hardly the fact, sir. ... I asked for the interview.”

“Which is worse. ... You even, as it is reported to me, agreed to talk with this agitator at some future time.”

“I asked him to explain things to me.”

“Any explanations of labor conditions and demands I shall always be glad to make. The thing I am trying to bring home to you is that the men have gotten an absurd impression that you are in sympathy with them. ... Young men sometimes come home from college with unsound notions. Possibly you have picked up some socialistic nonsense. You will have to rid yourself of it. Our family has always arrayed itself squarely against such indefensible theories. ... But the thing to do at once is to wipe out any silly ideas your indiscretion may have aroused among our workingmen.”

“But I am not sure—”

“When you have been in this business ten years I shall be glad to listen to your matured ideas. Now your ideas—your actions at least-must conform to the policy we have maintained for generations. I have called some of our department heads to my room. I believe I hear them assembling. Let us go in.”

Bonbright followed his father mechanically. The next room contained some ten or twelve subordinate executives who eyed Bonbright curiously.

“Gentlemen,” said the elder Foote, “this is my son, whom you may not have met as yet. I wish to present him to you formally, and to tell you that hereafter he and I share the final authority in this plant. Decisions coming from this office are to be regarded as our joint decisions—except in the case of an exception of immediate moment. ... As you know, a fresh and determined effort is afoot to unionize this plant. My son and I have conferred on the matter, but I have seen fit to let the decision rest with him-as to our policy and course of action.”

The men looked with renewed curiosity at the young man who stood, white of face, with compressed lips and troubled eyes.

Page 19

“My son has rightly determined to adhere to the policy established many years ago. He has determined that unionism shall not be permitted to enter Bonbright Foote, Incorporated. ... I state your sentiments, do I not, my son?”

At the direct challenge Bonbright raised his eyes to his father’s face appealingly. “Father—” he said.

“I state your position?” his father said, sternly.

Against Bonbright’s will he felt the accumulated power of the family will, the family tradition. He had been reared in its shadow. Its grip lay firm upon him. Struggle he might, but the strength to defy was not yet in him. ... He surrendered, feeling that, somehow, his private soul had been violated, his individuality rent from him.

“Yes,” he said, faintly.

“The first step he has decided upon,” said his father, “and one which should be immediately repressive. It is to post in every room and department of the shops printed notices to the effect that any man who affiliates himself with organized labor, or who becomes a member of a so-called trade-union, will be summarily dismissed from his employment. ... That was the wording you suggested, was it not?”

“Yes,” said Bonbright, this time without struggle.

“Hangar,” said Mr. Foote, “my son directs that these cards be printed *at once*, and put in place before noon. It can be done, can it not?”

“Yes, sir,” said Rangar.

“I think that is all, gentlemen. ... You understand my son’s position, I believe, so that if anyone questions you can answer him effectively?”

The department heads stirred uneasily. Some turned toward the door, but one man cleared his throat.

“Well, Mr. Hawthorne?” said the head of the business.

“The men seem very determined this time. I’m afraid too severe action on our part will make trouble.”

“Trouble?”

“A strike,” said Hawthorne. “We’re loaded with contract orders, Mr. Foote. A strike at this time—”

“Hangar,” said Mr. Foote, sharply, “at the first sign of such a thing take immediate steps to counteract it. ... Better still, proceed now as if a strike were certain. These mills *must* continue uninterruptedly. ... If these malcontents force a strike, Mr. Hawthorne, we shall be able to deal with it. ... Good morning, gentlemen.”

The men filed out silently. It seemed as if they were apprehensive, almost as if they ventured to disagree with the action of their employers. But none voiced his disapproval.

Bonbright stood without motion beside his father’s desk, his eyes on the floor, his lips pressed together.

“There,” said his father, with satisfaction, “I think that will set you right.”

“Right?... The men will think I was among them last night as a spy!... They’ll despise me. ... They’ll think I wasn’t honest with them.”

Bonbright Foote VI shrugged his shoulders. “Loyalty to your family,” he said, “and to your order is rather more important than retaining the good will of a mob of malcontents.”

Page 20

Bonbright turned, his shoulders dropping so that a more sympathetic eye than his father's might have found itself moistening, and walked slowly back to his room. He did not sit at his desk, but walked to the window, where he rested his brow against his hand and looked out upon as much of the world as he could see. ... It seemed large to him, filled with promise, filled with interests, filled with activities for *him*—if he could only be about them. But they were held tantalizingly out of reach.

He was safe in his groove; had not slipped there gradually and smoothly, but had been thrust roughly, by sudden attack, into it.

His young, healthy soul cried out in protest against the affront that had been put upon it. Not that the issue itself had mattered so much, but that it had been so handled, ruthlessly. Bonbright was no friend to labor. He had merely been a surprised observer of certain phenomena that had aroused him to thought. He did not feel that labor was right and that his father was wrong. It might be his father was very right. ... But labor was such a huge mass, and when a huge mass seethes it is impressive. Possibly this mass was wrong; possibly its seething must be stilled for the better interests of mankind. Bonbright did not know. He had wanted to know; had wanted the condition explained to him. Instead, he had been crushed into his groove humiliatingly.

Bonbright was young, to be readily impressed. If his father had received his uncertainty with kindliness and had answered his hunger's demand for enlightenment with arguments and reasoning, the crisis probably would have passed harmlessly. His father had seen fit not to use diplomacy, but to assert autocratically the power of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated. Bonbright's individuality had thought to lift its head; it had been stamped back into its appointed, circumscribed place.

He was not satisfied with himself. His time for protest had been when he answered his father's challenge. The force against him had been too great, or his own strength too weak. He had not measured up to the moment, and this chagrined him.

"All I wanted," he muttered, "was to *know*!"

His father called him, and he responded apathetically.

"Here are some letters," said Mr. Foote. "I have made notes upon each one how it is to be answered. Be so good as to dictate the replies."

There it was again. He was not even to answer letters independently, but to dictate to his secretary words put into his mouth by Bonbright Foote, Incorporated.

"It will help you familiarize yourself with our routine," said his father, "and your signature will apprise the recipients that Bonbright Foote VII has entered the concern."

He returned to his desk and pressed the buzzer that would summon Ruth Frazer with book and pencil. She entered almost instantly, and as their eyes met she smiled her famous smile. It was a thing of light and brightness, compelling response. In his mood it acted as a stimulant to Bonbright.

Page 21

“Thank you,” he said, involuntarily.

“For what?” she asked, raising her brows.

“For—why, I’m sure I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t know why I said that. ... Will you take some letters, please?”

He began dictating slowly, laboriously. It was a new work to him, and he went about it clumsily, stopping long between words to arrange his thoughts. His attention strayed. He leaned back in his chair, dictation forgotten for the moment, staring at Ruth Frazer without really being conscious of her presence. She waited patiently. Presently he leaned forward and addressed a question to her:

“Did you and Mr. Dulac mention me as you walked home?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Would it be—impertinent,” he asked, “to inquire what you said?”

She wrinkled her brows to aid recollection.

“Mr. Dulac,” she replied, “wondered what you were up to. That was how he expressed it. He thought it was peculiar—your asking to know him.”

“What did *you* think?”

“I didn’t think it was peculiar at all. You”—she hesitated—“had been taken sort of by surprise. Yes, that was it. And you wanted to *know*. I think you acted very naturally.”

“Naturally!” he repeated after her. “Yes, I guess that must be where I went wrong. I was natural. It is not right to be natural. You should first find how you are expected to act—-how it is planned for you to act. Yourself—why, yourself doesn’t count.”

“What do you mean, Mr. Foote?”

“This morning,” he said, bitterly, “cards with my name signed to them have been placed, or will be placed, in every room of the works, notifying the men that if they join a labor union they will be discharged.”

“Why—why—”

“I have made a statement that I am against labor unions.”

She looked at him uncomprehendingly, but somehow compelled to sympathize with him. He had passed through a bitter crisis of some sort, she perceived.

“I am not interested in all those men—that army of men,” he went on. “I don’t want to understand them. I don’t want to come into contact with them. I just want to sit here in my office and not be bothered by such things. ... We have managers and superintendents and officials to take care of labor matters. I don’t want to talk to Dulac about what he means, or why our men feel resentment toward us. Please tell him I have no interest whatever in such things.”

“Mr. Foote,” she said, gently, “something has happened to you, hasn’t it? Something that has made you feel bitter and discouraged?”

“Nothing unusual—in my family—Miss Frazer. I’ve just been cut to the Bonbright Foote pattern. I didn’t fit my groove exactly—so I was trimmed until I slipped into it. I’m in now.”

A sudden tumult of shouts and cheers arose in the street under his window; not the sound of a score of voices nor of a hundred, but a sound of great volume. Ruth looked up, startled, frightened. Bonbright stepped to the window. “It’s only eleven o’clock,” he said, “but the men are all coming out. ... The whistle didn’t blow. They’re cheering and capering and shaking hands with one another. What does that mean, do you suppose?”

Page 22

“I’m afraid,” said Miss Frazer, “it’s your placard.”

“My placard?”

“The men had their choice between their unions and their jobs—and they’ve stood by their unions.”

“You mean—?”

“They’ve struck,” said Ruth.

CHAPTER V

There are family traditions among the poor just as there are among the rich. The families of working-men may cling as tenaciously to their traditions as the descendants of an earl. In certain families the sons are compelled by tradition to become bakers, in others machinists; still other lowly family histories urge their members to conduct of one sort or another. It is inherent in them to hold certain beliefs regarding themselves. Here is a family whose tradition is loyalty to another family which has employed the father, son, grandfather; across the street may live a group whose peculiar religion is to oppose all constituted authority and to uphold anarchism. Theories and beliefs are handed down from generation to generation until they assume the dignity of blood laws.

Bonbright was being wrenched to fit into the Foote tradition. Ruth Frazer, his secretary, needed no alterations to conform to the tradition of *her* family. This was the leveling tradition; the elevating of labor and the pulling down of capital until there was a dead level of equality—or, perhaps, with labor a bit in the saddle. Probably a remote ancestor of hers had been a member of an ancient guild; perhaps one had risen with Wat Tyler. Not a man of the family, for time beyond which the memory of man runneth not, but had been a whole-souled, single-purposed labor man—trade-union man—extremist—revolutionist. Her father had been killed in a labor riot—and beatified by her. As the men of her family had been, so were the women—so was she.

Rights of man, tyranny of capital, class consciousness had been taught her with her nursery rhymes. She was a zealot. A charming zealot with a soul that laughed and wanted all mankind to be happy with it—a soul that translated itself by her famous grin.

When she thought of capital, of moneyed aristocracy in the mass and in the abstract, she hated it. It was a thing to be uprooted, plotted against, reviled. When she met a member of it in the body, and face to face, as she was meeting Bonbright Foote, she could not hate. He was a man, an individual. She could not withhold from him the heart-warming flash of her smile, could not wish him harm. Somehow, in the concrete, he became a part of mankind, and so entitled to happiness.

She was sincere. In her heart she prayed for the revolution. Her keen brain could plan for the overthrow of the enemy and her soul could sacrifice her body to help to bring it to pass. She believed. She had faith. Her actions would be true to her faith even at a martyr cost. But to an individual whom she saw face to face, let him be the very head and front of the enemy, and she could not wish him personal harm. To a psychologist this might have presented a complex problem. To Ruth it presented no problem at all. It was a simple condition and she lived it.

Page 23

She was capable of hero worship, which, after all, is the keystone of aristocracies. But her heroes were not warriors, adventurers, conquerors of the world, conquerors of the world's wealth. They were revolutionists. They were men who gave their lives and their abilities to laboring for labor. ... Already she was inclining to light the fires of her hero worship at the feet of the man Dulac.

Ruth Frazer's grin has been spoken of. It has been described as a grin. That term may offend some sensitive eye as an epithet applicable only to something common, vulgar. To smile is proper, may even be aristocratic; only small boys and persons of slack breeding are guilty of the grin. ... Ruth Frazer's grin was neither common nor vulgar. It was warming, encouraging, bright with the flashing of a quick mind, and withal sweet, womanly, delicious. Yet that it was a grin cannot be denied. Enemies to the grin must make the most of it.

The grin was to be seen, for Dulac had just entered Ruth's mother's parlor, and it glowed for him. The man seemed out of place in that cottage parlor. He seemed out of place in any homelike room, in any room not filled by an eager, sweating, radical crowd of men assembled to hang upon his words. That was the place for him, the place nature had created him to become. To see him standing alone any place, on the street, in a hotel, affected one with the feeling that he was exotic there, misplaced. He must be surrounded by his audience to be *right*.

Something of this crossed Ruth's mind. No woman, seeing a possible man, is without her sentimental speculation. She could not conceive of Dulac in a *home*.

"It's been a day!" he said.

"Yes."

"Every skilled mechanic has struck," he said, with pride, as in a personal achievement. "And most of the rest. To-night four thousand out of their five thousand men were with us."

"It came so suddenly. Nobody thought of a strike this morning."

"We were better organized than they thought," he said, running his hand through his thick, black hair, and throwing back his head. "Better than I thought myself. ... I've always said fool employers were the best friends we organizers have. The placard that young booby slapped the men in the face with—that did it. ...That and his spying on us last night."

"I'm sure he wasn't spying last night."

"Bosh! He was mighty quick to try to get our necks under his heel this morning."

“I don’t know what happened this morning,” she said, slowly. “I’m his secretary, you know. Something happened about that placard. I don’t believe he wanted it to go up.”

“You’re defending him? Of course. You’re a girl and you’re close to the throne with a soft job. He’s a good-looking kid in his namby-pamby Harvard way, too.”

“Mr. Dulac!...My job—I was going to ask you what I should do. I want to help the men. I want them to feel that I’m with them, working for them and praying for them. Ought I to quit, too—to join the strike?”

Page 24

Dulac looked at her sharply, calculatingly. “No,” he said, presently, “you can do a lot more good where you are.”

“Will there be trouble? I dread to think of rioting and maybe bloodshed. It will be bad enough, anyhow—if it lasts long. The poor women and children!”

“There’ll be trouble if they try to turn a wheel or bring in scab labor.” He laughed, so that his white teeth showed. “The first thing they did was to telephone for the police. I suppose this kid with a whole day’s experience in the business will be calling in strike breakers and strong-arms and gunmen. ...Well, let him bring it down on himself if he wants to. We’re in this thing to win. It means unionism breaking into this automobile game. This is just the entering wedge.”

“Won’t the automobile manufacturers see that, too?” she asked. “Won’t the men have all their power and wealth to fight?”

Dulac shrugged his shoulders. “I guess the automobile world knows who Dulac is to-night,” he said, with gleaming eyes.

Somehow the boast became the man. It was perfectly in character with his appearance, with his bearing. It did not impress Ruth as a brag; it seemed a natural and ordinary thing for him to say.

“You’ve been here just two weeks,” she said, a trifle breathlessly; for he loomed big to her girlish eyes. “You’ve done all this in two weeks.”

He received the compliment indifferently. Perhaps that was a pose; perhaps the ego of the man made him impervious even to compliments. There are men so confident in their powers that a compliment always falls short of their own estimate of themselves.

“It’s a start—but all our work is only a start. It’s preliminary,” His voice became oratorical. “First we must unionize the world. Now there are strong unions and weak unions—both arrayed against a capital better organized and stronger than ever before in the world’s history. Unionism is primary instruction in revolution. We must teach labor its power, and it is slow to learn. We must prepare, prepare, prepare, and when all is ready we shall rise. Not one union, not the unions of a state, of a country, but the unions of the world...hundreds of millions of men who have been ground down by aristocracies and wealth for generations. Then we shall have such an overturning as shall make the French Revolution look like child’s play. ...A World’s Republic—that’s our aim; a World’s Republic ruled by labor!”

Her eyes glistened as he talked; she could visualize his vision, could see a united world, cleansed of wars, of boundary lines; a world where every man’s chance of happiness was the equal of every other man’s chance; where wealth and poverty were abolished,

from which slums, degradation, starvation, the sordid wickednesses compelled by poverty, should have vanished. She could see a world of peace, plenty, beauty.

It was for this high aim that Dulac worked. His stature increased. She marveled that such a man could waste his thoughts upon her. She idealized him; her soul prostrated itself before him.

Page 25

So much of accomplishment lay behind him—and he not yet thirty years old! The confidence reposed in him by labor was eloquently testified to by the sending of him to this important post on the battle line. Already he had justified that confidence. With years and experience what heights might he not climb!...This was Ruth's thought. Beside Dulac's belief in himself and his future it was colorless.

Dulac had been an inmate of the Frazer cottage two weeks. In that time he had not once stepped out of his character. If his attitude toward the world were a pose it had become so habitual as to require no objective prompting or effort to maintain. This character was that of the leader of men, the zealot for the cause of the under dog. It held him aloof from personal concerns. Individual affairs did not touch him, but functioned unnoticed on a plane below his clouds. Not for an instant had he sought the friendship of Ruth and her mother, not to establish relations of friendship with them. He was devoted to a cause, and the cause left no room in his life for smaller matters. He was a man apart.

Now he was awkwardly tugging something from his pocket. Almost diffidently he offered it to Ruth. It was a small box of candy.

"Here..." he said, clumsily.

"For me!" Ruth was overpowered. This demigod had brought *her* a gift. He had thought about her—insignificant her! True, she had talked with him, had even taken walks with him, but those things had not been significant. It had seemed he merely condescended to the daughter of a martyr to his cause. He had been paying a tribute to her father. But a gift—a personal gift such as any young man might make to a girl whose favor he sought! Could it mean...?

Then she saw that he was embarrassed, actually embarrassed before her, and she was ashamed of herself for it. But she saw, too, that in him was a human man, a man with fears and sensations and desires and weaknesses like other men. After all, a demigod is only half of Olympus.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you *so* much."

"You're not—offended?"

He was recovering himself. In an instant he was back again in character.

"We men," he said, "who are devoted to the Cause have little time in our lives for such things. The Cause demands all. When we go into it we give up much that other men enjoy. We are wanderers. We have no homes. We can't *afford* to have homes. ...I," he said, it proudly, "have been in jail more than once. A man cannot ask a woman to share such a life. A man who leads such a life has no place in it for a woman."

“I should think,” she said, “that women would be proud to share such a life. To know they were helping a little! To know they were making one comfortable spot for you to come to and rest when you were tired or discouraged. ...”

“Comforts are not for us,” he said, theatrically, yet he did not seem theatrical to her, only nobly self-sacrificing.

Page 26

“It isn’t right,” she said, passionately. “The poorest laborer has more than you. He has his home and his family. No matter how poor he is, no matter what he suffers, he has some compensations. ...And you —you’re giving your life and everything in life that’s bright and beautiful for that laborer.”

“The happiness of one man buying the happiness of millions,” he said, his black eyes glowing. “Yet sometimes we have our weak moments. We see and we desire.”

“And are entitled to possess,” she said.

His eyes glowed upon her hungrily—she read the hunger in them, hunger for *her*! It frightened her, yet it made her heart leap with pride. To be looked upon with favor by such a man!

“Some women,” he said, slowly, “might live through it. There are women big enough and strong enough—a few, maybe. Big enough to endure neglect and loneliness; to live and not know if their husbands would sleep at home that night or in a jail or be in the middle of a riot on the other side of the world! They could not even depend on their husbands for support. ...A few might not complain, might be able to endure. ...You, Miss Ruth—I believe you are one of them!”

Her cheeks paled. Was he—could he be about to ask her to share his life? It was impossible! Yet what else could he mean? To what else could his words be tending? She was awed, frightened—yet warmed by a surge of pride. She thought of her father. ...If he could see and know! If knowledge could only pass to him that his daughter had been thought worthy by such a man to play her part for the Cause!...She waited tensely, hand pressed to her bosom.

Dulac stepped toward her, barbarically handsome. She felt the force, the magnetism of him. It called to her, compelled her. ...She could not lift her eyes.

Slowly he approached another step. It was as though he were forced to her against his will. The silence in the room was the tense silence of a human crisis. ...Then it was broken ruthlessly. There came a pounding on the door that was not a knock, but an alarm. It was imperative, excited, ominous.

“Oh...” Ruth cried.

Her mother was opening the door.

“Dulac! Where’s Dulac?” a man’s voice demanded.

“Here,” he replied. “What is it?”

“O’Hagan’s in town,” the man panted, rushing into the room. “They’ve brought in O’Hagan and his gang of bullies.”

O’Hagan, king of strike breakers! Ruth knew that name well, and what the arrival of the man of evil omen foretold. It promised violence, riot, bloodshed, suffering.

“They’re going to try to run, then,” said Dulac, calmly.

“The police have escorted a mob of scabs into the mill yards. They’ve tried to drive away our pickets. They’ve locked up Higgins and Bowen. Got Mason, too, but the crowd took him away from the police.”

“It’s on their own heads,” said Dulac, solemnly. “I’ll come with you.” He turned to Ruth and took her hand. “You see,” he said, “it calls me away—even from a moment like that. ...”

Page 27

CHAPTER VI

Malcolm Lightener was not a man to send messages nor to depend upon telephones. He was as direct as a catapult, and was just as regardful of ceremony. The fact that it was his and everybody else's dinner hour did not hold him back an instant from having himself driven to the Foote residence and demanding instant speech with Mr. Foote.

Mr. Foote, knowing Lightener, shrugged his shoulders and motioned Bonbright to follow him from the table.

"If we asked him to be seated and wait," said he, "Lightener would burst into the dining room."

They found their visitor not seated, but standing like a granite monolith in the center of the library.

"Well," he said, observing no formalities of greeting, "you've chucked a brick into the hornets' nest."

"Won't you be seated?" asked Mr. Foote, with dignified courtesy.

"Seated? No, I've got no time for seats, and neither have you, if you would wake up to it. Do you know what you've done with your bullheadedness? You've rammed the automobile manufacturers up against a crisis they've been dodging for years. Needlessly. There was no more need for this strike at this time than there is for fur overcoats in hell. But just when the hornets were stirred up and buzzing, you had to heave your brick. ... And now we've got to back your play."

"I am not aware," said Mr. Foote, icily, "that we have asked assistance."

"If the house next to mine catches fire the owner doesn't have to holler to me for help. I've got to help to keep the blaze from spreading to my own house. ... You've never thought beyond the boundaries of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated—that's what's the matter with you. You're hidebound. A blind man could see the unions look at this thing as their entering wedge into the automobile industry. If they break into you they'll break into us. So we've got to stop 'em short."

"If we need any help—" Mr. Foote began.

"Whether you need it or whether you want it," said Lightener, "you get it."

"Let me point out to you," said Mr. Foote, with chilly courtesy, "that my family has been able to manage its business for several generations—with some small success. ... Our relations with our employees are our own concern, and we shall tolerate no

interference. ... I have placed my son in complete charge of this situation, with confidence that he will handle it adequately."

"Huh!" grunted Lightener, glancing at Bonbright. "I heard about *that*. ... What I came to say principally was: This thing can be headed off now if you go at it with common sense. Make concessions. Get to this Dulac. You can get your men back to work—-and break up this union thing."

"Mr. Lightener, our course is decided on. We shall make no concessions. My son has retained O'Hagan, the strike breaker. To-morrow morning the mills start up as usual, with new men. We have them camped in the yards now. There shall be no compromising. When we have the strikers whipped into their places we'll talk to them —not before."

Page 28

“What’s the idea of putting up the boy as stalking horse? What do you expect to get by hiding behind him?”

“My son was indiscreet. He created a misapprehension among the men as to his attitude toward labor. I am merely setting them right.”

“And sewing a fine crop of hatred for the boy to reap.”

Mr. Foote shrugged his shoulders “The position of my family has not been doubtful since the inception of our business. I do not propose that my son shall make it so. Our traditions must be maintained.”

“If you’d junk a few traditions,” said Lightener, “and import a little modern efficiency—-and human understanding of human beings— you might get somewhere. You quit developing with that first ancestor of yours. If the last hundred years or so haven’t been wasted, there’s been some progress. You’re wabbling along in a stage coach when other folks use express trains. ... When I met the boy here last night, I thought he was whittled off a different stick from the rest of you. ... I guess he was, too. But you’re tying a string of ancestors around his neck and squeezing him into their likeness.”

“My son knows his duty to his family,” said Mr. Foote.

“I didn’t have a family to owe duty to, thank God,” said Lightener, “but I spent quite some time figuring out my duty to myself. ... You won’t listen to reason, eh? You’re going to bull this thing through?”

“My son will act as my son should act,” said Mr. Foote.

Lightener turned to where Bonbright stood with set face and eyes that smoldered, and studied him with an eye accustomed to judging men.

“There’ll be rioting,” he said. “Probably there’ll be bloodshed. There’ll certainly be a devil of a lot of suffering. Your father is putting the responsibility for it on your shoulders, young fellow. Does that set comfortably on your mind?”

Bonbright was slow to answer. His position was difficult, for it seemed to him he was being asked by a stranger to criticize his father and his family. His own unrest under the conditions which were forced upon him was not to be mentioned. The major point—the conflict between capital as represented by Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, and labor—as represented by the striking employees—he did not understand. He had wanted to understand it; he had felt a human interest in the men, but this was forbidden to him. ... Whatever he felt, whatever he thought, whatever dread he might have of the future as it impended over himself—he must be loyal to his name. So when he spoke it was to say in a singularly unboyish voice:

“My father has spoken for me, Mr. Lightener.”

For the first time Lightener smiled. He laid a heavy hand on Bonbright’s shoulder. “That was well done, my boy,” he said. Bonbright was grateful for his understanding.

A servant appeared. “Mr. Bonbright is wanted on the telephone,” she said.

It was Rangar. “There’s rioting at the plant,” the man said, unemotionally. “I have notified the police and taken the necessary steps.”

Page 29

“Very well,” said Bonbright. He walked to the library, and, standing in the door, stirred by excitement so that his knees quivered and a great emptiness was within him, he said to his father, “There’s rioting at the plant, sir.”

Then he turned, put on his coat and hat, and quietly left the house.

There was rioting at the mills! Bonbright was going to see what rioting was like, what it meant. It was no impulse, no boyish spirit of adventure or curiosity, that was taking him, but a command. No sooner had Rangar spoken the words over the telephone than Bonbright knew he must go.

“Whatever is happening,” he said to himself, “I’m going to be blamed for it.”

With some vague juvenile notion of making himself unrecognizable he turned up the collar of his coat and pulled down his cap. ...

When still some blocks from the mills a patrol wagon filled with officers careened past him, its gong emitting a staccato, exciting alarm. Here was reality. Bonbright quickened his step; began to run. Presently he entered the street that lay before the face of the factory—a street lighted by arc lamps so that the scene was adequately visible. As far as the main gates into the factory yards the street was in the possession of the police; beyond them surged and clamored the mob, not yet wrought to the pitch of attack. Bonbright thought of a gate around the corner. He would enter this and ascend to his office, whence he could watch the street from his window.

Before the gate a man sat on a soap box, a short club dangling by a thong from his wrist. As Bonbright approached he arose.

“What you want?” he demanded, taking a businesslike grip on his weapon.

“I want to go in,” said Bonbright. “I’m Mr. Foote.”

The man grinned. “To be sure, Mr. Foote. Howdy, Mr. Foote. You’ll be glad to meet me. I’m Santa Claus.”

“I tell you I’m Mr. Foote. I want to go inside.”

“And I tell you,” said the man, suddenly dropping his grin, “to beat it—while you’re able.”

Youthful rage sent its instant heat through Bonbright. For an instant he meditated jerking the man from that gate by the nape of the neck and teaching him a lesson with his athletic foot. ... It was not fear of the result that deterred him; it was the thought that this man was his own employee, placed there by him for this very purpose. If the guard made *him* bristle with rage, how would the sight of the man and his club affect the

strikers? He was a challenge and an insult, an invitation to violence. Bonbright turned and walked away, followed by a derisive guffaw from the strike breaker.

Bonbright retraced his steps and approached the rear of the police. Here he was stopped by an officer.

“Where you goin’?”

“I’m Mr. Foote,” said Bonbright. “I want to see what’s happening.”

Page 30

“I can’t help it if you’re Mr. Roosevelt, you can’t go any farther than this. ... Now *git*.” He gave Bonbright a violent and unexpected shove, which almost sent the young man off his feet. He staggered, recovered himself, and stood glowering at the officer. “Move!” came the short command, and once more burning with indignation, he obeyed. Here was another man acting in his behalf, summoned to his help. It was thus the police behaved, roughly, intolerantly, neither asking nor accepting explanations. It did not seem to Bonbright this could be the right way to meet the emergency. It seemed to him calculated only to aggravate it. The application of brute force might conquer a mob or stifle a riot, but it would leave unquenched fires of animosity. A violent operation may be necessary to remove a malignant growth. It may be the only possible cure; but no physician would hope to cure typhoid fever by knocking the patient insensible with a club. True, the delirium would cease for a time, but the deep-seated ailment would remain and the patient only be the worse for the treatment. ... Here the disease was disagreement, misunderstanding, suspicion, bitterness of heart between employer and employees. Neither hired strike breaker nor policeman’s baton could get to the root of it. ... Yet he, Bonbright Foote VII, was the man held out to all the world as favoring this treatment, as authorizing it, as ordering it!

He walked quite around the block, approaching again on a side street that brought him back again just ahead of the police. This street was blocked by excited, restless, crowding, jeering men, but Bonbright wormed his way through and climbed upon a porch from which he could see over the heads of the foremost to where a line of police and the front rank of strikers faced each other across a vacant space of pavement, the square at the intersection of the streets.

Behind him a hatless man in a high state of excitement was making an inflammatory speech from a doorstep. He was urging the mob to charge the police, to trample them under. ... Bonbright leaned far over the railing so he could look down the street where the main body of the mob was assembled. There was another speaker. Bonbright recognized Dulac—and Dulac, with all his eloquence, was urging the men to disperse to their homes in quiet. Bonbright listened. The man was talking sense! He was pointing out the folly of mob violence! He was showing them that it achieved nothing. ... But the mob was beyond the control of wise counsel. Possibly the feet of many had pressed brass rails while elbows crooked. Certainly there was present a leaven of toughs, idlers, in no way connected with the business, but sent by the devil to add to the horror of it.

One of these, discreetly distant from the front, hurled half a brick into the line of police. It was a vicious suggestion. Other bricks and missiles followed, while the crowd surged forward. Suddenly the line of patrolmen opened to let through a squad of mounted police, who charged the mob. ... It was a thing requiring courage, but a thing ordered by an imbecile.

Page 31

Horses and men plunged into that dammed river of men. ... It was a scene Bonbright could never erase from his memory, yet never could have described. It was a nightmare, a sensation of dread rather than a scene of fierce, implacable action.

The police drew back. The strikers hesitated. ... Between them, on the square of pavement, lay quiet, or writhing in pain, half a dozen human forms. ... Bonbright, his face colorless as those who lay below, stared at the bodies. For this that he saw he would be held responsible by the world. ...

He ran down the steps and began struggling through the mob. “Let me through. ... Let me through,” he panted.

He broke through to the front, not moved by reason, but quivering with the horror of the sight of men needlessly slain or maimed. ... He must do something. He must stop it!

Then he Was recognized. “It’s young Foote,” a man shouted, and snatched at his shoulder. He shook the man off, but the cry was taken up. “It’s Foote—young Foote. ... Spying again.”

Men sprang upon him, but he turned furiously and hurled them back. They must not stop him. He must not be interfered with, because he had to put an end to this thing. The mob surged about him, striking, threatening, so that he had to turn his face toward them, to strike out with his fists. More than one man went down under his blows before he could break away and run toward the police.

“See what you’ve done,” he shouted in their faces. “This must stop.” He advanced another step, as if to force the mounted officers to retreat.

“Grab him,” ordered a sergeant.

Bonbright was promptly grabbed and hauled through the line of mounted police, to be thrown into the arms of waiting patrolmen. He fought as strength was given him to fight, but they carried him ungently and hurled him asprawl upon the floor of a patrol wagon, already well occupied by arrests from the mob.

“Git ’em to the station,” the driver was ordered, and off lurched the patrol wagon.

That rapid ride brought cooling to Bonbright’s head. He had made a fool of himself. He was ashamed, humiliated, and to be humiliated is no minor torture to a young man.

Instead of giving his name to the lieutenant on the desk he refused to give a name, and was entered as John Doe. It was his confused thought to save his family from publicity and disgrace. ... So he knew what it was to have barred doors shut upon him, to be alone in a square cell whose only furnishing was a sort of bench across one end. He sank upon this apathetically and waited for what morning should bring.

CHAPTER VII

The world owes no small part of its advancement to the reflections of men in jails.

Bonbright, alone in the darkness of his cell, was admirably situated for concentrated thought. All through the sleepless night he reviewed facts and theories and conditions. He reached few definite conclusions, and these more boyish than mature; he achieved to no satisfaction with himself. His one profound conclusion was that everything was wrong. Capital was wrong, labor was wrong; the whole basis upon which society is organized was wrong. It was an exceedingly sweeping conclusion, embracing *everything*. He discerned no ray of light.

Page 32

He studied his own conduct, but could convince himself of no voluntary wrongdoing. Yet he was in a cell. ... In the beginning he had merely tried to understand something that aroused his curiosity— labor. From the point of view of capital, as represented by his father, this had been a sin. How or why it was a sin he could not comprehend. ... Labor had been willing to be friendly, but now it hated him. Orders given in his name, but not originating in his will, had caused this. His attitude became fatalistic—he was being moved about by a ruthless hand without regard to his own volition. He might as well close his eyes and his mind and submit, for Bonbright Foote VII did not exist as a rational human individual, but only as a checker on the board, to be moved from square to square with such success or error as the player possessed.

Last night. ... He had been mishandled by the employees of capital and the guardians of society; he had been mobbed by labor. He resented the guard and the police, but could not resent the mobbing. ... He seemed to be dangling between two worlds, mishandled by either that he approached. But one fact he realized—labor would have none of him. His father had seen to that. There was no place for him to go but into the refuge of capital, and so to become an enemy to labor against which he had no quarrel. ... This night set him more deeply in the Bonbright Foote groove. There was nothing for him now but complete submission, apathetic submission.

If it must be so, it must be so. He would let the family current bear him on. He would be but another Bonbright Foote, differentiated from the others only by a numeral to designate his generation.

Singularly, his own immediate problem did not present itself insistently until daylight began to penetrate the murk of the cell. What would the authorities do with him? How was he to get his liberty? Would the thing become public? He felt his helplessness, his inadequacy. He could not ask his father to help him, for he did not want his father ever to know what had happened the night before, yet he must have help from some one. Suddenly the name of Malcolm Lightener occurred to him.

After a time the doorman appeared with breakfast.

“Can I send a message?” asked Bonbright.

The doorman scrutinized him, saw he was no bum of the streets, but quite evidently a gentleman in temporary difficulty.

“Maybe,” he said, grudgingly. “Gimme the message and I’ll see.”

“Please telephone Mr. Malcolm Lightener that the younger of the gentlemen he called on last evening is here and would like to see him.”

“Malcolm Lightener, the automobile feller?”

“Yes.”

“Friend of your’n?”

“Yes.”

“Um!...” The doorman disappeared to return presently with the lieutenant.

“What’s this about Malcolm Lightener?” the officer asked.

Page 33

“I gave the man here a message for him,” said Bonbright.

“Is it on the level? You know Lightener?”

“Yes,” said Bonbright, impatiently.

“Then what the devil did you stay here all night for? Why didn’t you have him notified last night? Looks darn fishy to me.”

“It will do no harm to deliver my message,” said Bonbright.

“Huh!... Let him out.” The doorman swung wide the barred door and the lieutenant motioned Bonbright out. “Come and set in the office,” he said. “Maybe you’d rather telephone yourself?”

“If I might,” said Bonbright, amazed at the potency of Lightener’s name to open cell doors and command the courtesy of the police. It was his first encounter with Influence.

He was conducted into a small office; then the lieutenant retired discreetly and shut the door. Bonbright made his call and asked for speech with Malcolm Lightener.

“Hello!... Hello!” came Lightener’s gruff voice. “What is it?”

“This is Bonbright Foote. ... I’m locked up in the Central Station. I wonder if you can’t help me somehow?”

There was a moment’s silence; then Bonbright heard a remark not intended for his ears but expressive of Lightener’s astonishment, “Well, I’m *darned*!” Then: “I’ll be right there. Hold the fort.”

Bonbright opened the door and said to the lieutenant, “Mr. Lightener’s on his way down.”

“Um!... Make yourself comfortable. Say, was that breakfast all right? Find cigars in that top drawer.” The magic of Influence!

In twenty minutes Lightener’s huge form pushed through the station door. “Morning, Lieutenant. Got a friend of mine here?”

“Didn’t know he was a friend of yours, Mr. Lightener. He wouldn’t give his name, and never asked to have you notified till this morning. ... He’s in my office there.”

Lightener strode into the room and shut the door.

“Well?” he demanded.

Breathlessly, almost without pause, Bonbright poured upon him an account of last night's happenings, making no concealments, unconsciously giving Lightener glimpses into his heart that made the big man bend his brows ominously. The boy did not explain; did not mention accusingly his father, but Lightener understood perfectly what the process of molding Bonbright was being subjected to. He made no comment.

"I don't want father to know this," Bonbright said. "If it can be kept out of the papers. ... Father wouldn't understand. He'd feel I had disgraced the family."

"Doggone the family," snapped Lightener. "Come on."

Bonbright followed him out.

"May I take him along, Lieutenant? I'll fix it with the judge if necessary. ... And say, happen to recognize him?"

"Never saw him before."

"If any of the newspaper boys come snoopin' around, you never saw me, either. Much obliged, Lieutenant."

Page 34

“You’re welcome, Mr. Lightener. Glad I kin accommodate you.”

Lightener pushed Bonbright into his limousine. “You don’t want to go home, I guess. We’ll go to my house. Mother’ll see you get breakfast. ... Then we’ll have a talk. ... Here’s a paper boy; let’s see what’s doing.”

It was the morning penny paper that Lightener bought, the paper with leanings toward the proletariat, the veiled champion of labor. He bought it daily.

“Huh!” he grunted, as he scanned the first page. “They kind of allude to you.”

Bonbright looked. He saw a two-column head:

YOUNG MILLIONAIRE URGES ON POLICE

The next pyramid contained his name; the story related how he had rushed frantically to the police after they had barbarously charged a harmless gathering of workingmen, trampling and maiming half a dozen, and had demanded that they charge again. It was a long story, with infinite detail, crucifying him with cheap ink; making him appear a ruthless, heartless monster, lusting for the spilled blood of the innocent.

Bonbright looked up to meet Lightener’s eyes.

“It—it isn’t fair,” he said, chokingly.

“Fairness,” said Lightener, almost with gentleness, “is expected only when we are young.”

“But I didn’t. ... I tried to stop them.”

“Don’t try to tell anybody so—you won’t be believed.”

“I’m going to tell somebody,” said Bonbright, his mind flashing to Ruth Frazer, “and I’m going to be believed. I’ve got to be believed.”

After a while he said: “I wasn’t taking sides. I just went there to see. If I’ve got to hire men all my life I want to understand them.”

“You’ve got to take sides, son. There’s no straddling the fence in this world. ... And as soon as you’ve taken sides your own side is all you’ll understand. Nobody ever understood the other side.”

“But can’t there ever be an understanding? Won’t capital ever understand labor, or labor capital?”

“I suppose a philosopher would say there is no difference upon which agreement can’t be reached; that there must somewhere be a common meeting ground. ... The Bible says the lion shall lie down with the lamb, but I don’t expect to live to see him do it without worrying some about the lion’s teeth.”

“It’s one man holding power over other men,” said Bonbright.

As the car stopped at Malcolm Lightener’s door, sudden panic seized Bonbright.

“I ought not to come here,” he said, “after last night. Mrs. Lightener... your daughter.”

“I’ll bet Hilda’s worrying you more than her mother. Nonsense! They both got sense.”

Certainly Mrs. Lightener had.

“Just got him out of the police station,” her husband said as he led the uncomfortable Bonbright into her presence. “Been shut up all night. ... Rioting—that’s what he’s been doing. Throwing stones at the cops.”

Page 35

Mrs. Lightener looked at Bonbright's pale, weary, worried face. "You let him be, Malcolm. ... Never mind *him*," she said to the boy. "You just go right upstairs with him. A warm bath and breakfast are what you need. You don't look as if you'd slept a *wink*."

"I haven't," he confessed.

When Bonbright emerged from the bath he found the motherly woman had sent out to the haberdashers for fresh shirt, collar, and tie. He donned them with the first surge of genuine gratefulness he had ever known. Of course he had said thank you prettily, and had thought he felt thanks. ... Now he knew he had not.

"Guess you won't be afraid to face Hilda now," said Lightener, entering the room. "I notice a soiled collar is worn with a heap more misgiving than a soiled conscience. ... Grapefruit, two soft-boiled eggs, toast, coffee. ... Some prescription."

Hilda was in the library, and greeted him as though it were an ordinary occurrence to have a young man just out of the cell block as a breakfast guest. She did not refer to it, nor did her father at the moment. Bonbright was grateful again.

After breakfast the boy and girl were left alone in the library, briefly.

"I'm ashamed," said Bonbright, chokingly.

"You needn't be," she said. "Dad told us all about it. I thought the other night I should like you. Now I'm sure of it." She owned her father's directness.

"You're good," he said.

"No—reasonable," she answered.

He sat silent, thinking. "Do you know," he said, presently, "what a lot girls have to do with making a fellow's life endurable?... Since I went to work I—I've felt really *good* only twice. Both times it was a girl. The other one just grinned at me when I was feeling down on my luck. It was a dandy grin. ... And now you..."

"Tell me about her," she said.

"She's my secretary now. Little bit of a thing, but she grins at all the world... Socialist, too, or anarchist or something. I made them give her to me for my secretary so I could see her grin once in a while."

"I'd like to see her."

"I don't know her," said Bonbright. "She's just my secretary. I'll bet she'd be bully to know."

Hilda Lightener would not have been a woman had she not wondered about this girl who had made such an impression on Bonbright. It was not that she sensed a possible rival. She had not interested herself in Bonbright to the point where a rival could matter. But—she would like to see that girl.

Malcolm Lightener re-entered the room.

“Clear out, honey,” he said to his daughter. “Foote and I have got to make medicine.”

She arose. “If he rumbles like a volcano,” she said to Bonbright, “don’t be afraid. He just rumbles. Pompeii is in no danger.”

“You *git*,” her father said.

“Now,” he said when they were alone, “what’s to pay?”

Page 36

“I don’t know.”

“Will your father raise the devil? Maybe you’d like to have me go along when you interview him.”

“I think I’d rather not.”

Lightener nodded with satisfaction.

“Well, then—I’ve kind of taken a shine to you. You’re a young idiot, all right, but there’s something about you. ... Let’s start off with this: You’ve got something that’s apt to get you into hot water. Either it’s fool curiosity or genuine interest in folks. I don’t know which. Neither fits into the Bonbright Foote formula. Six generations of ’em seem to have been whittled off the same chip—and then the knife slipped and you came off some other chip altogether. But the Foote chip don’t know it, and won’t recognize it if it does. ... I’m not going to criticize your father or your ancestors, whatever kind of darn fools I may personally think they are. What I want to say is, if you ever kick over the traces, drop in and tell me about it. I’ll see you on your road.”

“Thanks,” said Bonbright, not half comprehending.

“You can’t keep on pressing men out of the same mold forever. Maybe you can get two or three or a dozen to be as like as peas—and then nature plays a joke on you. You’re the joke on the Foote mold, I reckon. Maybe they can squeeze you into the form and maybe they can’t. ... But whatever happens is going to be darn unpleasant for you.”

Bonbright nodded. *That* he knew well.

“You’ve got a choice. You can start in by kicking over the traces— with the mischief to pay; or you can let the vanished Footes take a crack at you to see what that can make of you. I advise no boy to run against his father’s wishes. But everybody starts out with something in him that’s his own—individual—peculiar to him. Maybe it’s what the preachers call his soul. Anyhow, it’s *his*. Whatever they do to you, try to hang on to it. Don’t let anybody pump it out of you and fill its room with a standardized solution. Get me?”

“I think so.”

“I guess that’s about, all from me. Now run along to your dad. Got any idea what will happen?”

Bonbright studied the rug more than a minute before he answered.

“I think I was right last night. Maybe I didn’t go about it the way I should, but I *intended* right. At least I didn’t intend *wrong*. Father will be—displeased. I don’t think I can explain it to him ... "

“Uh!” grunted Lightener.

“So I—I guess I sha’n’t try,” Bonbright ended. “I think I’ll go along and have it over with.”

When he was gone Malcolm Lightener made the following remark to his wife, who seemed to understand it perfectly:

“Some sons get born into the wrong families.”

CHAPTER VIII

Bonbright entered his office with the sensations of a detected juvenile culprit approaching an unavoidable reckoning. If there was a ray of brightness in the whole episode it was that the newspapers had miraculously been denied the meatiest bit of his night’s adventure— his detention in a cell. If that had been flaunted before the eyes of the public Bonbright felt he would never have been able to face his father.

Page 37

He was vividly aware of the stir his entrance caused among the office employees. It was as though the heart of the office skipped a beat. He flushed, and, with eyes straight before him, hurried into his own room and sat in his chair. He experienced a quivering, electric emptiness—his nerves crying out against an approaching climax. It was blood-relative to panic.

Presently he was aware that his father stood in the door scrutinizing him. Bonbright's eyes encountered his father's. They seemed to lock ... In that tense moment the boy was curiously aware how perfectly his father's physical presence stood for and expressed his theory of being. Tall, unbending, slender, aristocratic, intellectual—the pose of the body, the poise of the head, even that peculiar, slanting set of the lips expressed perfectly the Bonbright Foote idea. Five generations had bred him to be the perfect thing it desired.

"Well, sir," he said, coldly. Bonbright arose. There was a formality about the situation which seemed to require it. "Good morning," he said, in a low tone.

"I have seen the papers."

"Yes, sir."

"What they printed was in substance true?"

"I prefer not—to discuss it, sir."

"And *I* prefer *to* discuss it ... Do you fancy you can drag the name of Foote through the daily press as though it were that of some dancing girl or political mountebank, and have no reference made of it? Tell me exactly what happened last night—and why it was permitted to happen."

"Father—" Bonbright's voice was scarcely audible, yet it was alive and quivering with pain. "I cannot talk to you about last night."

The older man's lips compressed. "You are a man grown—are supposed to be a man grown. Must I cross-examine you as if you were a sulking schoolboy?"

Bonbright was not defiant, not sulkily stubborn. His night's experiences had affected, were affecting him, working far-reaching changes in him, maturing him. But he was too close to them for their effect to have been accomplished. The work was going on each moment, each hour. He did not reply to his father immediately, but when he did so it was with a certain decision, a firmness, a lack of the old boyishness which was marked and distinct.

"You must not cross-question me. There are things about which one's own father has not the right to ask. ... If I could have come to you voluntarily—but I could not. In

college I have seen fellows get into trouble, and the first thing they thought of was to go to their fathers with it ... It was queer. What happened last night happened to *me*. Possibly it will have some effect on my family and on the name of Foote, as you say ... But it happened to *me*. Nobody else can understand it. No one has the right to ask about it."

"It happened to *you*! Young man, you are the seventh Bonbright Foote— member of a *family*. What happens to you happens to it. You cannot separate yourself from it. You, as an individual, are not important, but as Bonbright Foote VII you become important. Do you imagine you can act and think as an entity distinct from Bonbright Foote, Incorporated? ... Nonsense. You are but one part of a whole; what you do affects the whole, and you are responsible for it to the shops."

Page 38

“A man must be responsible to himself,” said Bonbright, fumbling to express what was troubling his soul. “There are bigger things than family ...”

His father had advanced to the desk. Now he interrupted by bringing his hand down upon it masterfully. “For you there is no bigger thing than family. You have a strange idea. Where did you get it? Is this sort of thing being taught in college to-day? I suppose you have some notion of asserting your individuality. Bosh! Men in your position, born as you have been born, have no right to individuality. Your individuality must express the individuality of your family as mine has done, and as my father’s and *his* father’s did before me ... I insist that you explain fully to me what occurred last night.”

“I am sorry, sir, but I cannot.”

There was no outburst of passion from the father; it would have been wholly out of keeping with his character. Bonbright Foote VI was a strong man in his way; he possessed force of character—even if that force were merely a standardized, family-molded force of character. He recognized a crisis in the affairs of the Foote family which must be met wisely. He perceived that results could not be obtained through the violent impact of will; that here was a dangerous condition which must be cured—but not by seizing it and wrenching it into place ... Perhaps he could make Bonbright obey him, but if matters were as serious as they seemed, it would be far from wise. The thing must be dealt with patiently, firmly. Here was only a symptom; the disease went deeper. For six generations one Bonbright Foote after another had been born true to tradition’s form—the seventh generation had gone askew! It must be set right, remolded.

“Let me point out to you,” said he, “that you are here only because you are my son and the descendant of our forefathers. Aside from that you have no right to consideration or to position. You possess wealth. You are a personage ... Suppose it were necessary to deprive you of these things. Suppose, as I have the authority to do, I should send you out of this office to earn your own living. Suppose, in short, I should find it necessary to do as other fathers have done— to disown you ... What then? What could you do? What would your individuality be worth? ... Think it over, my son. In the meantime we will postpone this matter until you revise your mood.”

He turned abruptly and went into his own room. He wanted to consider. He did not know how to conduct himself, nor how to handle this distressing affair ... He fancied he was acting wisely and diplomatically, but at the same time he carried away with him the unpleasant consciousness that victory lay for the moment with his son. Individuality was briefly triumphant. One thing was clear to him—it should not remain so. The Bonbright Foote tradition should be continued correctly by his son. This was not so much a determination as a state of mind. It was a thing of inevitability.

Page 39

Bonbright's feeling as his father left him was one of utter helplessness, of futility. He had received his father's unveiled threat and later it would have its effect. For the moment it passed without consideration. First in his mind was the fact that he did not know what to do—did not even know what he *wanted* to do. All he could see was the groove he was in, the family groove. He did not like it, but he was not sure he wanted to be out of it. His father had talked of individuality; Bonbright did not know if he wanted to assert his individuality. He was at sea. Unrest grappled with him blindly, urging him nowhere, seeming merely to wrestle with him aimlessly and maliciously ... What was it all about, anyhow? Why was he mixed up in the struggle? Why could not he be left alone in quiet? If he had owned a definite purpose, a definite ambition, a describable desire, it would have been different, but he had none. He was merely bitterly uncomfortable without the slightest notion what event or course of action could bring him comfort.

One thought persisted through the chaos of his surging thoughts. He must call in Ruth Frazer and explain to her that he had not done what the papers said he did. Somehow he felt he owed her explanation, her of all the world.

She entered in response to the button he pushed, but there was not the broad smile—-the grin—he looked up eagerly to see. She was grave, rather more than grave—she was troubled, so troubled that she did not raise her eyes to look at him, but took her seat opposite him and laid her dictation book on the desk.

"Miss Frazer—" he said, and at his tone she looked at him. He seemed very young to her, yet older than he had appeared before. Older he was, with a tired, haggard look left by his sleepless night. She could not restrain her heart from softening toward him, for he was such a boy—just a boy.

"Miss Frazer," he said again, "I want to—talk to you about last night—about what the papers said."

If he expected help from her he was disappointed. Her lips set visibly.

"It was not true—what they said ... I sha'n't explain it to anybody else. What good could it do? But I want you to understand. It seems as if I *have* to explain to you. ... I can't have you believing—"

"I didn't read it in the papers," she said. "I heard from an eyewitness.

"Mr. Dulac," he said. "Yes, he would have seen. Even to him it might have looked that way—it might. But I didn't—I didn't! You must believe me. I did not run to the police to have them charge the strikers again ... Why should I?"

"Why should you?" she repeated, coldly.

Page 40

“Let me tell you ... I went there—out of curiosity, I guess. This whole strike came so suddenly. I don’t understand why strikes and troubles like this must be, and I thought I might find out something if I went and watched ... I wasn’t taking sides. I don’t know who is right and who is wrong. All I wanted was to learn. One thing ... I don’t blame the strikers for throwing bricks. I could have thrown a brick at one of our guards; a policeman shoved me and I could have thrown a brick at him. ... I suppose, if there are to be strikes and mobs who want to destroy our property, that we must have guards and police ... But they shouldn’t aggravate things. I went around where I could see—and I saw the police charge. I saw them send their horses smashing into that crowd—and I saw them draw back, leaving men on the pavement, ... There was one who writhed about and made horrible sounds! ... The mob was against us and the police were for us—but I couldn’t stand it. I guess I lost my head. I hadn’t the least intention of doing what I did, or of doing anything but watch ... but I lost my head. I did rush up to the police, Miss Frazer, and the strikers tried to mob me. I was struck more than once ... It wasn’t to tell the police to charge. You must believe me—you *must*. ... I was afraid they *would* charge again, so I rushed at them. All I remember distinctly is shouting to them that they mustn’t do it again—mustn’t charge into that defenseless mob. ... It was horrible.” He paused, and shut his eyes as though to blot out a picture painted on his mind. Then he spoke more calmly. “The police didn’t understand, either. They thought I belonged to the mob, and they arrested me. ... I slept—I spent the night in a cell in Police Headquarters.”

Ruth was leaning over the desk toward him, eyes wide, lips parted. “Is—is that the *truth*?” she asked; but as she asked she knew it was so. Then: “I’m sorry—so sorry. You must let me tell Mr. Dulac and he will tell the men. It would be terrible if they kept on believing what they believe now. They think you are—”

“I know,” he said, wearily. “It can’t be helped. I don’t know that it matters. What they think about me is what—it is thought best for them to think. I am supposed to be fighting the strike.”

“But aren’t you?”

“I suppose so. It’s the job that’s been assigned to me—but I’m doing nothing. I’m of no consequence—just a stuffed figure.”

“You caused the strike.”

“I?” There was genuine surprise in his voice. “How?”

“With that placard.”

“I suppose so,” he said, slowly. “My name *was* signed to it, wasn’t it? ... You see I had been indiscreet the night before. I had mingled with the men and spoken to Mr. Dulac. ... I had created a false impression—which had to be torn up—by the roots.”

“I don’t understand, Mr. Foote.”

Page 41

“No,” he said, “of course not. ... Why should you? I don’t understand myself. I don’t see why I shouldn’t talk to Mr. Dulac or the men. I don’t see why I shouldn’t try to find out about things. But it wasn’t considered right—was considered very wrong, and I was—disciplined. Members of my family don’t do those things. Mind, I’m not complaining. I’m not criticizing father, for he may be right. Probably he *is* right. But he didn’t understand. I wasn’t siding with the men; I was just trying to find out ...”

“Do you mean,” she asked, a bit breathlessly, “that you have done none of these things of your own will—because you wanted to? I mean the placard, and bringing in O’Hagan and his strike breakers, and taking all these ruthless methods to break the strike? ... Were you made to *appear* as though it was you—when it wasn’t?”

“Don’t *you* misunderstand me, Miss Frazer. You’re on the other side— with the men. I’m against them. I’m Bonbright Foote VII.” There was a trace of bitterness in his voice as he said it, and it did not escape her attention. “I wasn’t taking sides. ... I wouldn’t take sides now— but apparently I must. ... If strikes are necessary then I suppose fellows in places like mine must fight them. ... I don’t know. I don’t see any other way. ... But it doesn’t seem right—that there should be strikes. There must be a reason for them. Either our side does something it shouldn’t—and provokes them, or your side is unfair and brings them on. ... Or maybe both of us are to blame. ... I wanted to find out.”

“I shall tell Mr. Dulac,” she said. “I shall tell him *everything*. The men mustn’t go on hating and despising you. Why, they ought to be sorry for you! ... Why do you endure it? Why don’t you walk out of this place and never enter it again? ...”

“You don’t understand,” he said, with perplexity.” I knew you would think I am siding with the men.”

“I don’t think that—no! ... You might come to side with us—because we’re right. But you’re not siding with yourself. You’re letting somebody else operate your very soul—-and that’s a worse sin than suicide. ... You’re letting your father and this business, this Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, wipe you out as if you were a mark on a slate—and make another mark in your place to suit its own plans. ... You are being treated abominably.”

“Miss Frazer, I guess neither of us understands this thing. You see this business, for generations, has had a certain kind of man at the head of it. Always. It has been a successful business. Maybe when father, and his father, were young, they had to be disciplined as I am being. Maybe it is *right*—what I have heard called *training*.”

“Do you like it?”

He did not answer at once. “I—it disturbs me. It makes me uneasy. ... But I can do nothing. They’ve got me in the groove, and I suppose I’ll move along it.”

Page 42

“If you would own up to it, you’re unhappy. You’re being made miserable. ... Why, you’re being treated worse than the strikers—and by your own father! ... Everybody has a right to be himself.”

“You say that, but father and the generations of Footes before him say the exact opposite. ... However, I’m not the question. All I wanted to do was to explain to you about last night. You believe me?”

“Of course. And I shall tell—”

He shook his head. “I’d rather you didn’t. Indeed, you mustn’t. As long as I am here I must stick by my family. Don’t you see? I wanted *you* to know. My explanation was for you alone.”

Rangar appeared in the door—quietly as it was his wont to move. “Pardon,” he said. “Your father wishes to speak to you, Mr. Foote.”

“One moment, Miss Frazer. I have some letters,” Bonbright said, and stepped into his father’s office.

“Bonbright,” said his father, “Rangar has just discovered that your secretary—this Miss Frazer—lives in the same house with Dulac the strike leader. ... She comes of a family of disturbers herself. Probably she is very useful to Dulac where she is. Therefore you will dismiss her at once.”

“But, father—”

“You will dismiss her at once—personally.”

A second time that day the eyes of father and son locked.

Bonbright’s face was colorless; he felt his lips tremble.

“At once,” said his father, tapping his desk with his finger.

Bonbright’s sensation was akin to that of falling through space— there seemed nothing to cling to, nothing by which to sustain himself. How utterly futile he was was borne in upon him! He could not resist. Protestation would only humiliate him. He turned slowly and walked into his own room, where he stood erect before his desk.

“Miss Frazer,” he said in a level, timbreless voice, “the labor leader Dulac lives in your house. You come of a family of labor agitators. Therefore you are discharged.”

“*What*?” she exclaimed, the unexpectedness of it upsetting her poise.

“You are discharged,” he repeated; and then, turning his back on her, he walked to the window, where he stood tense, tortured by humiliation, gazing down upon a street which he could not see.

Ruth gathered her book and pencils and stood up. She moved slowly to the door without speaking, but there she stopped, turned, and looked at Bonbright. There was neither dismay nor anger in her eyes—only sympathy. But she did not speak it aloud. “Poor boy!” she whispered to herself, and stepped out into the corridor.

CHAPTER IX

Page 43

Ruth Frazer had passed her twentieth birthday, and now, for the first time, she was asking herself that question which brings tearful uncertainty, vague fears, disquieting speculations to the great majority of women—should she give herself, body and soul, into the hands of a definite man? It was the definiteness, the identification of the man, that caused all her difficulty. All women expect to be chosen by, and to choose, some man; but when he arrives in actual flesh and blood—that is quite another matter. Some, perhaps many, have no doubts. Love has come to them unmistakably. But not so with most. It is a thing to be wept over, and prayed over, and considered with many changes of mind, until final decision is made one way or the other.

Dulac had been interrupted in what Ruth knew would have been a proposal of marriage; the scene would be resumed, and when it was what answer should she give?

It is no easy task for a girl of twenty to lay her heart under the microscope and to see if the emotion which agitates it is love, or admiration, or the excitation of glamour. She has heard of love, has read of love, has dreamed of love, possibly, but has never experienced love. How, then, is she to recognize it? With Ruth there had been no long acquaintanceship with this man who came asking her future of her. There had been no months or years of service and companionship. Instead, he had burst on her vision, had dazzled her with his presence and his mission. Hers was a steady little head, and one capable of facing the logic of a situation. Was her feeling toward Dulac merely hero worship?

The cause he represented was dear to her heart, and he was an eminent servant in that cause. It thrilled her to know that such a man as he could want *her* for his wife. It quite took her breath away. Present also was the feeling that if Dulac wanted her, if she could bring happiness, ease, help to him, it would be her duty to give herself. By so doing she would contribute her all to the cause. ... Behind that thought were generations of men and women who had sacrificed and suffered for labor. If her father had given his life, would he not expect his daughter to give *her* life? If she could make Dulac stronger to carry on his work for social revolution, had she a right to withhold herself? ...

But, being a girl, with youth singing in her heart, it was impossible that anything should take precedence of love. That was the great question. Did she love? ... At noon she was sure she did; at one o'clock she was sure she did not; at two o'clock she was wavering between the two decisions; at six o'clock she had passed through all these stages half a dozen times, and was no nearer certainty.

Page 44

Being who she was and what she was, her contacts with the world had not been those of the ordinary girl of her age and her station in life. In her earlier years she had been accustomed to radical words, radical thought, radical individuals. The world she was taught to see was not the world girl children are usually taught to see. And yet she retained her humor, her brightness of spirit, the joy of life that gave her her smile. ... She had known boys and men. However, none of these had made marked impression upon her. They had been mere incidents, pleasant, uninteresting, wearying, amusing. None had thrilled her. ... So she had less experience to call to her aid than the average girl.

Dulac occupied her mind as no man had ever occupied it before; the thought of him thrilled her. ... He wanted her, this magnetic, theatrically handsome man wanted her. ...

When we make a choice we do so by a process of comparison. We buy this house because we like it better than that house; we buy this hat because we prefer it to that other; ... it is so we get our notions of value, of desirability. It is more than possible that some effort at comparison is made by a woman in selecting a husband. She compares her suitor with other men. Her decision may hinge upon the result. ... Dulac was clearly superior to most of the men Ruth had known. ... Then, unaccountably, she found herself thinking of Bonbright Foote, who had that morning discharged her from her employment. She found herself setting young Foote and Dulac side by side and, becoming objectively conscious of this, she felt herself guilty of some sort of disloyalty. What right had a man in Foote's position to stand in her thoughts beside Dulac? He was everything Dulac was not; Dulac was nothing that Foote was.

She realized she was getting nowhere, was only confusing herself. Perhaps, she told herself, when Dulac was present, when he asked her to be his wife, she would know what to answer. So, resolutely, she put the matter from her mind. It would not stay out.

She dreaded meeting Dulac at supper—for the evening meal was supper in the Frazer cottage—and yet she was burningly curious to meet him, to be near him, to verify her image of him. ... Extra pains with the detail of her simple toilet held her in her room until her mother called to know if she were not going to help with the meal. As she went to the kitchen she heard Dulac moving about in his room.

When they were seated at the table it was Mrs. Frazer who jerked the conversation away from casual matters.

"Ruth was discharged this morning, Mr. Dulac," she said, bitterly, "and her as good a typewriter and as neat and faithful as any. No fault found, either, nor could be, not if anybody was looking for it with a fine-tooth comb. Meanness, that's what I say. Nothing but meanness. ... And us needing that fifteen dollars a week to keep the breath of life in us."

Page 45

“Don’t worry about that, mother,” Ruth said, quickly. “There are plenty of places—”

“Who fired you?” interrupted Dulac, his black eyes glowing angrily. “That young cub?”

“Young Mr. Foote,” said Ruth.

“It was because I live here,” said Dulac, intensely. “That was why, wasn’t it? That’s the way they fight, striking at us through our womenfolks. ... And when we answer with bricks...”

“I don’t think he wanted to do it,” Ruth said. “I think he was made to.”

“Nonsense! Too bad the boys didn’t get their hands on him last night— the infernal college-bred whipper-snapper! ... Well, don’t you worry about that job. Nor you, either, Mrs. Frazer.”

“Seems like I never did anything but worry; if it wasn’t about one thing it was another, and no peace since I was in the cradle,” said Mrs. Frazer, dolefully. “If it ain’t the rent it’s strikes and riots and losin’ positions and not knowin’ if your husband’s comin’ home to sleep in bed, or his name in the paper in the morning and him in jail. And since he was killed—”

“Now, mother,” said Ruth, “I’ll have a job before tomorrow night. We won’t starve or be put out into the street.”

Mrs. Frazer dabbed at her eyes with her apron and signified her firm belief that capital was banded together for the sole purpose of causing her mental agony; indeed, that capital had been invented with that end in view, and if she had her way—which seldom enough, and her never doing a wrong to a living body—capital should have visited on it certain plagues and punishments hinted at as adequate, but not named. Whereupon she got up from the table and went out into the kitchen after the pie.

“Mrs. Frazer,” said Dulac, when she returned, “I’ve got to hurry downtown to headquarters, but I want to have a little talk with Ruth before I go. Can’t the dishes wait?”

“I did up dishes alone before Ruth was born, and a few thousand times since. Guess I can get through with it without her help at least once more.”

Dulac smiled, so that his white, even teeth showed in a foreign sort of way. In that moment Ruth thought there was something Oriental or Latin about his appearance—-surely something exotic. He had a power of fascination, and its spell was upon her.

He stood up and walked to the door of the little parlor, where he stood waiting. Ruth, not blushing, but pale, afraid, yet eager to hear what she knew he was going to say, passed him into the room. He closed the door.

“You know what I want to say,” he began, approaching close to her, but not touching her. “You know what life will be like with a man whose work is what mine is. ... But I’d try to make up for the hardships and the worries and the disagreeable things. I’d try, Ruth, and I think I could do it. ... Your heart is with the Cause. I wouldn’t marry you if it wasn’t because you couldn’t stand the life. But you want to see what I want to see. ... If I’m

Page 46

willing to run the risks and live the life I have to live because I see how I can help along the work and make the world a better place for those to live in who need to have it a better place ... if I can do what I do, I've thought you might be willing to share it all. ... You're brave. You come of a blood that has suffered and been willing to suffer. Your father was a martyr—just as I would be willing to be a martyr. ..."

Somehow the thing did not seem so much like a proposal of marriage as like a bit of flamboyant oratory. The theatrical air of the man, his self-consciousness—with the saving leaven of unquestionable sincerity—made it more an exhortation from the platform. Even in his intimate moments Dulac did not step out of character. ... But this was not apparent to Ruth. Glamour was upon her, blinding her. The personality of the man dominated her personality. She saw him as he saw himself. ... And his Cause was her Cause. If he would have suffered martyrdom for it, so would she. She raised her eyes to his and, looking into them, saw a soul greater than his soul, loftier than his soul. She was an apostle, and her heart throbbed with pride and joy that this man of high, self-sacrificing purpose should desire her. ... She was ready to surrender; her decision was made. Standing under his blazing eyes, in the circle of his magnetism, she was sure she loved him.

But the surrender was not to be made then. Her mother rapped on the door.

"Young gentleman to see you, Ruth," she called.

She heard Dulac's teeth click savagely. "Quick," he said. "What is it to be?"

The spell was broken, the old uncertainty, the wavering, was present again. "I—oh, let me think. To-morrow—I'll tell you to-morrow."

She stepped—it was almost a flight—to the door, and opened it. In the dining room, hat in hand, stood Bonbright Foote. Dulac saw, too.

"What does he want here?" he demanded, savagely.

"I don't know."

"I'll find out. It's no good to you he intends."

"Mr. Dulac!" she said, and faced him a moment. He stopped, furious though he was. She stopped him. She held him. ... There was a strength in her that he had not realized. Her utterance of his name was a command and a rebuke.

"I know his kind," Dulac said, sullenly. "Let me throw him out."

“Please sit down,” she said. “I want to bring him in here. I know him better than you—-and I think your side misunderstands him. It may do some good.”

She stepped into the dining room. “Mr. Foote,” she said.

He was embarrassed, ill at ease. “Miss Frazer,” he said, with boyish hesitation, “you don’t want to see me—you have no reason to do anything but—despise me, I guess. But I had to come. I found your address and came as quickly as I could.”

“Step in here,” she said. Then, “You and Mr. Dulac have met.”

Dulac stood scowling. “Yes,” he said, sullenly. Bonbright flushed and nodded. ... Dulac seemed suddenly possessed by a gust of passion. He strode threateningly to Bonbright, lips snarling, eyes blazing.

Page 47

“What do you mean by coming here? What do you want?” he demanded, hoarsely. “You come here with your hands red with blood. Two men are dead. ... Four others smashed under the hoofs of your police! ... You’re trying to starve into submission thousands of men. You’re striking at them through their wives and babies. ... What do you care for them or their suffering? You and your father are piling up millions—and every penny a loaf stolen from the table of a workingman! ... There’ll be starving out there soon. ... Babies will be dying for want of food—and you’ll have killed them. ... You and your kind are bloodsuckers, parasites! ... and you’re a sneaking, spying hound. ... Every man that dies, every baby that starves, every ounce of woman’s suffering and misery that this strike causes are on your head. ... You forced the strike, backed up by the millions of the automobile crowd, so you could crush and smash your men so they wouldn’t dare to mutter or complain. You did it deliberately—you prowling, pampered puppy. ...” Dulac was working himself into blind rage.

Bonbright looked at the man with something of amazement, but with nothing of fear. He was not afraid. He did not give back a step, but, as he stood there, white to the lips, his eyes steadily on Dulac’s eyes, he seemed older, weary. He seemed to have been stripped of youth and of the lightheartedness and buoyancy of youth. He was thinking, wondering. Why should this man hate him? Why should others hate him? Why should the class he belonged to be hated with this blighting virulence by the class they employed? ...

He did not speak nor try to stem Dulac’s invective. He was not angered by it, nor was he hurt by it. ... He waited for it to subside, and with a certain dignity that sat well on his young shoulders. Generations of ancestors trained in the restraints were with him this night, and stood him in good stead.

Ruth stood by, the situation snatched beyond her control. She was terrified, yet even in her terror she could not avoid a sort of subconscious comparison of the men.

“Mr. Dulac! ... Please! ... Please! ...” she said, tearfully.

“I’m going to tell this—this murderer what he is. and then I’m going to throw him out,” Dulac raged.

“Mr. Foote came to see *me*,” Ruth said, with awakened spirit. “He is in my house. ... You have no right to act so. You have no right to talk so. ... You sha’n’t go on.”

Dulac turned on her. “What is this cub to you? What do you care? ... Were you expecting him?”

“She wasn’t expecting me,” said Bonbright, breaking silence for the first time. “I came because she didn’t get a square deal. ... I had to come.”

“What do you want with her? ... You’ve kicked her out of your office —now leave her alone. ... There’s just one thing men of your class want of girls of her class. ...”

At first Bonbright did not comprehend Dulac’s meaning; then his face reddened; even his ears were enveloped in a surge of color. “Dulac,” he said, evenly, “I came to say something to Miss Frazer. When I have done I’m going to thrash you for that.”

Page 48

Ruth seized Dulac's arm. "Go away," she cried. "You have no right. ... If you ever want an answer—to that question—you'll go *now* ... If this goes on—if you don't go and leave Mr. Foote alone, I'll never see you again. ... I'll never speak to you again. ... I mean it!"

Dulac, looking down into her face, saw that she did mean it. He shot one venomous glance at Bonbright, snatched his hat from the table, and rushed from the room.

Presently Ruth spoke.

"I'm so sorry," she said.

Bonbright smiled. "It was too bad. ... He believes what he says about me. ..."

"Yes, he believes it, and thousands of other men believe it. ... They hate you."

"Because I have lots of money and they have little. Because I own a factory and they work in it. ... There must be a great deal to it besides that. ... But that isn't what I came to say. I—it was about discharging you."

"Yes," she said. "I knew it wasn't you. ... Your father made you."

He flushed. "You see ... I'm not a real person. I'm just something with push buttons. When somebody wants a thing done he pushes one, and I do it. ... I didn't want you to go. I—Well, things aren't exactly joyous for me in the plant. I don't fit—and I'm being made to fit." His voice took on a tinge of bitterness. "I've got to be something that the label 'Bonbright Foote VII' will fit. ... It was on account of that smile of yours that I made them give you to me for my secretary. The first time I saw you you smiled—and it was mighty cheering. It sort of lightened things up—so I got you to do my work —because I thought likely you would smile sometimes. ..."

Her eyes were downcast to hide the moisture that was in them.

"Father made me discharge you. ... I couldn't help it—and you don't know how ashamed it made me. ... To know I was so helpless. That's what I came to say. I wanted you to know—on account of your smile. I didn't want you to think—I did it willingly. ... And—sometimes it isn't easy to get another position—so—so I went to see a man, Malcolm Lightener, and told him about you. He manufactures automobiles—and he's—he's a better kind of man to work for than—we were. If you are willing you can—-go there in the morning."

She showed him her smile now—but it was not the broad, beaming grin; it was a dewy, tremulous smile.

"That was good of you," she said, softly.

“I was just trying to be square,” he said. “Will you take the place? I should like to know. I should like to know I’d helped to make things right.”

“Of course I shall take it,” she said.

“Thank you. ... I—shall miss you. Really. ... Good night, Miss Frazer—and thank you.”

She pitied him from her heart. His position was not a joyful one. ... And, as people sometimes do, she spoke on impulse, not calculating possible complications.

Page 49

“If—you may come to see me again if you want to.”

He took her extended hand. “I may?” he said, almost incredulously. “And will you smile for me?”

“Once, each time you come,” she said.

CHAPTER X

Day after day and week after week the strike dragged on. Daily strength departed from it and entered into Bonbright Foote, Incorporated. The men had embarked upon it with enthusiasm, many of them with fanatic determination; but with the advent in their home of privation, of hunger, their zeal was transmuted into heavy determination, lifeless stubbornness. Idleness hung heavily on their hands, and small coins that should have passed over the baker’s counter clinked upon mahogany bars.

Dulac labored, exhorted, prayed with them. It was his personality, his individual powers over the minds and hearts of men, that kept the strike alive. The weight rested upon his shoulders alone, but he did not bend under it. He would not admit the hopelessness of the contest—and he fought on. At the end of a month he was still able to fire his audiences with sincere, if theatrical, oratory; he could still play upon them and be certain of a response. At the end of two months he—even he—was forced to admit that they listened with stolidness, with apathy. They were falling away from him; but he fought on. He would not admit defeat, would not, even in his most secret thoughts, look forward to inevitable failure.

Every man that deserted was an added atom of strength to Bonbright Foote, Incorporated. Every hungry baby, every ailing wife, every empty dinner table fought for the company and against Dulac. Rioting ended. It requires more than hopeless apathy to create a riot; there must be fervor, determination, enthusiasm. Daily Dulac’s ranks were thinned by men who slunk to the company’s employment office and begged to be reinstated. ... The back of the strike was broken.

Bonbright Foote saw how his company crushed the strike; how, ruthlessly, with machinelike certainty and lack of heart, it went ahead undeviatingly, careless of obstructions, indifferent to human beings in its path. There was something Prussian about it; something that recalled to him Bismarck and Moltke and 1870 with the exact, soulless mechanical perfection of the systematic trampling of the France of Napoleon III. ... And, just as the Bonbright Foote tradition crunched the strike to pieces so it was crunching and macerating his own individuality until it would be a formless mass ready for the mold.

The will should be a straight steel rod urged in one undeviating direction by heart and mind. No day passed upon which the rod of Bonbright's will was not bent, was not twisted to make it follow the direction of some other will stronger than his—the direction of the accumulated wills of all the Bonbright Footes who had built up the family tradition.

Page 50

No initiative was allowed him; he was not permitted to interest himself in the business in his own youthful, healthy way; but he must see it through dead eyes, he must initiate nothing, criticize nothing, suggest nothing. He must follow rule.

His father was not satisfied with him, that he realized—and that he was under constant suspicion. He was unsatisfactory. His present mental form was not acceptable and must undergo painful processes of alteration. His parents would have taken him back, as a bad bargain, and exchanged him for something else if they could, but being unable, they must make him into something else.

Humiliation lay heavy on him. Every man in the employ of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, must realize the shamefulness of his position, that he was a fiction, a sham held up by his father's hands. Orders issued from his lips to unsmiling subordinates, who knew well they were not his orders, but words placed in his mouth to recite parrot-like. Letters went out under his signature, dictated by him— according to the dictation of his father. He was a rubber stamp, a mechanical means of communication. ... He was not a man, an individual—he was a marionette dancing to ill-concealed strings.

The thing he realized with abhorrence was that when he was remade, when he became the thing the artisans worked upon him to create—when at last his father passed from view and he remained master of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, it would not be Bonbright Foote VII who was master. It would be an automaton, a continuation of other automatons. ... It is said the Dalai Lama is perpetual, always the same, never changing from age to age. A fiction maintained by a mystic priesthood supplying themselves secretly with fresh Dalai Lama material as needful—with a symbol to hold in awe the ignorance of their religionists. ... Bonbright saw that he was expected to be a symbol. ...

He approached his desk in the morning with loathing, and left it at night without relief. Hopelessness was upon him and he could not flee from it; it was inescapable.

True, he sought relief. Malcolm Lightener had become his fast friend —a sort of life preserver for his soul. In spite of his youth and Lightener's maturity there was real companionship between them. ... Lightener knew what was going on, and in his granite way he tried to help the boy. Bonbright was not interested in his own business, so Lightener awakened in him an interest in Lightener's business. He discussed his affairs with the boy. He talked of systems, of efficiency, of business methods. He taught Bonbright as he would have taught his own son, half realizing the futility of his teaching. Nor had he question as to the righteousness of his proceeding. Because a boy's father follows an evil course the parenthood does not hallow that course. ... So Bonbright learned, not knowing that he learned, and in his own office he made comparisons. The methods of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, he compared with the methods of Malcolm Lightener. He saw where modern business would make changes and improvements—-but after the first few trampled-on suggestions he remained silent and grew indifferent.

Page 51

Once he suggested the purchase of dictating machines.

“Fol-de-rol,” said his father, brusquely—and the matter ended.

In Lightener’s plant he saw lathes which roughed and finished in one process and one handling. In his own plant castings must pass from one machine to another, and through the hands of extra and unnecessary employees. It was economic waste. But he offered no suggestion. He saw time lost here, labor lavished there, but he was indifferent. He knew better. He knew how it should be done—but he did not care. ... The methods of Bonbright Foote I not only suited his father, but were the laws of his father’s life.

Not only had Bonbright established sympathetic relations with Malcolm Lightener, but with Lightener’s family. In Mrs. Lightener he found a woman whose wealth had compelled the so-called social leaders of the city to accept her, but whose personality, once she was accepted, had won her a firm, enduring position. He found her a woman whose sudden, almost magical, change from obscurity and the lower fringe of salary-drawers to a wealth that made even America gasp, had not made her dizzy. Indeed, it seemed not to have affected her character at all. Her dominant note was motherliness. She was still the housewife. She continued to look after her husband and daughter just as she had looked after them in the days when she had lived in a tiny frame house and had cooked the meals and made the beds. ... She represented womanhood of a sort Bonbright had never been on terms of intimate friendship with. ... There was much about her which gave him food for reflection.

And Hilda. ... Since their first meeting there had been no reference to the desire of their mothers for their marriage. For a while the knowledge of this had made it difficult for Bonbright to offer her his friendship and companionship. But when he saw, as the weeks went by, how she was willing to accept him unaffectedly as a friend, a comrade, a chum, how the maternal ambition to unite the families seemed to be wholly absent from her thoughts, they got on delightfully.

Bonbright played with her. Somehow she came to represent recreation in his life. She was jolly, a splendid sportswoman, who could hold her own with him at golf or tennis, and who drove an automobile as he would never have dared to drive.

She was not beautiful, but she was attractive, and the center of her attractiveness was her wholesomeness, her frankness, her simplicity. ... He could talk to her as he could not talk even to her father, yet he could not open his heart fully even to her. He could not show her the soul tissues that throbbed and ached.

He was lonely. A lonely boy thrown with an attractive girl is a fertile field for the sowing of love. But Bonbright was not in love with Hilda. ... The idea did not occur to him.

There was excellent reason—though he had not arrived at a realization of it, and this excellent reason was Ruth Frazer.

Page 52

He had ventured to accept Ruth's impulsive invitation to come to see her. Not frequently, not so frequently as his inclinations urged, but more frequently than was, perhaps, wise in his position. ... She represented a new experience. She was utterly outside his world, and so wholly different from the girls of his world. It was an attractive difference. ... And her grin! When it glowed for him he felt for the moment as if the world were really a pleasant place to spend one's life.

He learned from her. New ideas and comprehensions came to him as a result of her conversations with him. Through her eyes he was seeing the other side. Not all her theories, not even all her facts, could he accept, but no matter how radical, no matter how incendiary her words, he delighted to hear her voice uttering them. In short, Bonbright Foote VII, prince of the Foote Dynasty, was in danger of falling in love with the beggar maid.

So, many diverse forces and individualities were at work upon the molding of Bonbright Foote. One, and one only, he recognized, and that was the stern, ever-apparent, iron-handed wrenching of his father. There were times, which grew more and more frequent, when he fancied he had surrendered utterly to it and had handed over his soul to Bonbright Foote, Incorporated. He fancied he was sitting by apathetically watching the family tradition squeeze it into the desired form. ...

After a wretched day he had called on Ruth. The next morning soft-footed Rangar had moved shadowlike into his father's office, and presently his father summoned him to come in.

"I am informed," said the gentleman who was devoting his literary talents to a philosophical biography of the Marquis Lafayette, Hero of Two Worlds, friend of Liberty and Equality, "that you have been going repeatedly to the house of that girl who formerly was your secretary—whose mother runs a boarding house for anarchists."

The suddenness, the unexpectedness of attack upon this angle, nonplussed Bonbright. He could only stand silent, stamped with the guilty look of youth.

"Is it true?" snapped his father.

"I have called on Miss Frazer," Bonbright said, unsteadily.

Mr. Foote stood up. It was his habit to stand up in all crises, big or little.

"Have you no respect for your family name? ... If you must have things like this in your life, for God's sake keep them covered up. Don't be infernally blatant about them. Do you want the whole city whispering like ghouls over the liaison of my son with—with a female anarchist who is—the daughter of a boarding-house keeper?"

Liaison! ... Liaison! ... The foreign term beat again and again against Bonbright's consciousness before it gained admission. Used in connection with Ruth Frazer, with his relations with Ruth Frazer, it was dead, devoid of meaning, conveyed no meaning to his brain.

"Liaison, sir! ... Liaison?" he said, fumblingly.

Page 53

“I can find a plainer term if you insist.”

For a moment Bonbright felt curiously calm, curiously cold, curiously detached from the scene. He regarded the other man. ... This man was his father. His *father*! The laws of life and of humanity demanded that he regard this man with veneration. Yet, offhand, without investigation, this man could jump to a vile conclusion regarding him. Not only that, but could accuse him, not of guilt, but of failing to conceal guilt! ... Respectability! He knew he was watching a manifestation of the family tradition. It was wrong to commit an unworthy act, but it was a sin unspeakable to be caught by the public in the commission.

His mind worked slowly. It was a full half minute before the thought bored through to him that *he* was not the sole nor the greatest sufferer by this accusation. It was not *he* who was insulted. It was not *he* who was outraged. ... It was *her*!

His father could think that of her—casually. The mere fact that she was poor, not of his station, a wage-earner, made it plain to the senior Foote that Ruth Frazer would welcome a squalid affair with his son. ... The Sultan throwing his handkerchief.

Bonbright’s calm gave place to turmoil, his chill to heat.

“It’s not true,” he said, haltingly, using feeble words because stronger had not yet had time to surge up to the surface.

“Bosh!” said the father.

Then Bonbright blazed. Restraints crumbled. The Harvard manner peeled off and lay quivering with horror at his feet. He stepped a pace closer to his father, so that his face was close to his father’s face, and his smoldering eyes were within inches of his father’s scornful ones.

“It’s a lie,” he said, huskily, “a damned, abominable, insulting lie.”

“Young man,” his father shipped back, “be careful. ...”

“Careful! ... I don’t know who carried this thing to you, but whoever did was a miserable, sneaking mucker. He lied and he knew he lied. ... And you, sir, you were willing to believe. Probably you were eager to believe. ... I sha’n’t defend Miss Frazer. Only a fool or a mucker could believe such a thing of her. ... Yes, I have been to see her, and I’ll tell you why. ... I’ll tell you why, good and plenty! ... My first day in this place she was the only human, pleasant thing I met. Her smile was the only life or brightness in the place. ... Everything else was dead men’s bones. The place is a tomb and it stinks of graveclothes. Our whole family stinks of graveclothes. Family tradition! ... Men dead and rotten and eaten by worms—they run this place, and you want me to let them run me. ... Every move you make you consult a skeleton. ... And you want to smash and

crush and strangle me so that I'll be willing to walk with a weight of dead bones. ... I've tried. You are my father, and I thought maybe you knew best. ... I've submitted. I've submitted

Page 54

to your humiliations, to having everything that's *me*—that is individual in me—stamped out, and stuff molded to the family pattern rammed back in its place. ... She was the only bright spot in the whole outfit—and you kicked her out. ... And I've been going to see her—just to see her smile and to get courage from it to start another day with you. ... That's what my life has been here, and you made it so, and you will keep on making it so. ... Probably you'll grind me into the family groove. Maybe I'm ground already, but that doesn't excuse what you've just said, and it doesn't make it any less an abominable lie, nor the man who reported it to you any less a muck-hearted sewer..."

He stopped, pale, panting, quivering.

"How dare you! ... How dare—"

"Dare!" ... Bonbright glared at his father; then he felt a great, quivering emotion welling up within him, a something he was ashamed to have the eye of man look upon. His lips began to tremble. He swung on his heel and ran staggeringly toward his door, but there he stopped, clutched the door frame, and cried, chokingly, "It's a lie. ... A lie. ... A slimy lie!"

CHAPTER XI

Mr. Foote stood motionless, staring after his son as be might have stared at some phenomenon which violated a law of nature; for instance, as he might have stared at the sun rising in the west, at a stream flowing uphill, at Newton's apple remaining suspended in air instead of falling properly to the ground. He was not angry—yet. That personal and individual emotion would come later; what he experienced now was a *family* emotion, a staggering astonishment participated in by five generations of departed Bonbright Footes.

He was nonplussed. Here had happened a thing which could not happen. In the whole history of the Foote family there had never been recorded an instance of a son uttering such words to his father or of his family. There was no instance of an outburst even remotely resembling this one. It simply could not be. ... And yet it was. He had witnessed it, listened to it, had been the target at which his son's hot words had been hurled.

For most occurrences in his life Mr. Foote could find a family precedent. This matter had been handled thus, and that other matter had been handled so. But this thin—it had never been handled because it had never happened. He was left standing squarely on his own feet, without aid or support.

Mortification mingled with his astonishment. It had remained for him--who had thought to add to the family laurels the literary achievement of portraying philosophically the life of the Marquis Lafayette—to father a son who could be guilty of thinking such thoughts and uttering such words. He looked about the room apprehensively, as if he feared to find assembled there the shades of departed Bonbrights who had been eavesdropping, as the departed are said to do by certain psychic persons. ... He hoped they had not been listening at his keyhole, for this was a squalid happening that he must smother, cover up, hide forever from their knowledge.

Page 55

These sensations were succeeded by plain, ordinary, common, uncultured, ancestorless anger. Bonbright Foote VI retained enough personality, enough of his human self, to be able to become angry. True, he did not do it as one of his molders would have done; he was still a Foote, even in passion. It was a dignified, a cultured, a repressed passion ... but deep-seated and seething for an outlet, just the same. What he felt might be compared distantly to what other men feel when they seize upon the paternal razor strop and apply it wholesomely to that portion of their son's anatomy which tradition says is most likely to turn boys to virtue. ... He wanted to compel Bonbright to make painful reparation to his ancestors. He wanted to inflict punishment of some striking, uncommon, distressing sort. ...

His anger increased, and he became even more human. With a trifle more haste than was usual, with the studied, cultured set of his lips less studied and cultured than ever they had been before, he strode to his son's door. Something was going to happen. He was restraining himself, but something would happen now. He felt it and feared it. ... His rage must have an outlet. Vaguely he felt that fire must be fought with fire—and he all unaccustomed to handling that element. But he would rise to the necessities. ...

He stepped into Bonbright's room, keyed up to eruption, but he did not erupt. Nobody was there to erupt *at*. Bonbright was gone. ...

Mr. Foote went back to his desk and sat there nervously drumming on its top with his fingers. He was not himself. He had never been so disturbed before and did not know it was possible for him to be upset in this manner. There had been other crises, other disagreeable happenings in his life, but he had met them calmly, dispassionately, with what he was pleased to call philosophy. He had liked to fancy himself as ruled wholly by intellect and not at all by emotion. And now emotion had caught him up as a tidal wave might catch up a strong swimmer, and tossed him hither and thither, blinded by its spray and helpless.

His one coherent thought was that something must be done about it. At such a moment some fathers would have considered the advisability of casting their sons loose to shift for themselves as a punishment for too much independence and for outraging the laws requiring unquestioning respect for father from son. This course did not even occur to Mr. Foote. It was in the nature of things that it should not, for in his mind his son was a permanent structure, a sort of extension on the family house. He was *there*. Without him the family ended, the family business passed into the hands of strangers. There would be no Bonbright Foote VIII who, in his turn, should become the father of Bonbright Foote IX, and so following. No, he did not hold even tentatively the idea of disinheritance.

Page 56

Something, however, must be done, and the something must result in his son's becoming what he wanted his son to become. Bonbright must be grasped and shoved into the family groove and made to travel and function there. There could be no surrender, no wavering, no concession made by the family. ... The boy must be made into what he ought to be—but how? And he must have his lesson for this day's scene. He must be shown that he could not, with impunity, outrage the Family Tradition and flout the Family Ghosts. ... Again—how?

What Bonbright intended in his present state of boyish rage and revolt, his father did not consider. It was characteristic of him that he failed to think of that. All his considerations were of what he and the Family should do to Bonbright. ... A general would doubtless have called this defective strategy. To win battles one must have some notion of the enemy's intentions—and of his potentialities. ... His determination—set and stiff as cold metal— was that something unpleasant should happen to the boy and that the boy should be brought to his senses. ... If anyone had hinted to him that the boy was just coming to his senses he would have listened as one listens to a patent absurdity.

He pressed the buzzer which summoned Rangar, and presently that soft-footed individual appeared silently in the door—looking as Mr. Foote had never seen him look before. Rangar was breathing hard, he was flustered, his necktie was awry, and his face was ivory white. Also, though Mr. Foote did not take in this detail, his eyes smoldered with restrained malignancy.

"Why, Rangar," said Mr. Foote, "what's wrong?"

"Wrong, Mr. Foote! ... I—It was Mr. Bonbright."

"What about Mr. Bonbright?"

"A moment ago he came rushing out of his office—I use the word rushing advisedly. ... He was in a rage, sir. He was, you could see it plain. I—I was in his way, sir, and I stepped aside. But he wouldn't have it. No, sir, he wouldn't. ... He reached out, Mr. Foote, and grabbed me; yes, sir, grabbed me right before the whole office. It was by the front of the shirt and the necktie, and he shook me. ... He's a strong young man. ... And he said, 'You're the sneak that's been running to father with lies,' and then he shook me again. 'I suppose,' he says in a second, 'that I've got to expect to be spied on. ... Go ahead, it's a job that fits you.' Yes, sir, that's exactly what he said in his own words. 'Fits me,' says he. And then he shook me again and threw me across the alleyway so that I fell over on a desk. 'Spy ahead,' he says, so that everybody in the office heard him and was snickering at me, 'but report what you see after this—and see to it it's the truth. ... One more lie like this one,' he says, and then stopped and rushed on out of the office. It was a threat, Mr. Foote, and he meant it. He means me harm."

“Nonsense!” said Mr. Foote, holding himself resolutely in the character he had built for himself. “A fit of boyish temper.”

Page 57

Rangar's eyes glinted, but he made no rejoinder.

"He rather lost his temper with *me*," said Mr. Foote, "when I accused him of a liaison with that girl. ... He denied it, Rangar, or so I understood. He was very young and—-tempestuous about it. Are you sure you were right?"

"What else would he be going there for, Mr. Foote?"

"My idea exactly."

"Unless, sir, he fancies he's in love with the girl. ... I once knew a young man in a position similar to Mr. Bonbright's who fell in love with a girl who sold cigars in a hotel. ... He fairly *dogged* her, sir. Wanted to marry her. You wouldn't believe it, but that's what he did, and his family had to buy her off and send her away or he'd have done it, too. ... It might happen to any young man, Mr. Foote."

"Not to a member of my family, Rangar."

"I can't agree with you, sir. ... Nobody's immune to it. You can't deny that Mr. Bonbright has been going to see her regularly. Five or six times he's been there, and stayed a long time every visit. ... It was one thing or the other he went for, and you can't deny that. If he says it wasn't what you accused him of, then it was the other."

"You mean that my son—a Foote—could fall in love, as you call it, with the daughter of a boarding house and a companion of anarchists?"

"I hate to say it to you, sir, but there isn't anything else to believe. ... He's young, Mr. Foote, and fiery. She isn't bad looking, either, and she's clever. A clever girl can do a lot with a boy, no matter who he is, if she sets her heart on him. It wouldn't be a bad match for a girl like her if she was to entice Mr. Bonbright into a marriage."

"Impossible, Rangar. ... However, you have an eye kept on him. I want to be told every move he makes, where he goes, who he sees. I want to know everything about him, Rangar. Will you see to it?"

"Yes, sir," said Rangar, a gleam of malice again visible in his eyes.

"What do you know about this girl? Have you had her looked up?"

"Not fully, sir. But I've heard she was heart and soul with what these anarchists believe. Her father was one of them. Killed by the police or soldiers or somebody. ... The unions educated her. That's why Dulac went to live there—to help them out. ... And it's been reported to me, Mr. Foote, that Dulac was sweet on her himself. That came from a reliable source."

“My son a rival of an anarchist for the favor of the daughter of a cheap boarding house!” exclaimed Mr. Foote.

“This Dulac was seen, Mr. Foote, with reference to the strike. He’s a fanatic. Nothing could be done with him. He actually offered violence to our agent who attempted to show him how it would be to his benefit to—to be less energetic. We offered him—”

“I don’t care to hear what we offered him. Such details are distasteful, Rangar. That’s what I hire you for, isn’t it?”

Page 58

“Yes, sir. ... Anyhow, Mr. Foote, he couldn’t be bought.”

“Yes. ... Yes. Well, we’ll have to continue along the lines we’ve been following. They have been not unsuccessful.”

“True enough. It’s just a question of time now. It might do some good, Mr. Foote, to have the rumor get about that we wouldn’t take back any men who did not apply for reinstatement before the end of next week. ... There’s considerable discontent, due largely to insufficient nourishment. Yes, we can lay it to that, I imagine. It’s this man Dulac that holds the strike together. If only every laboring man had a dozen babies there’d be less strikes,” Rangar finished, not exactly callously, but in a matter-of-fact way. If he had thought of it he might have added, “and a sick wife.” Rangar would not have hesitated to provide each striker with the babies and the wife, purely as a strike-breaking measure, if he could have managed the matter.

“They’re improvident,” said Mr. Foote, sagaciously. “If they must strike and cut off their earnings every so often, why don’t they lay up savings to carry them through?”

“They seem to have the notion, sir, that they don’t earn enough to save. That, while it isn’t their main grievance, is an important one. But the idiots put nonsensical, immaterial grievances ahead of money matters mostly. ... Rights! Rights to do this or not to do that—to organize or to sit at board meetings. They’re not practical, Mr. Foote. If it was just money they wanted we might get on with them. It’s men like this Dulac putting notions into their heads that they haven’t brains enough to think of themselves. Social revolution, you know—that sort of thing.”

“Do what you like about it. You might have notices tacked up outside the gates stating that we wouldn’t take back men who weren’t back by the date you named. And, Rangar, be sure Mr. Bonbright’s name is signed to it. I want to rid the men thoroughly of any absurd ideas about him.”

“You have, sir. If Dulac is a fair sample, you have. Why, he seems regularly to *hate* Mr. Bonbright. Called him names, and that sort of thing. ... Maybe, though, there’s something personal mixed up in it.”

“That girl? ...”

“Very likely, sir.”

“You know her, Rangar. She worked under you. What sort of girl is she? ... I mean would you consider it wise to approach her with a proposition—delicately put, of course—to—say—move to another city, or something of the sort?”

“My observation of her—while not close—(you understand I have little opportunity for close observations of unimportant subordinates)—was that it would be unwise and—er

—futile. She seemed to have quite a will. Indeed, I may say she seemed stubborn ... and no fool. If she's got a chance at Mr. Bonbright she wouldn't give it up for a few dollars. Not her, sir."

"I don't recall her especially. Small—was she not? Not the—ah— ripe—rounded type to attract a boy? Eh?"

Page 59

“Curves and color don’t always do it, Mr. Foote, I’ve observed. I’ve known scrawny ones, without a thing to stir up the imagination, that had ten boys running after them to one running after the kind they have pictures of on calendars. ... I don’t know if it’s brains, or what, but they’ve got something that attracts.”

“Hum! ... Can’t say I’ve had much experience. Probably you’re right. Anyhow, we’re faced by something definite in the way of a condition. ... If the thing is merely a liaison—we can break it up, I imagine, without difficulty. If my son is so blind to right and wrong, and to his position, as to want to *marry* the girl, we’ll have to resort promptly to effective measures.”

“Promptly,” said Rangar. “And quietly, Mr. Foote. If she got an idea there was trouble brewing, she might off with him and get married before we could wink.”

“Heavens! ... An anarchistic boarding-house girl for a daughter-in-law! We’d be a proud family, Rangar.”

“Yes, sir. I understand you leave it with me?”

“I leave it with you to keep an eye on Bonbright. Consult with me before acting. My son is in a strange humor. He’ll take some handling, I’m afraid, before we bring him to see things as my son ought to see them. But I’ll bring him there, Rangar. I should be doing my duty very indifferently, indeed, if I did not. He’s resentful. He wants to display a thing he calls his individuality—as if our family had use for such things. We’re Footes, and I rather fancy the world knows what that means. ... My son shall be a Foote, Rangar. That’s all. ... Stay a moment, though. Hereafter bear in mind I do not care to be troubled with squalid details. If things have to be done, do them. ... If babies must be hungry—why, I suppose it is a condition that must exist from time to time. The fault of their fathers. ... However, I do not care to hear about them. I am engaged on an important literary work, as you know, and such things tend to distract me.”

“Naturally, sir,” said Rangar.

“But you will on no account relax your firmness with these strikers. They must be shown.”

“They’re being shown,” said Rangar, grimly, and walked out of the office. In the corridor his face, which had been expressionless or obsequious when he saw the need, changed swiftly. His look was that of a man thinking of an enemy. There was malice, vindictiveness, hatred in that look, and it expressed with exactness his sentiments toward young Bonbright Foote. ... It did not express all of them, for, lurking in the background, unseen, was a deep contempt. Rangar despised Bonbright as a nincompoop, as he expressed it privately.

"If I didn't think," he said, "I'd get all the satisfaction I need by leaving him to his father, I'd take a hand myself. But the Foote spooks will give it to him better than I could. ... I can't wish him any worse luck than to be left to *them*." He chuckled and felt of his disarranged tie.

Page 60

As for Bonbright Foote VI, he was frightened. No other word can describe his sensations. The idea that his son might marry—actually *marry*—this girl, was appalling. If the boy should actually take such an unthinkable step before he could be prevented, what a situation would arise!

“Of course it wouldn’t last,” he said to himself. “Such marriages never do. ... But while it did last—And there might be a child—a *son*!” A Bonbright Foote VIII come of such a mother, with base blood in his veins! He drew his aristocratic shoulders together as though he felt a chill.

“When he comes back,” Mr. Foote said, “we’ll have this thing out.”

But Bonbright did not come back that day, nor was he visible at home that night. ... The next day dragged by and still he did not appear. ...

CHAPTER XII

Ruth Frazer had been working nearly two months for Malcolm Lightener, and she liked the place. It had been a revelation to her following her experience with Bonbright Foote, Incorporated. It *interested* her, fascinated her. There was an atmosphere in the tremendous offices—a tension, a *snappiness*, an alertness, an efficiency that made Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, seem an anachronism; as belonging in an earlier, more leisurely, less capable century. There was a spirit among the workers totally lacking in her former place of employment; there was an attitude in superiors, and most notable in Malcolm Lightener himself, which was so different from that of Mr. Foote that it seemed impossible. Foote held himself aloof from contacts with his help and his business. Malcolm Lightener was everywhere, interested in everything, mixing into everything. And though she perceived his granite qualities, experienced his brusqueness, his gruffness, she, in common with the office, felt for him something that was akin to affection. He was the sort to draw forth loyalty.

Her first encounter with him occurred a couple of days after her arrival in the office. She was interrupted in the transcription of a letter by a stern voice behind her, saying:

“You’re young Foote’s anarchist, aren’t you?”

She looked up frightened into the unsmiling eyes of Malcolm Lightener.

“Mr. Foote—got me my place here,” she said, hesitatingly.

“Here—take this letter.” And almost before she could snatch book and pencil he was dictating, rapidly, dynamically. When Malcolm Lightener dictated a letter he did it as though he were making a public speech, with emphasis and gesture. “There,” he said, “read it back to me.”

She did, her voice unsteady.

“Spell isosceles,” he demanded.

She managed the feat accurately.

“Uh! ... That usually gets ’em. ... Needn’t transcribe that letter. Like it here?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Why?”

She looked up at him, considering the matter. Why did she like it there? “Because,” she said, slowly, “it doesn’t seem like just a—a— big, grinding machine, and the people working here like wheels and pulleys and little machines. It all feels *alive*, and—and—-we feel like human beings.”

Page 61

“Huh! ...” he grunted, and frowned down at her. “Brains,” he said. “Mighty good thing to have. Took brains to be able to think that—and say it.” He turned away, then said, suddenly, over his shoulder, “Got any bombs in your desk?”

“Bombs! ...”

“Because,” he said, with no trace of a smile, “we don’t allow little girls to bring bombs in here. ... If you see anything around that you think needs an infernal machine set off under it, why, you come and tell me. See? ... Tell me before you explode anything—not after. You anarchists are apt to get the cart before the horse.”

“I’m not an anarchist, Mr. Lightener.”

“Huh! ... What are you, then?”

“I think—I’m sure I’m a Socialist.”

“All of the same piece of cloth. ... Mind, if you feel a bomb coming on—see me about it.” He walked away to stop by the desk of a mailing clerk and enter into some kind of conversation with the boy.

Ruth looked after him in a sort of daze. Then she heard the girls about her laughing.

“You’ve passed your examination, Miss Frazer,” said the girl at the next desk. “Everybody has to. ... You never can tell what he’s going to do, but he’s a dear. Don’t let him scare you. If he thought he had he’d be tickled to death—and then he’d find some way to show you you needn’t be at all.”

“Oh!” said Ruth.

More than once she saw laboring men, machinists, men in greasy overalls, with grimy hands and smeared faces, pass into Malcolm Lightener’s office, and come out with the Big Boss walking beside them, talking in a familiar, gruff, interested way. She was startled sometimes to hear such men address him by his first name—and to see no lightning from heaven flash blastingly. She was positively startled once when a machinist flatly contradicted Lightener in her hearing on some matter pertaining to his work.

“That hain’t the way at all,” the man said, flatly. Ruth waited for the explosion.

“Landers planned it that way.” Landers was chief engineer in the plant, drawing a princely salary.

“Landers is off his nut. He got it out of a book. I’m *doin*’ it. I tell you it won’t work.”

“Why?” Always Lightener had a *why*. He was constantly shooting it at folks, and it behooved them to have a convincing answer. The machinist had, and he set it forth at length and technically. Lightener listened.

“You win,” he said, when the man was done. That was all.

More than once Ruth saw Hilda Lightener in the office. Usually the girls in an office fancy they have a grudge against the fortunate daughter of their employer. They are sure she snubs them, or is a snob, or likes to show off her feathers before them. This was notably absent in Hilda’s case. She knew many by name and stopped to chat with them. She was simple, pleasant, guiltless of pomp and circumstance in her comings and goings.

Page 62

“They say she’s going to marry young Foote. The Foote company makes axles for us,” said Ruth’s neighbor, and after that Ruth became more interested in Hilda.

She liked Bonbright Foote and was sorry for him. Admitting the unwisdom of his calls upon her, she had not the heart to forbid him, especially that he had shown no signs of sentiment, or of stepping beyond the boundary lines of simple friendship. ... She saw to it that he and Dulac did not meet.

As for Dulac—she had disciplined him for his outbreak as was the duty of a self-respecting young woman, and had made him eat his piece of humble pie. It had not affected her veneration for his work, nor her admiration for the man and his sincerity and his ability. ... She had answered his question, and the answer had been yes, for she had come to believe that she loved him. ...

She saw how tired he was looking. She perceived the discouragements that weighed on him, and saw, as he refused to see, that the strike was a failure in spite of his efforts. And she was sensible. The strike had failed; nothing was to be gained by sustaining the ebbing remnants of it, by making men and women and children suffer futilely. ... She would have ended it and begun straight-way preparing a strike that would not fail. But she did not say so to him. He *had* to fight. She saw that. She saw, too, that it was not in him to admit defeat or to surrender. It would be necessary to crush him first.

And then, at five o’clock, as she came out of the office she found Bonbright Foote waiting for her in his car. It had never happened before.

“I—I came for you,” he said, awkwardly, yet with something of tenseness in his voice.

“You shouldn’t,” she said, not unkindly. He would understand the reasons.

“I had to,” he said. “I—all day I’ve done nothing but wait to see you. I’ve got to talk to you. ... Please, now that I’m here, won’t you get in?”

She saw that something was wrong, that something out of the ordinary had happened, and as she stepped into the car she shot a glance at his set face and felt a wave of sympathy for him.

“I want you to—to have something to eat with me—out in the country. I want to get away from town. Let me send a messenger to your mother. I know you don’t want to, and—and all that, but you’ll come, won’t you?”

Ruth considered. There was much to consider, but she knew he was an honest, wholesome boy—and he was in trouble.

“This once,” she said, and let him see her grin.

“Thank you,” he said, simply.

It was but a short drive to an A. D. T. office, where Bonbright wrote a message to Mrs. Frazer:

I’m taking your daughter to Apple Lake to dinner. I hope you won’t mind. And I promise to have her home safe and early.

A boy was dispatched with this, and Bonbright and Ruth drove out the Avenue with the evening sun in their faces, toward distant, beautiful Apple Lake. Bonbright drove in silence, his eyes on the road. Ruth was alone in her appreciation of the loveliness of the waning day.

Page 63

The messenger left on his bicycle, but had not gone farther than around the first corner when a gentleman drew up beside him in an automobile.

“Hey, kid, I want to speak to you,” said Mr. Rangar.

The boy stopped and the car stopped.

“You’ve got a message there that I’m interested in,” said Rangar. “It isn’t sealed. I want a look at it.” He held out a five-dollar bill. The boy pocketed the bill and handed over the message, which Rangar read and returned to him. Then Rangar drove to the office from which the boy had come and dispatched a message of his own, one not covered by his instructions from Mr. Foote. It was a private matter with him, inspired by an incident of the morning having to do with a rumpled necktie and a ruffled dignity. The malice which had glittered in his eyes then was functioning now.

Rangar’s message was to Dulac.

“Your girl’s just gone to Apple Lake with young Foote in his car,” it said. That was all, but it seemed ample to Rangar.

Bonbright was not a reckless driver, but he drove rapidly this evening, with a sort of driven eagerness. From, time to time Ruth turned and glanced at his face and wondered what could have happened, for she had never seen him like this before, even in his darkest moments. There was a new element in his bearing, an element never there before. Discouragement, apathy, she had seen, and bitterness. She had seen wistfulness, hopelessness, chagrin, humiliation, but never until now had she seen set determination, smoldering embers of rage. What, she wondered, could this boy’s father have done to him now?

Soon they were beyond the rim of industry which banded the city, and, leaving behind them towering chimneys, smokeless for the night, clouds of released working-men waiting their turns to crowd into overloaded street cars, the grimy, busy belt line which extended in a great arc through the body of the manufacturing strip, they passed through sprouting, mushroomlike suburban villages—villages which had not been there the year before, which would be indistinguishable from the city itself the year after. Farther on they sped between huge-lettered boards announcing the location of real-estate developments which as yet consisted only of new cement sidewalks, immature trees promising future shade, and innumerable stakes marking lot boundaries. Mile after mile these extended, a testimonial to the faith of men in the growth of their city. ... And then came the country, guiltless of the odors of gregarious humanity, of gasses, of smokes, of mankind itself, and of the operations which were preparing its food. Authentic farms spread about them; barns and farmhouses were dropped down at intervals; everywhere was green quiet, softened, made to glow enticingly by the sun’s red disk about to dip behind the little hills. ... All this Ruth saw and loved. It was an

unaccustomed sight, for she was tied to the city. It altered her mood, softened her, made her more pliable. Bonbright could have planned no better than to have driven her along this road. ...

Page 64

Presently they turned off at right angles, upon a country road shaded by century-old maples—a road that meandered leisurely along, now dipping into a valley created for agriculture, now climbing a hillside rich with fruit trees; and now and then, from hilltop, or through gap in the verdure, the gleam of quiet, rush-fringed lakes came to Ruth—and touched her, touched her so that her heart was soft and her lashes wet. ... The whole was so placid, so free from turmoil, from competition, from the tussling of business and the surging upward of down-weighted classes. She was grateful to it.

Yet when, as she did now and then, she glanced at Bonbright, she felt the contrast. All that was present in the landscape was absent from his soul. There was no peace there, no placidity, but unrest, bitterness, unhappiness—grimness. Yes, grimness. When the word came into her mind she knew it was the one she had been searching for. ... Why was he so grim?

Presently they entered upon a road which ran low beside Apple Lake itself, with tiny ripples lapping almost at the tire marks in the sand. She looked, and breathed deeply and gladly. If she could only live on such a spot! ...

The club house was deserted save by the few servants, and Bonbright gave directions that they should be served on the veranda. It was almost the first word he had littered since leaving the city. He led the way to a table, from which they could sit and look out on the water.

“It’s lovely,” she said.

“I come here a good deal,” he said, without explanation, but she understood.

“If I were you, I’d *live* here. Every day I would have the knowledge that I was coming home to *this* in the evening. ... You could. Why don’t you, I wonder?”

“I don’t know. I can’t remember a Foote who has ever lived in such a place. If it hasn’t been done in my family, of course I couldn’t do it.”

She pressed her lips together at the bitter note in his voice. It was out of tune. “Have the ancestors been after you?” she asked. She often spoke of the ancestors lightly and jokingly, which she saw he rather liked.

“The whole lot have been riding me hard. And I’m a well-trained nag. I never buck or balk. ... I never did till to-day.”

“To-day?”

“I bucked them off in a heap,” he said, with no trace of humor. He was dead serious. “I didn’t know I could do it, but all of a sudden I was plunging and rearing—and snorting, I expect. ... And they were off.”

“To stay?”

He dropped his eyes and fell silent. “Anyhow,” he said, presently, “it’s a relief to be running free even for an hour.”

“When they go to climb back why don’t you buck some more? Now that they’re off—-keep them off.”

“It’s not so easy. You see, I’ve been trained all my life to carry them. You can’t break off a thing like that in an instant. A priest doesn’t turn atheist in a night ... and this Family Tradition business is like a religion. It gets into your bones. You *respect* it. You feel it demanding things of you and you can’t refuse. ... I suppose there is a duty.”

Page 65

“To yourself,” she said, quickly.

“To *them*—and to the—the future. ... But I bucked them off once. Maybe they’ll never ride so hard again, and maybe they’ll try to break me by riding harder. ... Until to-day I never had a notion of fighting back—but I’m going to give them a job of it now. ... There are things I *will* do. They sha’n’t always have their way. Right now, Miss Frazer, I’ve broken with the whole thing. They may be able to fetch me back. I don’t know. ... Sometime I’ll have to go. When father’s through I’d have to go, anyhow—to head the business.”

“Your father ought to change the name of the business to Family Ghosts, Incorporated,” she said, with an attempt to lighten his seriousness.

“I’ll be general manager—responsible to a board of directors from across the Styx,” he said, with an approach to a smile. “Here’s our waiter. I telephoned our order. Hope I’ve chosen to please you.”

“Indeed you have,” she replied. “I feel quite the aristocrat. I ought not to do this sort of thing. ... But I’m glad to do it once. I abhor the rich,” she said, laughing, “but some of the things they do and have are mighty pleasant.”

After a while she said: “If I were a rich man’s wife I’d be something more than a society gadabout. I’d insist on knowing his business ... and I’d make him do a lot of things for his workmen. Think of being a woman and able to do so much for thousands of—of my class,” she finished.

“Your class!” he said, sharply.

“I belong to the laboring class. First, because I was born into it, and, second, because my heart is with it.”

“Class doesn’t touch you. It doesn’t concern you. You’re *yourself*.” For the first time in her acquaintance with him he made her uneasy. His eyes and the way he spoke those sentences disturbed her.

“Nonsense!” she said.

Neither spoke for some time. It was growing dark now, and lights were glowing on the veranda. “When we’re through,” Bonbright said, “let’s walk down by the lake. There’s a bully walk and a place to sit. ... I asked you to come because I wanted to take you there—miles away from everybody. ...”

She was distinctly startled now, but helpless. She read storm signals, but no harbor was at hand.

“We must be getting back,” she said, lamely.

“It’s not eight. We can go back in an hour. ... Shall we walk down now? I can’t wait, Ruth, to say what I’ve got to say. ...”

It was impossible to hold back, futile to attempt escape. She knew now why he had brought her and what he wanted to say, but she could not prevent it. ... If he must have his say let it be where he desired. Very grave now, unhappy, her joy marred, she walked down the steps by his side and along the shore of the lake. “Here,” he said, presently, drawing her into a nook occupied by a bench. She sat down obediently.

Page 66

Was it fortunate or unfortunate that she did not know an automobile was just turning into the lake road, a hired automobile, occupied by her fiance, Dulac? Rangar's note had reached his hands and he had acted as Rangar had hoped. ...

CHAPTER XIII

Until a few moments before Ruth had never had a suspicion of Bonbright's feeling for her; she had not imagined he would ever cross that distinct line which separates the friend from the suitor. It was an unpleasant surprise to her. Not that he was repugnant to her, but she had already bestowed her affections, and now she would have to hurt this boy who had already suffered so much at the hands of others. She recoiled from it. She blamed herself for her blindness, but she was not to blame. What she had failed to foresee Bonbright himself had realized only that morning.

He had awakened suddenly to the knowledge that his sentiment for Ruth Frazer was not calm friendship, but throbbing love. He had been awakened to it rudely, not as most young men are shown that they love. ... When he flung out of his father's office that morning he had recognized only a just rage; hardly had his feet carried him over the threshold before rage was crowded out by the realization of love. His father's words had aroused his rage because he loved the woman they maligned! Suddenly he knew it. ...

"It's *so*," he said to himself. "It's so—and I didn't know it."

It was disconcerting, but he was glad. Almost at once he realized what a change this thing brought into his life, and the major consequences of it. ... First, he would have her —he must have her— he would not live without her. It required no effort of determination to arrive at that decision. To win her, to have her for his own, was now the one important thing in his life. To do so would mean—what would it mean? The Family, dead and living, would be outraged. His father would stand aghast at his impiousness; his mother, class conscious as few of the under dogs are ever class conscious, would refuse to receive this girl as her daughter. ... There would be bitterness—but there would be release. By this one step he would break with the Family Tradition and the Family Ghosts. They would cast him out. ... But would they cast him out? He was Bonbright Foote VII, crown prince of the dynasty, vested with rights in the family and in the family's property by family laws of primogeniture and entail. ... No, he would not be cast out, could not be cast out, for his father would let no sin of his son's stand in the way of a perpetuation of the family. Bonbright knew that if a complete breach opened between his father and himself it must be his hand that opened it. His father's would never do so. ... He wondered if he could do so—if, when he was calm, he would desire to do so.

Once he recognized his love he could not be still; office walls could not contain him. He was in a fever to see Ruth with newly opened eyes, with eyes that would see her as they had not seen her in the days before. ... He rushed out—to encounter Hangar, and to experience a surging return of rage. ... Then he went on, with no aim or purpose but to get rid of the time that must pass before he could see Ruth. It was ten o'clock, and he could not see her until five. Seven hours. ...

Page 67

Now she was here, within reach of his hand, her face, not beautiful by day, very lovely to his eyes as the rising moon stretched a ribbon of light across the lake to touch her with its magic glow... and he could not find words to say what must be said.

He had seated her on the bench and now paced up and down before her, struggling to become coherent.

Then words came, a torrent of them, not coherent, not eloquent, but *real*. Ruth recognized the reality in them. "I want you," he said, standing over her. "I didn't know—I didn't realize ... until to-day. It's so. ... It's been so right along. That's why I had to come to you. ... I couldn't get along without seeing you, but I didn't know why. ... I thought it was to see you smile. But it was because I had to be near you. ... I want to be near you always. This morning I found out—and all day I've waited to see you. ... That's all I've done—thought about you and waited. It seems as if morning were years away. ... I don't know what I've done all day—just wandered around. I didn't eat—until to-night. I couldn't. I couldn't do anything until I saw you—and told you. ... That's why I brought you here. ... I wanted to tell you *here*—not back there. ... Away from all that. ... I can't go on without you—that's what you mean to me. You're *necessary*—like air or water. ... I—Maybe you haven't thought about me this way. I didn't about you. ... But you *must* ... you *must*!"

It was pitiful. Tears wet Ruth's cheeks and she caught her breath to restrain a rising sob.

He became calmer, gentler. "Maybe I've surprised you," he said. "Maybe I've frightened you—I hope not. I don't mean to frighten you. I don't want you ever to be frightened or worried. ... I want to keep all kinds of suffering out of your life if you'll let me. Won't you let me? ..." He stood waiting.

"Mr. Foote," she said, presently, "I—" then she stopped. She had intended to tell him about Dulac; that she loved him and had promised to marry him, but she could not utter the words. It would hurt him so to know that she loved another man. She could refuse him without that added pain. "Don't you see," she said, "how impossible it is? It wouldn't do—even if I cared for you."

"If you cared for me," he said, "nothing could make it impossible."

"We belong in different worlds. ... You couldn't come down to mine; I wouldn't fit into yours. My world wouldn't have you, and your world wouldn't have me. ... Don't you see?"

"I don't see. What has your world or mine to do with it? It's just you and me."

“When you saw that your family wouldn’t have me, when you found out that your friends wouldn’t be friends with me, and that they didn’t want to be friends with you any longer just because you married me ...”

“I don’t want any friends or family but you,” he said, eagerly, boyishly.

Page 68

“Be reasonable, Mr. Foote. ... You’re rich. Some day you’ll be the head of a great business—with thousands of men working for you. ... I belong with them. You must be against them. ... I couldn’t bear it. You know all about me. I’ve been brought up to believe the things I believe. My father and grandfather and *his* grandfather worked and suffered for them. ... Just as your ancestors have worked and planned for the things you represent. ... It wouldn’t ever do. We couldn’t be happy. Even if I—cared—and did as you ask—it wouldn’t last.”

“It would last,” he said. “I *know*. I’ve been trying to tell you, to make you believe that you have crowded everything else out of my life. There’s just you in it. ... It would last—and every day and every year it would grow—more wonderful.”

“There must be agreement and sympathy between a husband and his wife, Mr. Foote. ... Oh, I *know*. In the bigger things. And there we could never agree. It would make trouble—trouble that couldn’t be avoided nor dodged. It would be there with us every minute—and we’d know it. You’d know I hated the things you stand for and the things you have to do. ... No man could bear that—to have his wife constantly reproaching him.”

“I think,” he said, “that your word would be my law. ...”

She sat silent, startled. Unasked, unsought, a thought had entered her mind; a terrifying thought, but a big and vital thought. *Her word would be his law*. Her influence would be upon him. ... And he was master of thousands of her class. He would be master of more thousands. ... If she were his wife—if her word might become his law—-how would those laboring men be affected? Would her word be his law with respect to them? ...

She did not love him, but she did love the Cause she represented, that her promised husband, Dulac, represented. ... Her father had given his life for it. She had given nothing. Now she could give— herself. ... She could sacrifice herself, she could pass by her love— but would it avail anything? ... This boy loved her, loved her with all his strength and honesty. He would continue to love her. She believed that. ... If, not loving him, she should marry him, she would be able to hold his love—and her word would be in some sort his law. She could influence him—not abruptly, not suddenly, but gradually, cleverly, cunningly. She could use him for her great purpose. Thousands of men might be happier, safer from hunger and misery, closer to a realization of their hope, if she gave herself to this boy. ... She was filled with exaltation—a Joan of Arc listening to her Voices. ...

It was possible—possible. ... And if it were possible, if she could accomplish this great thing for the Cause, dared she avoid it? Was it not a holy duty?

Remember her parentage, her training; remember that she had drawn into her being enthusiasm, fanaticism with the air she breathed in the very cradle. She was a revolutionist. ... Greater crimes than loveless marriages have been committed in the name of Enthusiasm for a Cause.

Page 69

She hesitated. What should she say?. ... She must think, for a new face was upon the matter. She must think, and she must talk with Dulac. Dulac was stronger than she—-but he saw eye to eye with her. The things she set up and worshiped in their shrines he worshiped more fervently. ... She must put the boy off with evasion. She must postpone her answer until she was certain she saw her duty clearly.

Love of humanity in the mass was in her heart—it shouldered out fairness to an individual man. She did not think of this. If she had thought it might not have mattered, for if she were willing to immolate herself would she not have been as ready to sacrifice one man—for the good of thousands?

“I-” she began, and was dimly conscious of shame at her duplicity. “I did not know you—wanted me this way. ... Let me think. I can’t answer—to-night. Wait. ... Give me time.”

His voice was glad as he answered, and its gladness shamed her again. “Wait. ... I’d wait forever. But I don’t want to wait forever. ... It is more than I hoped, more than I had the right to hope. I know I took you by surprise. ... Let me have time and the chance to make you love me—to let you get used to the idea of my loving you. But try not to be long. I’m impatient—you don’t know how impatient. ...”

“I-I sha’n’t be long,” she said. “You mustn’t build too many hopes. ...”

He laughed. She had never heard him laugh with such lightness, with such a note of soul-gladness, before. “Hope. ... I shall eat and drink hope—until you—come to me. For you will come to me. I know it. ... It couldn’t be any other way.” He laughed again, gayly. And then from out the blackness of the surrounding shrubbery there plunged the figure of a man. ...

Before Bonbright could lift a hand to shield himself blows began to fall, blows not delivered with the naked fist. Once, twice, again the man struck with the strength of frenzy. Ruth sat silent, stunned, paralyzed by fright, and uttered no scream. Then she saw the face of Bonbright’s assailant. It was Dulac—and she understood.

She sprang to him, clutched at his arm, but he hurled her off and struck again. ... It was enough. Bonbright stood wavering a moment, struggling to remain upright, but sagging slowly. Then he slumped to the ground in a sort of uncanny sitting posture, his head sunk upon his knees.

Ruth stood looking down upon him with horror-widened eyes. Dulac hurled his weapon into the bushes and turned upon her furiously, seizing her arm and dragging her to him so that his eyes, glowing with unreason, could burn into hers.

“Oh—” she moaned.

“I’ve taught him,” Dulac said, his voice quivering with rage. “It was time... the vermin. Because he was rich he thought he was safe. He thought he could do anything. ... But I’ve taught him. They starve us and stamp on us—and then steal our wives and smirch our sweethearts.”

Page 70

Ruth tried to bend over Bonbright, to lift his head, to give him assistance, but Dulac jerked her away.

“Don’t touch him. Don’t dare to touch him,” he said.

“He doesn’t—move,” she said, in a horrified whisper. “Maybe you’ve-killed him.”

“He deserved it. ... And you—have you anything to say? What are you doing here—-with him?”

“Let me go,” she panted. “Let me see—I must see. He can’t be—dead. ... You—you *beast*!” she cried, shrilly. “He was good. He meant no harm. ... He loved me, and that’s why this happened. It’s my fault— my fault.”

“Be still,” he commanded. “He loved you—you admit it. You dare admit it—and you here alone with him at night.”

“He asked—me—to—marry—him,” she said, faintly. “He was not—what you think. ... He was a good—boy.”

Suddenly she tried to break from him to go to Bonbright, but he clutched her savagely. “Help! ... Help! ...” she cried. Then his hand closed over her mouth and he gathered her up in his arms and carried her away.

He did not look behind at Bonbright huddled there with the ribbon of moonlight pointing across the lake at his limp body, but half staggered, half ran to his waiting car. ... A snarled word, and the engine started. Ruth, choking, helpless, was carried away, leaving Bonbright alone and still. ...

CHAPTER XIV

Bonbright was on his hands and knees on the edge of the lake, dizzily slopping water on his head and face. He was struggling toward consciousness, fighting dazedly for the power to act. As one who, in a dream, reviews the events of another half-presented dream, he knew what had happened. Consciousness had not fully deserted him. Dulac had attacked him; Dulac had carried Ruth away. ... Somehow he had no fears for her personal safety, but he must follow. He must *know* that she was safe. ...

Not many minutes had passed since Dulac struck him down. His body was strong, well trained to sustain shocks and to recover from them, thanks to four years of college schooling in the man’s game of football. Since he left college he had retained the respect for his body which had been taught him, and with golf and tennis and gymnasium he had kept himself fit ... so that now his vital forces marshaled themselves quickly to fight his battle for him. Presently he raised himself to his feet and stood

swaying dizzily; with fingers that fumbled he tied his handkerchief about his bruised head and staggered toward his car, for his will urged him on to follow Dulac.

To crank the motor (for the self-starter had not yet arrived) was a task of magnitude, but he accomplished it and pulled himself into the seat. For a moment he lay upon the steering wheel, panting, fighting back his weakness; then he thrust forward his control lever and the car began to move. The motion, the kindly touch of the cool night air against his head, stimulated him; he stepped on the gas pedal and the car leaped forward as though eager for the pursuit.

Page 71

Out into the main road he lurched, grimly clutching the steering wheel, leaning on it for support, his aching, blurred eyes clinging to the illuminated way before him, and he drove as he had never ventured to drive before. Beating against his numbed brain was his will's sledge-hammer demands for speed, and he obeyed recklessly. ...

Roadside objects flicked by, mile after mile was dropped behind, the city's outskirts were being snatched closer and closer—and then he saw the other car far ahead. All that remained to be asked of his car he demanded now, and he overhauled the smaller, less speedy machine. Now his lights played on its rear and his horn sounded a warning and a demand. Dulac's car veered to the side to let him pass, and he lurched by, only turning a brief, wavering glance upon the other machine to assure himself that Ruth was there. He saw her in a flashing second, in the tonneau, with Dulac by her side. ... She was safe, uninjured. Then Bonbright left them behind.

The road narrowed, with deep ditches on either hand. Here was the place he sought. He set his brakes, shut off his power, and swung his car diagonally across the way, so that it would be impossible for Dulac to pass. Then he alighted, and stood waiting, holding on to his machine for support.

The other car came to a stop and Dulac sprang out. Bonbright saw Ruth rise to follow; heard Dulac say, roughly: "Get back. Stay where you are."

"No," she replied, and stepped to the road.

Bonbright could see how pale she was, how frightened.

"Don't be afraid," he said to her. "Nothing is going to—happen."

He stood erect now, free from the support of the car, waiting for Dulac, who approached menacingly.

"Dulac," he said, "I can't—fight you. I can't even——defend myself— much. ... Unless you insist."

The men were facing each other now, almost toe to toe. Dulac's face was stormy with passion under scant restraint; Bonbright, though he swayed a bit unsteadily, faced him with level eyes. Ruth saw the decent courage of the boy and her fear for him made her clutch Dulac's sleeve. The man shook her off.

"I know—why you attacked me," said Bonbright, slowly, "what you thought. ... I—-stopped you to—be sure Miss Frazer was safe ... and to tell you you were—wrong. ... Not that you have a—right to question me, but nobody must think—ill of Miss Frazer. ... No misunderstanding. ..."

"Get that car out of the way," said Dulac.

Bonbright shook his head. “Not till I’m—through,” he said. “Then you may—take Miss Frazer home. ... But be kind to her—gentle. ... I shall ask her about it—and I sha’n’t be—knocked out long.”

“You threaten me, you pampered puppy!”

“Yes,” said Bonbright, grimly, “exactly.”

Dulac started to lift his arm, but Ruth caught it. “No. ... No,” she said, in a tense whisper. “You mustn’t. Can’t you see how—hurt he is? He can hardly stand. ... You’re not a *coward*. ...”

Page 72

“Dulac,” said Bonbright, “here’s the truth: I took Miss Frazer to the lake to—ask her to—marry me. ... No other reason. She was—safe with me—as with you. I want her for—my wife. Do you understand? ... You thought—what my father thought.”

Ruth uttered a little cry. So *that* was what had happened!

“All the decency in the world,” Bonbright said, “isn’t in—union men, workingmen. ... Because I have more money than you—you want to believe—anything of me. ... You’re even willing to—believe it of her. ... I can—love as well as if I were poor. ... I can—-honor and respect the girl I want to marry as well as if I—carried a union card. ... That is *true*.”

Dulac laughed shortly; then, even in his rage, he became oratorical, theatrical.

“We know the honor and respect of your kind. ... We know what our sisters and daughters have to expect from you. We’ve learned it. You talk fair—you dangle your filthy money under their eyes—you promise this and you promise that. ... And then you throw away your toys. ... They come back to us covered with disgrace, heart-broken, marked forever, and fit to be no man’s wife. ... That’s your respect and honor. That’s your decency. ... Leave our women alone. ... Go to your bridge-playing, silly, husband-swapping society women. They know you. They know what to expect from you—and get what they deserve. Leave our women alone. ... Leave this girl alone. We men have to endure enough at your hands, but we won’t endure this. ... We’ll do as I did to-night. I thrashed you—”

“Like a coward, in the dark, from behind,” said Bonbright, boyish pride insisting upon offering its excuse. “I didn’t stop you to argue about capital and labor. I stopped you—-to tell you the truth about to-night. I’ve told it.”

“You’ve lied the way your kind always lies.”

Bonbright’s lips straightened, his eyes hardened, and he leaned forward. “I promised Miss Frazer nothing—should happen. It sha’n’t. ... But you’re a fool, Dulac. You know I’m telling the truth—but you won’t admit it—because you don’t want to. Because I’m not on your side, you won’t admit it. ... And that makes you a fool. ... Be still. You haven’t hesitated to tell me I lied. I’ve taken that—and you’ll take what I have to say. It isn’t much. I don’t know much about the—differences between your kind and my kind. ... But your side gets more harm than good from men like you. You’re a blind fanatic. You cram your men on lies and stir them up to hate us. ... Maybe there’s cause, but you magnify it. ... You won’t see the truth. You won’t see reason. ... You hold us apart. Maybe you’re honest— fanatics usually are, but fanatics are fools. It does no good to tell you so. I’m wasting my breath. ... Now take Miss Frazer home—-and be careful how you treat her.”

He turned his back squarely and pulled himself into his car. Then he turned to Ruth. “Good night, Miss Frazer,” he said. “I am sorry—for all this. ... May I come for—your answer to-morrow?”

Page 73

“No. ...” she said, tremulously. “Yes. ...”

Bonbright straightened his car in the road and drove on. He was at the end of his strength. He wanted the aid of a physician, and then he wanted to lie down and sleep, and sleep. The day that had preceded the attack upon him had been wearing enough to exhaust the sturdiest. The tension of waiting, the anxiety, the mental disturbance, had demanded their usual wages of mind and body. Sudden shock had done the rest.

He drove to the private hospital of a doctor of his acquaintance, a member of his club, and gained admission. The doctor himself was there, by good fortune, and saw Bonbright at once, and examined the wounds in his scalp.

“Strikers get you?” he asked.

“Automobile mix-up,” said Bonbright, weakly.

“Uh-huh!” said the doctor. “I suppose somebody picked up a light roadster and struck you over the head with it. ... Not cut much. No stitches. A little adhesive’ll do the trick—and then. ... Sort of excited, eh? Been under a bit of a strain? ... None of my business, of course. ... Get into bed and I’ll send up something to tone you down and make you sleep. You’ve been playing in too high a key—your fiddle strings are too tight.”

Getting into that cool, soft bed was one of the pleasantest experiences of Bonbright’s life. He was almost instantly asleep—and he still slept, even at the deliberate hour that saw his father enter the office at the mills.

Mr. Foote was disturbed. He had not seen his son since the boy flung out of the office the morning before; had had no word of him. He had expected Bonbright to come home in the evening and had waited for him in the library to have a word with him. He had come to the conclusion that it would be best to throw some sort of sop to Bonbright in the way of apparent authority, of mock responsibility. It would occupy the boy’s mind, he thought, while in no way altering the conditions, not affecting the end to be arrived at. Bonbright must be held. ... If it were necessary to administer an anaesthetic while the operation of remaking him into a true Foote was performed, why, the anaesthetic would be forthcoming.

But Bonbright did not come, even with twelve strokes of the clock. His father retired, but in no refreshing sleep. ... On that day no progress had been made with the Marquis Lafayette. That work required a calm that Mr. Foote could not master.

His first act after seating himself at his desk was to summon Rangar.

“My son was not at home last night,” he said. “I have not seen him since yesterday morning. I hope you can give me an account of him.”

“Not home last night, Mr. Foote!” Manifestly Rangar was startled. He had not been at ease before, for be had been unable to pick up any trace of the boy this morning; had not seen him return home the night before. ... It might be that he had gone too far when he sent his anonymous note to Dulac. Dulac had gone in pursuit, of that he had made sure. But what had happened? Had the matter gone farther than the mere thrashing he had hoped for? ... He was frightened.

Page 74

“I directed you to keep him under your eye.”

“Your directions were followed, Mr. Foote, so far as was possible. I know where he was yesterday, and where he went last night, but when a young man is running around the country in an automobile with a girl, it’s mighty hard to keep at his heels. He was with that girl.”

“When? ... What happened?”

“He waited for her at the Lightener plant. She works there now. They drove out the Avenue together—some place into the country. Mr. Bonbright is a member of the Apple Lake Club, and I was sure they were going there. ... That’s the last I know.”

“Telephone the Apple Lake Club. See if he was there and when he left.”

Rangar retired to do so, and returned presently to report that Bonbright and a young lady had dined there, but had not been seen after they left the table. Nobody could say when they went away from the club.

“Call Malcolm Lightener—at his office. Once the boy stayed at his house.”

Rangar made the call, and, not able to repress the malice that was in him, went some steps beyond his directions. Mr. Lightener was on the wire.

“This is Rangar, Mr. Lightener—Bonbright Foote, Incorporated. Mr. Foote wished me to inquire if you had seen Mr. Bonbright between six o’clock last night and this morning.”

“No. ... Why does he ask me? What’s the matter?”

“Mr. Foote says Bonbright stayed with you one night, and thought he might have done so again. Mr. Foote is worried, sir. The young man has—er—vanished, so to speak. He was seen last at your plant about five o’clock. In his automobile, Mr. Lightener. He was waiting for a young woman who works for you—a Miss Frazer, I understand. Used to be his secretary. They drove away together, and he hasn’t been seen since. ... Mr. Foote has feared some sort of—er—understanding between them.”

“Huh!” grunted Lightener. “Don’t know anything about it. Tell Foote to look after his own son ... if he knows how.” Then the receiver clicked.

Lightener swung away from the telephone and scowled at the wall. “He don’t look it,” he said, presently, “and I’m darned if *she* does. ... Huh! ...” He pressed a button. “Send in Miss Frazer,” he said to the boy who answered the buzzer.

In a moment Ruth stood in the door. He let her stand while he scrutinized her briefly. She looked ill. Her eyes were dull and marked by surrounding darkness. She had no color. He shook his head Like a displeased lion.

“Miss Frazer,” he said, gruffly, “I make it a practice always to mind my own business except when there’s some reason for not minding it— which is frequent.”

“Yes, sir,” she said, as he paused.

“Yes, sir. ... Yes, sir. What do *you* know about it? Come in and shut the door. Come over here where I can look at you. What’s the matter? Ill? If you’re sick what are you doing here? Home’s the place for you.”

Page 75

“I’m not ill, Mr. Lightener.”

“Huh! ... I liked your looks—like ’em yet. Like everybody’s looks who works here, or I wouldn’t have ’em. ... You’re all right, I’ll bet a dollar—all *right*. ... You know young Foote got you your job here?”

He saw the sudden intake of her breath as Bonbright’s name was mentioned. “Yes,” she said, faintly.

“What about him?... Know him well? *Like him*?”

“I—I know him quite well, Mr. Lightener. Yes, I—like him.”

“Trust him?”

She looked at him a moment before replying; then her chin lifted a trifle and there came a glint into her eyes. “Absolutely,” she said.

“Um!... Good enough. So do I. ... Enough to let him play around with my daughter. ... Has he anything to do with the way you look to-day?... Not a fair question—yet. You needn’t answer.”

“I shouldn’t,” she said, and he smiled at the asperity of her tone.

“Mr. Bonbright Foote seems to be causing his family anxiety,” he said. “He’s disappeared. ... I guess they think you carried him off. Did you go somewhere with him in his car last night?”

“You have no right to question me, Mr. Lightener.”

“Don’t I know it? I tell you I like you and I like him—and I think his father’s a stiff-backed, circumstantial, ancestor-ridden damn fool. ... Something’s happened or Foote wouldn’t be telephoning around. He’s got reason to be frightened, and good and frightened. ... A girl, especially a girl in your place, hasn’t any business being mixed up in any mess, much less with a young millionaire. ... That’s why I’m not minding my own business. You work for me, don’t you—and ain’t I responsible for you, sort of? Well, then? Were you with Bonbright last night?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Huh!... Something happened, didn’t it?” “Nothing that—Mr. Foote had anything to do with—”

“But something happened. What?”

“I can’t tell you, Mr. Lightener.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Where is he now?”

“I don’t know.”

“When did you see him last?”

“A little after nine o’clock last night.”

“Where?”

“Going toward home—I thought.”

“He didn’t go there. Where else would he go?”

“I don’t—know.” Her voice broke, her self-control was deserting her.

“Hey!... Hold on there. No hysterics or anything. Won’t have ’em. Brace up.”

“Let me alone, then,” she said, childishly. “Why can’t you let me alone?”

“I—Confound it! I’m not deviling you. I’m trying to haul you out of a muss. Quit it, will you?” She had sunk into a chair and covered her face. He got up and stood over her, scowling. “Will you stop it? Hear me? Stop it, I tell you’... What’s the matter—-anyhow? If Bonbright Foote’s done anything to you he hadn’t ought to I’ll skin him alive.”

Page 76

The door opened and Hilda Lightener tripped into the room. “Hello, dad!” she said. “Surprise. ... I want to—” She stopped to look at her father, and then at Ruth, crouched in her chair. “What’s the matter, dad?” Hilda asked. “You haven’t been scaring this little girl? If you have—” She paused threateningly.

“Oh, the devil!... I’ll get out. You see if you can make her stop it. Cuddle her, or something. I’ve done a sweet job of it. ... Miss Frazer, this is my daughter. Er—I’m going away from here.” And he went, precipitately.

There was a brief silence; then Hilda laid her hand on Ruth’s head. “What’s dad been doing to you?” she asked. “Scare you? His bark’s a heap sight worse than his bite.”

“He—he’s good,” said Ruth, tearfully. “He was trying to be good to me. ... I’m just upset—that’s all. I’ll be—all right in a moment.” But she was not all right in a moment. Her sobs increased. The strain, the anxiety, a sleepless night of suffering—and the struggle she had undergone to find the answer to Bonbright’s question—had tried her to the depths of her soul. Now she gave quite away and, unwillingly enough, sobbed and mumbled on Hilda Lightener’s shoulder, and clung to the larger girl pitifully, as a frightened baby clings to its mother.

Hilda’s face grew sober, her eyes darkened, as, among Ruth’s broken, fragmentary, choking words, she heard the name of Bonbright Foote. But her arm did not withdraw from about Ruth’s shoulders, nor did the sympathy in her kind voice lessen. ... Most remarkable of all, she did not give way to a very natural curiosity. She asked no question.

After a time Ruth grew quieter, calmer.

“I’ll tell you what you need,” said Hilda. “It’s to get away from here. My electric’s downstairs. I’m going to take you away from father. We’ll drive around a bit, and then I’ll run you home. ... You’re all aquiver.”

She went out, closing the door after her. Her father was pacing uneasily up and down the alley between the desks, and she motioned to him.

“She’s better now. I’m going to take her home. ... Dad, she was muttering about Bonbright. What’s he got to do with this?”

“I don’t know, honey. Nothing—nothing *rotten*. ... It isn’t in him— nor *her*.”

Hilda nodded.

“Bonbright seems to have disappeared,” her father said.

“*Disappeared*?”

“His father’s hunting for him, anyhow. Hasn’t been home all night.”

“I don’t blame him,” said Hilda, with a flash in her eyes. “But what’s this girl got to do with it?”

“I wish you’d find out. I was trying to—and that blew up the house.”

“I’ll try nothing of the kind,” she said. “Of course, if she *wants* to tell me, and *does* tell me, I’ll listen. ... But I won’t tell you. You run your old factory and keep out of such things. You just *mess* them.”

Page 77

“Yes, ma’am,” he said, with mock submissiveness, “it looks like I do just that.”

Hilda went back into the room, and presently she and Ruth emerged and went out of the building. That day began their acquaintance, which was to expand into a friendship very precious to both of them—and one day to be the rod and staff that sustained Ruth and kept her from despair.

CHAPTER XV

Hilda Lightener represented a new experience to Ruth. Never before had she come into such close contact with a woman of a class she had been taught to despise as useless and worse than useless. Even more than they hated the rich man Ruth’s class hated the rich man’s wife and daughter. Society women stood to them for definite transgressions of the demands of human equality and fairness and integrity of life. They were parasites, wasters, avoiding the responsibilities of womanhood and motherhood. They flaunted their ease and their luxuries. They were arrogant. When their lives touched the lives of the poor it was with maddening condescension. In short, they were not only no good, but were flagrantly bad.

The zealots among whom Ruth’s youth had lain knew no exceptions to this judgment. All so-called society women were included. Now Ruth was forced to make a revision. ... All employers of labor had been malevolent. Experience had proven to her that Bonbright Foote was not malevolent, and that a more conspicuous, vastly more powerful figure in the industrial world, Malcolm Lightener, was human, considerate, respectful of right, full of unexpected disturbing virtues. ... Ruth was forced to the conclusion that there were good men and good women where she had been taught to believe they did not exist. ... It was a pin-prick threatening the bubble of her fanaticism.

She had not been able to withhold her liking from Hilda Lightener. Hilda was strongly attracted by Ruth. King Copetua may occasionally wed the beggar maid, but it is rare for his daughter or his sister to desire a beggar maid’s friendship.

Hilda did not press Ruth for confidences, nor did Ruth bestow them. But Hilda succeeded in making Ruth feel that she was trustworthy, that she offered her friendship sincerely. ... That she was an individual to depend on if need came for dependence. They talked. At first Hilda carried on a monologue. Gradually Ruth became more like her sincere, calm self, and she met Hilda’s advances without reservation. ... When Hilda left her at her home both girls carried away a sense of possessing something new of value.

“Don’t you come back to the office to-day,” Hilda told her. “I’ll settle dad.”

“Thank you,” said Ruth. “I do need—rest. I’ve got to be alone to— think.” That was the closest she came to opening her heart.

She did have to think, though she had thought and reasoned and suffered the torture of mental conflict through a nearly sleepless night. She had told Bonbright to come on this day for her answer. ... She must have her answer ready. Also she must talk the thing over with Dulac. That would be hard—doubly hard in the situation that existed.

Page 78

Last night she had not spoken of it to him; had scarcely spoken to him at all, as he had been morosely silent to her. She had been shocked, frightened by his violence, yet she knew that his violence had been honest violence, perpetrated because he believed her welfare demanded it. She did not feel toward him the aversion that the average girl might have felt for one who precipitated her into such a scene. ... She was accustomed to violence and to the atmosphere of violence.

When she and Dulac arrived at the Frazer cottage, he had helped her to alight. Then he uttered a rude apology, but a sincere one— according to his lights.

“I’m sorry I had to do it with you watching,” he said. Then, curtly, “Go to bed now.”

Clearly he suspected her of no wrongdoing, of no intention toward future wrongdoing. She was a *victim*. She was a pigeon fascinated by a serpent.

Now she went to her room, and remained there until the supper hour.

When she and her mother and Dulac were seated at the table her mother began a characteristic Jeremiad. “I hope you ain’t coming down with a spell of sickness. Seems like sickness in the family’s about the only thing I’ve been spared, though other things worse has been aplenty. Here we are just in a sort of a breathing spell, and you begin to look all peeked and home from work, with maybe losing your place, for employers is hard without any consideration, and food so high and all. I wasn’t born to no ease, nor any chance of looking forward like some women, though doing my duty at all times to the best of my ability. And now you on the verge of a run of the fever, with nobody can say how long in bed, and doctors and medicines and worry. ...”

“I’m not going to be ill, mother,” Ruth said. “Please don’t worry about me.”

“If a mother can’t worry about her own daughter, then I’d like to know what she can do,” said Mrs. Frazer, with the air of one suffering meekly a studied affront.

Ruth turned to Dulac. “Before you go downtown,” she said, “I want to talk to you.”

Dulac had not hoped to escape a reckoning with Ruth, and now he supposed she was demanding it. Well, as well now as later, if the thing had to be. He was a trifle sulky about it; perhaps, now that his blind rage had subsided, not wholly satisfied with himself and his conduct. “All right,” he said, and went silently on with his meal. After a time he pushed back his chair. “I’ve got a meeting downtown,” he said to Ruth, paving the way for a quick escape.

“Maybe what I have to say,” she said, gravely, “will be as important as your meeting,” and she preceded him into the little parlor.

His attitude was defensive; he expected to be called on for explanations, to be required to soothe resentment; his mental condition was more or less that of a schoolboy expecting a ragging.

Ruth did not begin at once, but walked over to the window, and, leaning her elbow against the frame, pressed her forehead against the cool glass. She wanted to clear and make direct and coherent her thoughts. She wanted to express well, leaving no ground for misunderstanding of herself or her motives, what she had to say. Then she turned, and began abruptly; began in a way that left Dulac helplessly surprised, for it was not the attack he expected.

Page 79

“Mr. Foote asked me to marry him, last night,” she said, and stopped. “That is why he took me out to the lake. ... I hadn’t any idea of it before. I didn’t know... He was honest and sincere. At first I was astonished. I tried to stop him. I was going to tell him I loved you and that we were going to be married.” She stopped again, and went on with an effort. “Then something came to me—and it frightened me. All the time he was talking to me I kept on thinking about it... and I didn’t want to think about it because of—you. ... You know I want to do something for the Cause—something big, something great! It’s hard for a woman to do such a thing—but I saw a chance. It was a hard chance, a bitter chance, but it was there. ... I’m not a doll. I think I could be strong. He’s just a boy, and I am strong enough to influence him. ... And I thought how his wife could help. Don’t you see? He will own thousands of laboring men—thousands and thousands. If I married him I could do—what couldn’t I do?—for them. I would make him see through my eyes. I would make him *understand*. My work would be to make him better conditions, to give those thousands of men what they are entitled to, to give them all men like you and like my father have taught me they ought to have. ... I could do it. I know. Think of it—thousands of men, and then—wives and children, made happier, made contented, given their fair share—and by me!... That’s what I thought about—and so—so I didn’t refuse him. I didn’t tell him about you. ... I told him I’d give him my answer—later. ...”

His face had changed from sullenness to relief, from relief to astonishment, then to black anger.

“Your answer,” he said, passionately. “What answer could you give but one? You’re mine. You’ve promised me. That’s the answer you’ll give him. ... You *thought*. I know what you thought. You thought about his money—about his millions. You thought what his wife would have, how she would live. You thought about luxuries, about automobiles, about jewels. ... Laboring men!... Hell! He showed you the kingdoms of the earth—and you wanted them. He offered to buy you—and you looked at the price and it was enough to tempt you. ... You’ll give him no answer. I’ll give it to him, and it’ll be the same kind of answer I gave him last night. ... But this time he won’t get up so quick. This time...”

“Stop!... That’s not true. You know it’s not true. ... I’ve promised to marry you—and I’ve loved you. Yes, I’ve loved you. ... I’m glad of that. It makes the sacrifice real. It makes all the more I have to give. ... Father gave his life. You’re giving your life and your strength and your abilities. ... I want to give, too, and so I’m glad, glad that I love you-and that I can give that. ... If I didn’t love you, if I did care for Mr. Foote, it would be different. I would be afraid I was marrying him because of what he is and what he has. ... But

Page 80

I am giving up more than he can ever return to me with all his money. ... Money can't buy love. It can't give back to me that happiness I would have known with you, working for you, suffering with you, helping you. It's my chance. ... You must see. You must believe the truth. I couldn't bear it if you didn't—if you didn't see that I am throwing away my happiness and giving myself—just for the Cause. That I am giving all of myself—not to a quick, merciful death. That wouldn't be hard. ... But to years of misery, to a lifetime of suffering. Knowing I love you, I will have to go to him, and be his wife, and pretend—pretend—day after day, year after year, that I love him. ... I'll have to deceive him. I'll have to hold his love and make it stronger, and I'll—I'll come to loathe him. Does that sound easy? Could money buy that? Look into your heart and see. ..."

He strode to her, and his hands fell heavily on her shoulders, his black, blazing eyes burned into hers.

"You love me—you haven't lied to me?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"I love you."

"Then, by God! you're mine, and I'll have you. He sha'n't buy you away if I have to kill him. You're mine, do you hear?—*Mine*!"

"Who do you belong to?" she asked. "If I demanded that you give up your work, abandon the Cause, would you do it for me?"

"No."

"You belong to the Cause—not to me. ... I belong to the Cause, too. ... Body and soul I belong to it. What am I to you but a girl, an incident? Your duty lies toward all those men. Your work is to help them. ... Then you should give me willingly; if I hesitate you should try to force me to do this thing-for it will help. What other thing could do what it will do? Think! *Think*!... *Think*!"

"You're mine. ... He has everything else. His kind take everything else from us. Now they want our wives. They sha'n't have them. ... He sha'n't have them. ... He sha'n't have you."

"It is for me to say," she replied, gently. "I'm so sorry—so sorry— if it hurts you. I'm sorry any part of the suffering and sorrow must fall on you. If I could only bear it alone! If I can help, it's my right to help, and to give. ... Don't make it harder. Oh, don't make it harder!"

He flung her from him roughly. “You’re like all of them. ... Wealth dazzles you. You fear poverty. ... Softness, luxuries—you all—you women—are willing to sell your souls for them.”

“Did my mother sell her soul for luxuries? If she did, where are they? Did your mother sell her soul for them? ... Have the wives of all the men who have worked and suffered and been trampled on for the Cause sold their souls?... You’re bitter. I—I am sorry—so sorry. If you care for me as I do for you—I—I know how bitterly hard it will be—to—give me up-to see me his wife. ...”

“I’ll never see that. You can throw me over, but you’ll never marry him.”

Page 81

“You’re big—you’re big enough to see this as I see it, and big enough to let me do it. ... You will be when—the surprise and the first hurt of it have gone. It’s asking just one more thing of you— when you’ve willingly given so much. ... But it’s I who do the harder giving. In a few months, in a year, you will have forgotten me. ... I can never forget you. Every day and every hour I’ll be reminded of you. I’ll be thinking of you. ... When I greet *him* it will be *you* I’m greeting. ... When I am pretending to—to care for him, it will be *you* I am loving. The thought of that, and the knowledge of what I am doing for those poor men—will be all the happiness I shall have... will give me courage to live on and to *go* on. ... You believe me, don’t you, dear? You must, you must believe me!”

He approached her again. “Look at me!... Look at me,” he demanded, and she gave her eyes to his. They were pure eyes, the eyes of an enthusiast, the eyes of a martyr. He could not misread them, even in his passion he could not doubt them. ... The elevation of her soul shone through them. Constancy, steadfastness, courage, determination, sureness, and loftiness of purpose were written there. ... He turned away, his head sinking upon his breast, and when he spoke the passion, the rancor, the bitterness, were gone from his voice. It was lower, quivering, almost gentle.

“You sha’n’t. ... It isn’t necessary. It isn’t required of you.”

“If it is possible, then it is required of me,” she said.

“No. ... No. ...” He sank into a chair and covered his face, and she could hear the hissing of his breath as he fought for self-control.

“If it were you,” she said. “If you could bring about the things I can—the good for so many—would you hesitate? Is there anything you wouldn’t do to give *them* what I can give?... You know there’s not. You know you could withhold no sacrifice. ... Then don’t make this one harder for me. Don’t stand in my way.”

“I *hate* him,” Dulac said, in a tense whisper. “If you—married him and I should meet him—I couldn’t keep my hands off him. ... The thought of *you*—of *him*—I’d *kill* him. ...”

“You wouldn’t,” she said. “You’d think of *me*—and you’d remember that I love you—and that I have given you up—and all the rest, so I could be his wife—and rule him. ... And you wouldn’t make it all futile by killing him. ... Then I’d be helpless. I’ve got to have him to—to do the rest.”

She went to him, and stroked his black, waving hair—so gently.

“Go now, my dear,” she said. “You’ve got to rise to this with me. You’ve got to sustain me. ... Go now. ... My mind is made up. I see my way. ...” Her voice trembled pitifully. “Oh, I see my way—and it is hard, *hard*. ...”

“No,” he cried, struggling to his feet.

“Yes,” she said, softly. “Good-by. ... This is our good-by. I—oh, my dear, don’t forget—-never forget—Oh, go, *go*!”

Page 82

In that moment it seemed to her that her heart was bursting for him, that she loved him to the very roots of her soul. She was sure at last, very sure. She was certain she was not blinded by glamour, not fascinated by the man and his part in the world. ... If there had been, in a secret recess of her heart, a shadow of uncertainty, it was gone in this moment.

“Good-by,” she said.

He arose and walked toward the door. He did not look at her. His hand was on the knob, and the door was opening, yet he did not turn or look. ... “Good-by. ... Good-by,” she sobbed—and he was *gone*...

She was alone, and through all the rest of her years she must be alone. She had mounted the altar, a sacrifice, a willing sacrifice, but never till this minute had she experienced the full horror and bitterness and woe that were required of her. ... She was *alone*.

The world has seen many minor passions in the Garden. It sees and passes on, embodying none of them in deathless epic as His passion was embodied. ... Men and women have cried out to listening Heaven that the cup might pass from their lips, and it has not been permitted to pass, as His was not permitted to pass. In the souls of men and of women is something of the divine, something high and marvelous—a gift from Heaven to hold the human race above the mire which threatens to engulf it. ... Every day it asserts itself somewhere; in sacrifice, in devotion, in simple courage, in lofty renunciation. It is common; wonderfully, beautifully common... yet there are men who do not see it, or, seeing, do not comprehend, and so despair of humanity. ... Ruth, crouching on the floor of her little parlor, might have numbered countless brothers and sisters, had she known. ... She was uplifting man, not because of the thing she might accomplish, but because she was willing to seek its accomplishment. ...

Her eyes were dry. She could not weep. She could only crouch there and peer into the blackness of the gulf that lay at her feet. ... Then the doorbell rang, and she started. Eyes wide with tragedy, she looked toward the door, for she knew that there stood Bonbright Foote, come for his answer. ...

CHAPTER XVI

Bonbright had disobeyed the physician’s orders to stay in bed all day, but when he arose he discovered that there are times when even a restless and impatient young man is more comfortable with his head on a pillow. So until evening he occupied a lounge with what patience he could muster. So it was that Rangar had no news of him during the day and was unable to relieve his father’s increasing anxiety. Mr. Foote was

not anxious now, but frightened; frightened as any potentate might be who perceived that the succession was threatened, that extinction impended over his line.

Page 83

Bonbright scarcely tasted the food that was brought him on a tray at six o'clock. He was afire with eagerness, for the hour was almost there when he could go to Ruth for her answer. He arose, somewhat dizzily, and demanded his hat, which was given him with protests. It was still too early to make his call, but he could not stay away from the neighborhood, so he took a taxicab to Ruth's corner, and there alighted. For half an hour he paced slowly up and down, eying the house, picturing in his mind Ruth in the act of accepting him or Ruth in the act of refusing him. One moment hope flashed high; the next it was quenched by doubt. ... He saw Dulac leave the house; waited another half hour, and then rang the doorbell.

Mrs. Frazer opened the door.

"Evening, Mr. Foote," she said, without enthusiasm, for she had not approved of this young man's calls upon her daughter.

"Miss Frazer is expecting me," he said, diffidently, for he was sensitive to her antagonism.

"In the parlor," said she, "and no help with the dishes, which is to be expected at her age, with first one young man and then another, which, if she gets any pleasure out of it, I'm not one to deny her, though not consulted. If I was starting over again I'd wish it was a son to be traipsing after some other woman's daughter and not a daughter to have other women's sons traipsing after. ... That door, Mr. Foote. Go right in."

Bonbright entered apprehensively, as one might enter a court room where a jury was about to rise and declare its verdict of guilty or not guilty. He closed the door after him mechanically.

"Ruth..." he said.

Her face, marked with tears, not untouched by suffering, startled him. "Are you—ill?" he said.

"Just—just tired" she said.

"Shall I go?... Shall I come again to-morrow?"

"No." She was aware of his concern, of the self-effacing thoughtfulness of his offer. He was a good boy, decent and kind. He deserved better than he was getting. ... She bit her lips and vowed that, giving no love, she would make him happy. She must make him happy.

"You know why I've come, Ruth," he said. "It has seemed a long time to wait—since last night. You know why I've come?"

“Yes.”

“You have—thought about me?”

“Yes.”

He stepped forward eagerly. “You look so unhappy, so tired. It hasn’t been worrying you like this? I couldn’t bear to think it had. ... I— I don’t want you ever worried or tired, but always—glad. ... I’ve been walking up and down outside for an hour. Couldn’t stay away. ... Ruth, you haven’t been out of my mind since last night—since yesterday morning. I’ve had time to think about you. ... I’m beginning to realize how much you mean to me. I’ll never realize it fully—but it will come to me more every day, and every day I shall love you more than I did the day before—if your answer can be yes. ...” He turned away his head and said, “I’m afraid to ask. ...”

Page 84

“I will marry you,” she said, in a dead voice. She felt cold, numb. Her body seemed without sensation, but her mind was sharply clear. She wanted to scream, but she held herself.

His face showed glad, relieved surprise. The shine of his eyes accused her. ... She was making capital of his love—for a great and worthy purpose—but none the less making capital of it. She was sorry for him, bitterly sorry for herself. He came forward eagerly, with arms outstretched to receive her, but she could not endure that—now. She could not endure his touch, his caress.

“Not now. ... Not yet,” she said, holding up her hand as though to ward him off. “You mustn’t.”

His face fell and he stopped short. He was hurt—surprised. He did not understand, did not know what to make of her attitude.

“Wait,” she said, pitifully. “Oh, be patient with me. ... I will marry you. I will be a good—a faithful wife to you. ... But you must be patient with me. Let me have time. ... Last night—and all to-day-have been—hard. ... I’m not myself. Can’t you see?...”

“Don’t you love me?” he asked.

“I—I’ve said I would marry you,” she replied. Then she could restrain herself no longer. “But let it be soon—soon,” she cried, and throwing herself on the sofa she burst into tears.

Bonbright did not know what to do. He had never seen a woman cry so before. ... Did girls always act this way when they became engaged? Was it the usual thing, or was something wrong with Ruth? He stood by, dumbly waiting, unhappy when he knew he should be happy; troubled when he knew there should be no cloud in his sky; vaguely apprehensive when he knew he should be looking into the future with eyes confident of finding only happiness there.

He wanted to pick her up and comfort her in his arms. He could do it, he could hold her close and safe, for she was so small. But he dared not touch her. She had forbidden it; her manner had forbidden it more forcefully than her words. He came closer, and his hand hovered over her hair, her hair that he would have loved to press with his lips-he, he did not dare.

“Ruth,” he said. ... “Ruth!”

Suddenly she sat up and faced him; forced herself to speak; compelled herself to rise to this thing that she had done and must see through.

“I’m—ashamed,” she said, irrepressible sobs interrupting her. “It’s silly, isn’t it—but—but it’s hard to *know*. It’s for so long—so *long*!”

“Yes,” he said, “that’s the best part of it. ... I shall have you always.”

Page 85

Always. He should have her always! It was no sentence for a month or a year, but for life. She was tying herself to this boy until death should free her. ... She looked at him, and thanked God that he was as he was, young, decent, clean, capable of loving her and cherishing her. ... For her sake she was glad it was he, but his very attributes accused her. She was accepting these beautiful gifts and was giving in return spurious wares. For love she would give pretense of love. ... Yet if he had been other than he was, if he had been old, seeking her youth as some men might seek it, steeped in experience to satiety as some rich man might have been, she knew she could not have gone through with it. To such a man she could not have given herself—even for the Cause. ... Bonbright made his own duping a possibility.

“I—I sha’n’t act this way again,” she said, trying to smile. “You needn’t be afraid. ... It’s just nerves.”

“Poor kid!” he said, softly, but even yet he dared not touch her.

“You want me? You’re very, very sure you want me? How do you know? I may not be what you think I am. Maybe I’m different. Are you sure, Bonbright?”

“It’s the only thing in the world I am sure of,” he said.

“And you’ll be good to me?... You’ll be patient with me, and gentle? Oh, I needn’t ask. I know you will. I know you’re good. ...”

“I love you,” was his reply, and she deemed it a sufficient answer.

“Then,” she said, “let’s not wait. There’s no need to wait, is there?
Can’t it be right away?”

His face grew radiant. “You mean it, Ruth?”

“Yes,” she said.

“A month?”

“Sooner.”

“A week?”

“Sooner. ... Sooner.”

“To-morrow? You couldn’t?... You don’t mean—*to-morrow*?”

She nodded, for she was unable to speak

“Sweetheart,” he cried, and again held out his arms.

She shook her head and drew back. “It’s been so—so quick,” she said. “And to-morrow comes so soon. ... Not till then. I’ll be your wife then—your *wife*.”

“To-morrow morning? I will come to-morrow morning? Can it be then?”

“Yes.”

“I—I will see to everything. We’ll be married, and then we will go away—somewhere. Where would you like to go, Ruth?”

“Anywhere. ... I don’t care. Anywhere.”

“It ’ll be my secret,” he said, in his young blindness. “We’ll start out—and you won’t know where we’re going. I sha’n’t tell you. I’ll pick out the best place in the world, if I can find it, and you won’t know where we’re going till we get there. ... Won’t that be bully?... I hate to go now, dear, but you’re all out of sorts—and I’ll have a heap of things to do—to get ready. So will you.” He stopped and looked at her pleadingly, but she could not give him what his eyes asked; she could not give him her lips to-night. ... He waited a moment, then, very gently, he took her hand and touched it with his lips.

Page 86

“I’m patient,” he said, softly. “You see how patient I am. ... I can wait... when waiting will bring me so much. ... At twelve o’clock? That’s the swell hour,” he laughed. “Shall I drag along a bishop or will an ordinary minister do?”

She tried to smile in response.

“Good night, dear,” he said, and raised her hand again to his lips.

“Good night.”

“Is that all?”

“All.”

“No—trimmings? You might say good night to the groceryman that way.”

“Good night-dear,” she said, obediently.

“It’s true. I’m not dreaming it. Noon *to-morrow*?”

“Noon to-morrow,” she repeated.

He walked to the door, stopped, turned, hesitated as if to come back. Then he smiled at her boyishly, happily, wagged his head gayly, as though admonishing himself to be about his business and to stop philandering, and went out. ... He did not see her drag herself to the sofa wearily; he did not see her sink upon it and bury her face again in the cushions; he did not hear the sobs that wrenched and shook her. ... He would then have understood that this was not the usual way for a girl to enter her engagement. He would have understood that something was wrong, very wrong.

After waiting a long time for her daughter to come out, Mrs. Frazer opened the door determinedly and went in. Ruth sat up and, wiping her eyes on a tear-soggy handkerchief, said:

“I’m going to marry Bonbright Foote to-morrow noon mother.”

Mrs. Frazer sat down very suddenly in a chair which was fortunately at hand, and stared at her daughter.

“Of all things...” she said, weakly.

Bonbright was on the way to make a similar announcement to his parents. It was a task he did not approach with pleasure; indeed, he did not look forward with pleasure to any sort of meeting with his father. In his heart he had declared his independence. He had broken away from Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, had clambered out of the family

groove—had determined to be himself and to maintain his individuality at any cost. ... Ruth would make it easier for him. To marry Ruth was the first great step toward independence and the throwing off of the yoke of the Foote tradition.

As he walked home he planned out what he would say and what he would do with respect to his position in the family. He could not break away from the thing wholly. He could not step out of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, as one steps out of an old coat, and think no more of it. No. ... But he would demand concessions. He would insist upon being something in the business, something real. He would no longer be an office boy, a rubber stamp, an automaton, to do thus and to do so when his father pressed the requisite buttons. ... Oh, he would go back to the office, but it would be to a very different office and to function in a very different manner.

Page 87

The family ghosts had been dissatisfied with him. Well, they could go hang. Using his father as the working tool, they had sought to remake him according to their pattern. He would show them. There would be a row, but he was buoyed up for whatever might happen by what had just happened. ... The girl he loved had promised to marry him—-and to-morrow. With a consciousness of that he was ready for anything.

He did not realize how strongly he was gripped by the teaching that had been his from his cradle; he did not realize how the Foote tradition was an integral part of him, as his arm or his skin. It would not be so easy to escape. Nor, perhaps, would his father be so ready to make concessions. He thought of that. But he banished it from his mind. When his father saw how determined he was the concessions would follow. They would have to follow. He did not ask himself what would happen if they did not follow.

Of course his father and mother would resent Ruth. Because Bonbright loved her so truly he was unable to see how anybody could resent her very much. He was blinded by young happiness. Optimism had been born in him in a twinkling, and set aside a knowledge of his parents and their habits of thought and life that should have warned him. He might have known that his father could have overlooked anything but this—the debasing of the Foote blood by mingling with it a plebeian, boarding-house strain; he might have comprehended that his mother, Mrs. Bonbright Foote VI, no less, could have excused crime, could have winked at depravity, but could never tolerate a daughter-in-law of such origin; would never acknowledge or receive her.

As a last resort, to save Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, his father might even submit to Bonbright's wife; his mother did not bow so low before that god; her particular deity was a social deity. If Bonbright's argosy did not wreck against the reef of his father, it never could weather the hidden rock of his mother's class consciousness.

Bonbright went along, whistling boyishly. He was worried, but not so worried but that he could find room also to be very happy. Everything would come out all right. ... Young folks are prone to trust implicitly to the goodness of the future. The future will take care of troubles, will solve difficulties, will always bring around a happy ending. He was not old enough or experienced enough to know that the future bothers with nobody's desires, but goes on turning out each day's work with calm detachment, continues to move its endless film of tomorrow's events to the edge of its kingdom and to give them life on the screen of to-day. It does not change or retouch the film, but gives it to to-day as it is, relentlessly, without pity and without satisfaction.

Bonbright saw the future as a benignant soul; he did not realize it is a nonsentient machine.

CHAPTER XVII

Page 88

Bonbright stopped in the library door, for he saw there not only his father, whom he had expected to see, but his mother also. He had not foreseen this. It made the thing harder to tell, for he realized in an instant how his mother would receive the news. He wished he had been less abrupt, but here he was and there could be no drawing back now. His mother was first to see him.

“Bonbright...” she said, rising.

He walked to her and kissed her, not speaking.

“Where have you been? Your father and I have been terribly worried. Why did you stay away like this, without giving us any word?”

“I’m sorry if I’ve worried you, mother,” he said, but found himself dumb when he tried to offer an explanation of his absence.

“You have worried us,” said his father, sharply. “You had no business to do such a thing. How were we to know something hadn’t happened to you—with the strike going on?”

“It was very inconsiderate,” said his mother.

There fell a silence awkward for Bonbright. His parents were expecting some explanation. He had come to give that explanation, but his mother’s presence complicated the situation, made it more difficult. There had never been that close confidence between Mrs. Foote and Bonbright which should exist between mother and son. He had never before given much thought to his relations with her; had taken them as a matter of course. He had not given to her that love which he had seen manifested by other boys for their mothers, and which puzzled him. She had never seemed to expect it of him. He had been accustomed to treat her with grave respect and deference, for she was the sort of person who seems to require and to be able to exact deference. She was a very busy woman, busy with extra-family concerns. Servants had carried on the affairs of the household. Nurses, governesses, and such kittle-cattle had given to Bonbright their sort of substitute for mother care. Not that Mrs. Foote had neglected her son—as neglect is understood by many women of her class. She had seen to it rigidly that his nurses and tutors were efficient. She had seen to it that he was instructed as she desired, and his father desired, him to be instructed. She had not neglected him in a material sense, but on that highest and sweetest sense of pouring out her affection on him in childhood, of giving him her companionship, of making her love compel his love—there she had been neglectful. ... But she was not a demonstrative woman. Even when he was a baby she could not cuddle him and wonder at him and regard him as the most wonderful thing in creation. ... She had never held him to her breast as God and nature meant mothers to hold their babies. A mercenary breast had nourished him.

Page 89

So he grew up to admire her, perhaps; surely to stand in some awe of her. She was his mother, and he felt vaguely that the relationship demanded some affection from him. He had fancied that he was giving her affection, but he was doing nothing of the sort. ... His childish troubles had been confided to servants. His babyish woes had been comforted by servants. What genuine love he had been able to give had been given to servants. She had not been the companion of his babyhood as his father had failed to be the companion of his youth. ... So far as the finer, the sweeter affairs of parenthood went, Bonbright had been, and was, an orphan. ...

"Have you nothing to say?" his father demanded, and, when Bonbright made no reply, continued: "Your mother and I have been unable to understand your conduct. Even in our alarm we have been discussing your action and your attitude. It is not one we expected from a son of ours. ... You have not filled our hopes and expectations. I, especially, have been dissatisfied with you ever since you left college. You have not behaved like a Foote. ... You have made more trouble for me in these few months than I made for my father in my life. ... And yesterday—I would be justified in taking extreme measures with you. Such an outburst! You were disrespectful and impertinent. You were positively *rebellious*. If I had not more important things to consider than, my own feelings you should have felt, more vigorously than you shall, my displeasure. You dared to speak to me yesterday in a manner that would warrant me in setting you wholly adrift until you came to your senses. ... But I shall not do that. Family considerations demand your presence in our offices. You are to take my place and to carry on our line. ... This hasn't seemed to impress you. You have been childishly selfish. You have thought only of yourself—of that thing you fancy is your individuality. Rubbish! You're a Foote—and a Foote owes a duty to himself and his family that should outweigh any personal desires. ... I don't understand you, my son. What more can you want than you have and will have? Wealth, position, family? Yet for months you have been sullen and restless-and then openly rebellious. ... And worse, you have been compromising yourself with a girl not of your class. ..."

"I could not believe my ears," said Mrs. Foote, coldly.

"However," said his father, "I shall overlook what has passed." Now came the sop he had planned to throw to Bonbright.

"You have been in the office long enough to learn something of the business, so I shall give you work of greater interest and responsibility. ... You say, ridiculously enough, that you have been a rubber stamp. Common sense should have told you you were competent to carry no great responsibilities at first. ... But you shall take over a part of my burden now. ... However, one thing must come first. Before we go any farther, your mother and I must have your promise that you will discontinue whatever relations you have with this boarding-house keeper's daughter, this companion of anarchists and disturbers."

Page 90

“I have insisted upon *that*,” said Mrs. Foote. “I will not tolerate such an affair.”

“There is no *affair*,” said Bonbright, finding his voice. His young eyes began to glow angrily. “What right have you to suppose such a thing-just because Miss Frazer happens to be a stenographer and because her mother keeps a boarder! Father insulted her yesterday. That caused the trouble. I couldn’t let it pass, even from him. I can’t let it pass from you, mother.”

“Oh, undoubtedly she’s worthy enough,” said Mr. Foote, who had exchanged a glance with his wife during Bonbright’s outburst, as much as to say, “There is a serious danger here.”

“Worthy enough!” said Bonbright, anger now burning with white heat.

“But,” said his father, “worthy or not worthy, we cannot have our son’s name linked in any way with a person of her class. It must stop, and stop at once.”

“That you must understand distinctly,” said Mrs. Foote.

“Stop!” said Bonbright, hoarsely. “It sha’n’t stop, now or ever. That’s what I came home to tell you. ... I’m not a dumb beast, to be driven where you want to drive me. I’m a human being. I have a right to make my own friends and to live my own life. ... I have a right to love where I want to—and to marry the girl I love. ... You tried to pick out a wife for me. ... Well, I’ve picked out my own. Whether you approve or not doesn’t change it. Nobody, nothing can change it. ... I love Ruth Frazer and I’m going to marry her. That’s what I came home to tell you.”

“What?” said his father, in a tone of one who listens to blasphemy.

Bonbright did not waver. He was strong enough now, strong in his anger and in his love. “I am going to marry Ruth Frazer,” he repeated.

“Nonsense!” said his mother.

“It is not nonsense, mother. I am a man. I have found the girl I love and will always love. I intend to marry her. Where is there nonsense in that?”

“Do you fancy I shall permit such a thing? Do you imagine for an instant that I shall permit you to give me a daughter-in-law out of a cheap boarding house? Do you think I shall submit to an affront like that? ... Why, I should be the laughingstock of the city.”

“The city finds queer things to laugh at,” said Bonbright.

“My son—” began Mr. Foote; but his wife silenced him. She had taken command of the family ship. From this moment in this matter Bonbright Foote VI did not figure. This

was her affair. It touched her in a vital spot. It threatened her with ridicule; it threatened to affect that most precious of her possessions—the deference of the social world. She knew how to protect herself, and would attend to the matter without assistance.

“You will never see that girl again,” she said, as though the saying of it concluded the episode.

Bonbright was silent.

“You will promise me *now* that this disgraceful business is ended. *Now*. ... I am waiting.”

Page 91

“Mother,” said Bonbright, “you have no right to ask such a thing. Even if I didn’t love Ruth, I have pledged my word to her...”

Mrs. Foote uttered an exclamation indicative of her disgust.

“Pledged your word!... You’re a silly boy, and this girl has schemed to catch you and has caught you. ... You don’t flatter yourself that she cares for you beyond your money and your position. ... Those are the things she had her eye on. Those are what she is trading herself for. ... It’s scandalous. What does your pledged word count for in a case like this?... Your pledged word to a scheming, plotting, mercenary little wretch!”

“Mother,” said Bonbright, in a strained, tense voice, “I don’t want to speak to you harshly. I don’t want to say anything sharp or unkind to you—but you mustn’t repeat that. ... You mustn’t speak like that about Ruth.”

“I shall speak about her as I choose...”

“Georgia!...” said Mr. Foote, warningly.

“If you please, Bonbright.” She put him back in his place. “*I* will settle this matter with our son—*now*.”

“It is settled, mother,” said Bonbright.

“Suppose you should be insane enough to marry her,” said Mrs. Foote. “Do you suppose I should tolerate her? Do you suppose I should admit her to this house? Do you suppose your friends—people of your own class—would receive her—or you?”

“Do you mean, mother,” said Bonbright, his voice curiously quiet and calm, “that you would not receive my wife here?”

“Exactly that. And I should make it my business to see that she was received nowhere else. ... And what would become of you? Everyone would drop you. Your wife could never take your position, so you would have to descend to her level. Society would have none of you.”

“I fancy,” said Bonbright, “that we could face even that—and live.”

“More than that. I know I am speaking for your father when I say it. If you persist in this we shall wash our hands of you utterly. You shall be as if you were dead. ... Think a moment what that means. You will not have a penny. We shall not give you one penny. You have never worked. And you would find yourself out in the world with a wife to support and no means of supporting her. How long do you suppose she would stay with you?... The moment she found she couldn’t get what she had schemed for, you would see the last of her. ... Think of all that.”

“I’ve thought of all that—except that Ruth would care for my money. ... Yesterday I left the office determined never to go into it again. I made up my mind to look for a job—-any job—that would give me a living—and freedom from what Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, means to me. I was ready to do that without Ruth. ... But the family has some claims to me. I could see that. So I came back. I was going to tell father I would go ahead and do my best. ... But not because I wanted to, nor because I was afraid.”

Page 92

“You see,” his mother said, bitingly, “it lasted a whole day with you.”

“Mother!”

Bonbright turned to his father. “I am going to marry Ruth. That cannot be changed. Nothing can alter it. ... I am ready to come back to the office—and be Bonbright Foote VII... and you can’t guess what that means. But I’ll do it—because it seems to be the thing I ought to do. ... I’ll come back if—and only if—you and mother change your minds about Ruth. ... She will be my wife as much as mother is your wife, and you must treat her so. She must have your respect. You must receive her as you would receive me... as you would have been glad to receive Hilda Lightener. If you refuse—I’m through with you. I mean it. ... You have demanded a promise of me. Now you must give me your promise—to act to Ruth as you should act toward my wife. ... Unless you do the office and the family have seen the last of me.” He did not speak with heat or in excitement, but very gravely, very determinedly. His father saw the determination, and wavered.

“Georgia,” he said, again.

“No,” said Mrs. Foote.

“The Family—the business.” said Mr. Foote, uncertainly.

“I’d see the business ended and the Family extinct before I would tolerate that girl. ... If Bonbright marries her he does it knowing how I feel and how I shall act. She shall never step a foot in this house while I live—nor afterward, if I can prevent it. Nor shall Bonbright.”

“Is that final, mother?... Are you sure it is your final decision?”

“Absolutely,” she said, her voice cold as steel.

“Very well,” said Bonbright, and, turning, he walked steadily toward the door.

“Where are you going?” his father said, taking an anxious step after his son.

“I don’t know,” said Bonbright. “But I’m not coming back.”

He passed through the door and disappeared, but his mother did not call after him, did not relent and follow her only son to bring him back. Her face was set, her lips a thin, white line.

“Let him go,” she said. “He’ll come back when he’s eaten enough husks.”

“He’s *got* to come back. ... We’ve got to stop this marriage. He’s our only son, Georgia—he’s necessary to the Family. *His* son is necessary.”

“And hers?” she asked, with bitter irony.

“Better hers than none,” said Mr. Foote.

“You would give in. ... Oh, I know you would. You haven’t a thought outside of Family. I wasn’t born in your family, remember. I married into it. I have my own rights in this matter, and, Family or no Family, Bonbright, that girl shall never be received where I am received. ... *Never*.”

Mr. Foote walked to the window and looked out. He saw his son’s tall form pass down the walk and out into the street—going he did not know where; to return he did not know when. He felt an ache in his heart such as he had never felt before. He felt a yearning after his son such as he had never known. In that moment of loss he perceived that Bonbright was something more to him than Bonbright Foote VII—he was flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood. The stifled, cramped, almost eliminated human father that remained in him cried out after his son. ...

Page 93

CHAPTER XVIII

As Bonbright walked away from his father's house he came into possession for the first time of the word *responsibility*. It was defined for him as no dictionary could define it. Every young man meets a day when responsibility becomes to him something more than a combination of letters, and when it comes he can never be the same again. It marks definitely the arrival of manhood, the dropping behind of youth. He can never look upon life through the same eyes. Forever, now, he must peer round and beyond each pleasure to see what burden it entails and conceals. He must weigh each act with reference to the *responsibility* that rests upon him. Hitherto he had been swimming in life's pleasant, safe, shaded pools; now he finds himself struggling in the great river, tossed by currents, twirled by eddies, and with no bottom upon which to rest his feet. Forever now it will be swim—or sink. ...

To-morrow Bonbright was to undertake the responsibilities of family headship and provider; to-night he had sundered himself from his means of support. He was jobless. He belonged to the unemployed. ... In the office he had heard without concern of this man or that man being discharged. Now he knew how those men felt and what they faced.

Realization of his condition threw him into panic. In his panic he allowed his feet to carry him to the man whose help had come readily and willingly in another moment of need—to Malcolm Lightener.

The hour was still early. Lights shone in the Lightener home and Bonbright approached the door. Mr. Lightener was in and would see him in the office. It was characteristic of Lightener that the room in the house which was peculiarly his own was called by him his office, not his den, not the library. ... There were two interests in Lightener's life—his family and his business, and he stirred them together in a quaintly granite sort of way.

For the second time that evening Bonbright stood hesitating in a doorway.

"Well, young fellow?" said Lightener. Then seeing the boy's hesitation: "Come in. Come in. What's happened *now*?"

"Mr. Lightener," said Bonbright, "I want a job. I've got to have a job."

"Um!... Job! What's the matter with the job you've got?"

"I haven't any job. ... I—I'm through with Bonbright Foote, Incorporated—forever."

"That's a darn long time. Sit down. Waiting for it to pass will be easier that way. ... Now spit it out." He was studying the boy with his bright gray eyes, wondering if this was the row he had been expecting. He more than half hoped, as he would have expressed it,

“that the kid had got his back up.” Bonbright’s face, his bearing, made Lightener believe his back *was* up.

“I’ve got to have a job—”

“You said that once. Why?”

“I’m going to be married to-morrow—”

Page 94

“What?”

“I’m going to be married to-morrow—and I’ve got to support my wife— decently...”

“It’s that little Frazer girl who was crying all over my office to-day,” said Lightener, deducing the main fact with characteristic shrewdness. “And your father wouldn’t have it—and threw you out...or did the thing that stands to him for throwing out?”

“I got out. I had gotten out before. Yesterday morning. ... Somebody told him I’d been going to see Ruth—and he was nasty about it. Called it a liaison. ...I—I *burned up* and left the office. I haven’t been back.”

“That accounts for his calling me up—looking for you. You had him worried.”

“Then I got to thinking,” said Bonbright, ignoring the interruption. “I was going back because it seemed as if I *had* to go back. You understand? As if there was something that compelled me to stick by the Family. ...”

“How long have you been going to marry this girl?”

“She said she would marry me to-night.”

“Engaged to-night—and you’re going to marry to-morrow?”

“Yes. ...And I went home to tell father. Mother was there—”

Lightener sucked in his breath. He could appreciate what Bonbright’s mother’s presence would contribute to the episode.

“—and she was worse than father. She—it was *rotten*, Mr. Lightener— *rotten*. She said she’d never receive Ruth as her daughter, and that she’d see she was never received by anybody else, and she—she *forced* father to back her up. ...There wasn’t anything for me to do but get out. ...I didn’t begin to wonder how I was going to support Ruth till it was all over with.”

“That’s the time folks generally begin to wonder.”

“So I came right here—because you *can* give me a job if you will—and I’ve got to have one to-night. I’ve got to know to-night how I’m going to get food and a place to live for Ruth.”

“Um!...We’ll come to that.” He got up and went to the door. From thence he shouted—-the word is used advisedly—for his wife and daughter. “Mamma. ... Hilda. Come here right off.” He had decided that Bonbright’s affairs stood in need of woman’s counsel.

Mrs. Lightener appeared first. “Why, Bonbright!” she exclaimed.

“Where’s Hilda?” asked Lightener. “Need her, too.”

“She’s coming, dear,” said Mrs. Lightener.

There are people whose mere presence brings relief. Perhaps it is because their sympathy is sure; perhaps it is because their souls were given them, strong and simple, for other souls to lean upon. Mrs. Lightener was one of these. Before she knew why Bonbright was there, before she uttered a word, he felt a sense of deliverance. His necessities seemed less gnawing; there was a slackening of taut nerves. ...

Then Hilda appeared. “Evening, Bonbright,” she said, and gave him her hand.

Page 95

“Let’s get down to business,” Lightener said. “Tell ’em, Bonbright.”

“I’m going to marry Ruth Frazer to-morrow noon,” he said, boldly.

Mrs. Lightener was amazed, then disappointed, for she had come to hope strongly that she would have this boy for a son. She liked him, and trusted in his possibilities. She believed he would be a husband to whom she could give her daughter with an easy heart. ... Hilda felt a momentary shock of surprise, but it passed quickly. Like her father, she was sudden to pounce upon the concealed meaning of patent facts—and she had spent the morning with Ruth. She was first to speak.

“So you’ve decided to throw me over,” she said, with a smile. ... “I don’t blame you, Bonbright. She’s a dear.”

“But who is she?” asked Mrs. Lightener. “I seem to have heard the name, but I don’t remember meeting her.”

“She was my secretary,” said Bonbright. “She’s a stenographer in Mr. Lightener’s office now.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Lightener, and there was dubiety in her voice.

“Exactly,” said Lightener.

“*Mother*!” exclaimed Hilda. “Weren’t you a stenographer in the office where dad worked?”

“It isn’t *that*,” said Mrs. Lightener. “I wasn’t thinking about the girl nor about Bonbright. I was thinking of his mother.”

“That’s why he’s here,” said Lightener. “The Family touched off a mess of fireworks. Mrs. Foote refuses to have anything to do with the girl if Bonbright marries her. Promised to see nobody else did, too. Isn’t that it, Bonbright?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t like to mix in a family row...”

“You’ve *got* to, dad,” said Hilda. “Of course Bonbright couldn’t stand *that*.” They understood her to mean by *that* the Foote family’s position in the matter. “He couldn’t stand it. ... I expect you and mother are disappointed. You wanted me to marry Bonbright, myself...”

“*Hilda*!” Mrs. Lightener’s voice was shocked.

“Oh, Bonbright and I talked it over the night we met. Don’t be a bit alarmed. I’m not being especially forward. ... We’ve got to do something. What does Bon want us to do?”

“He wants me to give him a job.”

She turned to Bonbright. “They turned you out?”

“I turned myself out,” he said.

She nodded understandingly. “You *would*,” she said, approvingly. “What kind of a job can you give him, dad?”

“H’m. *That’s* settled, is it? What do you think, mother?”

“Why, dear, he’s got to support his wife,” said Mrs. Lightener.

Malcolm Lightener permitted the granite of his face to relax in a rueful smile. “I called you folks in to get your advice—not to have you run the whole shebang.”

“We’re going to run it, dad. ...Don’t you like Ruth Frazer?”

“I like her. She seems to be a nice, intelligent girl. ...Cries all over a man’s office. ...”

Page 96

“I like her, too, and so will mother when she meets Ruth. I like her a eap, Bon; she’s a *dear*. Now that the job for you is settled—”

“Eh?” said Lightener.

Hilda smiled at him and amended herself. “Now that a very *good* job for you is settled, I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. First thing, I’m invited to the wedding, and so is mother, and so are some other folks. I’ll see to that. It isn’t going to be any justice-of-the-peace wedding, either. It’s going to be in the church, and there’ll be enough folks there to make it read right in the paper.”

“I’m afraid Ruth wouldn’t care for that,” said Bonbright, dubiously. “I know she wouldn’t.”

“She’s got to start off *right* as your wife, Bon. The start’s everything. You want your friends to know her and receive her, don’t you? Of course you do. I’ll round up the folks and have them there. It will be sort of romantic and interesting, and a bully send off for Ruth if it’s done right. It ’ll make her quite the rage. You’ll see. ...That’s what I’m going to do—in spite of your mother. Your wife will be received and invited every place that *I* am. ...Maybe your mother can run the dowagers, but I’ll bet a penny I can handle the young folks.” In that moment she looked exceedingly like her father.

“*Hilda*!” her mother exclaimed again. “You must consider Mrs. Foote. We don’t want to have any unpleasantness over this. ...”

“We’ve got it already,” said Hilda, “and the only way is to—go the limit.”

Lightener slammed the desk with his fist. “Right!” he said. “If we meddle at all we’ve got to go the whole distance. Either stay out altogether or go in over our heads. ... But how about this girl, Hilda, does she belong?”

“She’s decently educated. She has sweet manners. She’s brighter than two-thirds of us. She’ll fit in all right. Don’t you worry about her.”

“Young man,” growled Lightener, “why couldn’t you have fallen in love with my daughter and saved all this fracas?”

Bonbright was embarrassed, but Hilda came to his rescue. “Because I didn’t want him to,” she said. “You wouldn’t have *made* me marry him, would you?”

“*Probably* not,” said her father, with a rueful grin.

“I’m going to take charge of her,” said Hilda. “We’ll show your mother, Bon.”

“You’re—mighty good,” said Bonbright, chokingly.

“I’m going to see her the first thing in the morning. You see. I’ll fix things with her. When I explain everything to her she’ll do just as I want her to.”

Mrs. Lightener was troubled; tears stood in her eyes. “I’m so sorry, Bonbright. I—I suppose a boy has the right to pick out his own wife, but it’s too bad you couldn’t have pleased your mother. ... Her heart must ache to-night.”

“I’m afraid,” said Bonbright, slowly, “that it doesn’t ache the way you mean, Mrs. Lightener.”

Page 97

“It’s a hard place to put us. We’re meddling. It doesn’t seem the right thing to come between mother and son.”

“You’re not,” said Hilda. “Mrs. Foote’s snobbishness came between them.”

“*Hilda*!”

“That’s just what it is. Ruth is just as nice as she is or anybody else. She ought to be glad she’s getting a daughter like Ruth. You’d be. ...And we can’t sit by and see Bon and his wife *starve*, can we? We can’t fold our hands and let Mrs. Foote make Ruth unhappy. It’s cruel, that’s what it is, and nothing else. When Ruth is Bon’s wife she has the right to be treated as his wife should be. Mrs. Foote has no business trying to humiliate her and Bon—and she sha’n’t.”

“I suppose you’re right, dear. I *know* you’re right. ... But I’m thinking how I’d feel if it were *you*.”

“You’d never feel like Mrs. Foote, mother. If I made up my mind to marry a man out of dad’s office—no matter what his job was, if he was all right himself—you wouldn’t throw me out of the house and set out to make him and me as unhappy as you could. You aren’t a snob.”

“No,” said Mrs. Lightener, “I shouldn’t.”

Malcolm Lightener, interrupted. “Now you’ve both had your say,” he said, “and you seem to have decided the thing between you. I felt kind of that way, myself, but I wanted to know about you folks. What you say *goes*. ...Now clear out; I want to talk business to Bonbright.”

Hilda gave Bonbright her hand again. “I’m glad,” she said, simply. “I know you’ll be very happy.”

“And I’ll do what I can, boy,” said Mrs. Lightener

Bonbright was moved as he had never been moved before by kindliness and womanliness. “Thank you. ... Thank you,” he said, tremulously. “I—you don’t know what this means to me. You’ve—you’ve put a new face on the whole future. ...”

“Clear out,” said Malcolm Lightener.

Hilda made a little grimace at him in token that she flouted his authority, and she and her mother said good night and retired from the room.

“Now,” said Malcolm Lightener.

Bonbright waited.

“I’m going to give you a job, but it won’t be any private-office job. I don’t know what you’re good for. Probably not much. Don’t get it into your head I’m handing a snap to you, because I’m not. If you’re not worth what I pay you you’ll get fired. Understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“If you stick you’ll learn something. Not the kind of rubbish you’ve been sopping up in your own place. I run a business, not a museum of antiquity. You’ll have to work. Think you can?”

“I’ve wanted to. They wouldn’t let me.”

“Um!...You’ll get dirt on your hands. ...Most likely you’ll be running Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, one of these days. This thing won’t last. Your father’ll have to come around. ...I only hope he lets you stay with me long enough to teach you some business sense and something about running a plant. I’ll pay you enough to support you and this girl of yours—but you’ll earn it. When you earn more you’ll get it...Sounds reasonable.”

Page 98

“I—I can’t thank you enough.”

“Report for work day after to-morrow, then. You’re a man out of a job. You can’t afford honeymoons. I’ll let you have the day off to-morrow, but next morning you be in my office when the whistle blows. I always am.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Where are you going to live? Got any money?”

“I don’t know where we shall live. Maybe we’d better find a place to board for a while. I’ve got a hundred dollars or so.”

“Board!...Huh! Nobody’s got any business boarding when they’re married. Wife has too much time on her hands. Nothing to do. Especially at the start of things your wife’ll need to be busy. Keep her from getting notions. ...I’ll bet the percentage of divorces among folks that board is double that it is among folks that keep house. Bound to be. ...You get you a decent flat and furnish it. Right off. After you get married you and your wife pick out the furniture. That’s what I’m giving you the day off to-morrow for. You can furnish a little flat—the kind you can afford, for five hundred dollars. ... You’re not a millionaire now. You’re a young fellow with a fair job and a moderate salary that you’ve got to live on. ...Better let your wife handle it. She’s used to it and you’re not. She’ll make one dollar go as far as you would make ten.”

“Yes, sir.”

Lightener moved awkwardly and showed signs of embarrassment. “And listen here,” he said, gruffly, “a young girl’s a pretty sweet and delicate piece of business. They’re mighty easy to hurt, and the hurt lasts a long time. ...You want to be married a long time, I expect, and you want your wife to—er—love you right on along. Well, be darn careful, young fellow. Start the thing right. More marriages are smashed in the first few days than in the next twenty years. ...You be damn gentle and considerate of that little girl.”

“I—I hope I shall, Mr. Lightener.”

“You’d better be. ...Where you going to-night?”

“To the club. I have some things there. I’ve always kept enough clothes there to get along on.”

“Your club days are over for some time. Married man has no business with a club till he’s forty. ...Evenings, anyhow. Stay at home with your wife. How’d you like to have her running out to some darn thing three or four nights a week?...Go on, now. I’ll tell Hilda where you are. Probably she’ll want to call you up in the morning. ...Good night.”

“Good night...and thank you.”

“Huh!” said Malcolm Lightener, and without paying the slightest bit of attention to whether Bonbright stayed or went away, he took up the papers on his desk and lost himself in the figures that covered them. Bonbright went out quietly, thankfully, his heart glad with its own song. ...The future was settled; safe. He had nothing to fear. And tomorrow he was going to enter into a land of great happiness. He felt he was entering a land of fulfillment. That is the way with the very young. They enter upon marriage feeling it is a sort of haven of perpetual bliss, that it marks the end of unhappiness, of difficulties, of loneliness, of griefs...when, in reality, it is but the beginning of life with all the diverse elements of joy and grief and anxiety and comfort and peace and discord that life is capable of holding. ...

Page 99

CHAPTER XIX

Hilda Lightener had found Ruth strangely quiet, with a manner which was not indifference to her imminent marriage, but which seemed more like numbness.

“You act as if you were going to be hanged instead of married,” Hilda told her, and found no smile answering her own.

Ruth was docile. She offered no objection to any suggestion offered by Hilda, accepted every plan without demurring. Hilda could not understand her, and was troubled. Wholly lacking was the girlish excitement to be expected. “Whatever you want me to do I will do, only get it over with,” seemed to be Ruth’s attitude. She seemed to be holding herself in, communing with herself. A dozen times Hilda had to repeat a question or a statement which Ruth had not heard, though her eyes were on Hilda’s and she seemed to be giving her attention.

She was saying to herself: “I must go through with it. ... I can’t draw back. ... What I am doing is *right—right*.”

She obeyed Hilda, not so much through pliancy as through listlessness, and presently Hilda was going ahead with matters and acting as a sort of specially appointed general manager of the marriage. She directed Ruth what to wear, saw it was put on, almost bundled Ruth and her mother into the carriage, and convoyed them to the church, where Bonbright awaited them. She could not prevent a feeling of exasperation, especially toward Mrs. Frazer, who had moved from chair to chair, uttering words of self-pity, and pronouncing a constant jeremiad. ... Such preliminaries to a wedding she had never expected to witness, and she witnessed them with awakened foreboding.

A dozen or so young folks and Malcolm Lightener and his wife witnessed the brief ceremony. Until Ruth’s appearance there had been the usual chattering and gayety, but even the giddiest of the youngsters was restrained and subdued by her white, tense face, and her big, unseeing eyes.

“I don’t like it,” Lightener whispered to his wife.

“Poor child!... Poor child!” she whispered back, not taking her eyes from Ruth’s face.

After the rector pronounced the final words of the ceremony Ruth stood motionless. Then she turned slowly toward Bonbright, swaying a trifle as if her knees were threatening to fail her, and said in a half whisper, audible to those about: “It’s over?... It’s all over?”

“Yes, dear.”

“It can’t be undone,” she said, not to her husband, but to herself. “We are—married.”

Hilda, fearing some inauspicious act or word, bustled forward her bevy of young folks to offer their babel of congratulations. As she presented them one by one, Ruth mustered a wan smile, let them take her cold, limp hand. But her mind was not on them. All the while she was thinking: “This is my *husband*. ... I belong to this man. ... I am his *wife*.” Once in a while she would glance at Bonbright; he seemed more a stranger to her than he had done the first time her eyes had ever rested on him—a stranger endowed with odious potentialities. ...

Page 100

Mrs. Lightener took Ruth into her arms and whispered, “He’s a dear, good boy. ...” There was comfort in Mrs. Lightener’s arms, but scant comfort in her words, yet they would remain with Ruth and she would find comfort in them later. Now she heard Malcolm Lightener speaking to her husband. “You be good to that little girl, young man,” he said. “Be mighty patient and gentle with her.” She waited for Bonbright’s reply. “I love her,” she heard Bonbright say in a low voice. It was a good answer, a reassuring answer, but it stabbed Ruth with a new pang, for she had traded on that love; she was a cheat. Bonbright was giving her his love in exchange for emptiness. Somehow she could not think of the Cause now, for this was too intimate, too individual, too personal. ...

Presently Bonbright and Ruth were being driven to their hotel. The thought of wedding breakfast or of festivities of any sort had been repugnant to Ruth, and Hilda had not insisted. They were alone. Ruth lay back against the soft upholstery of Malcolm Lightener’s limousine, colorless, eyes closed. Bonbright watched her face hungrily, scrutinizing it for some sign of happiness, for some vestige of feeling that reciprocated his own. He saw nothing but pallor, weariness.

“Dear,” he whispered, and touched her hand almost timorously. Her hand trembled to his touch, and involuntarily she drew away from him. Her eyes opened, and in them his own eager eyes read *fear*. ... He was startled, hurt. Being only a boy, with a boy’s understanding and a boy’s pride, he was piqued, and himself drew back. This was not what he had expected, not what the romances he had read had led him to believe would take place. In stories the bride was timid, yet eager; loving, yielding, happy. She clung to her husband, her heart beating against his heart, whispering her adoration and demanding whispered adoration from him. ... Here all of this was lacking, and something which crouched at the opposite pole of human emotion was present— *fear*.

“You must be patient and gentle with her,” Malcolm Lightener had said with understanding, and Bonbright was wise enough to know that there spoke experience; probably there spoke truth, not romance, as it is set down on the printed page. Even if Ruth’s attitude were unusual, so the circumstances were unusual. It was no ordinary marriage preceded by an ordinary, joyous courtship. In this moment Bonbright took thought, and it was given him to understand that now, as at no other moment in his life with Ruth, was the time to exercise patience and gentleness.

“Ruth,” he said, taking her hand and holding it with both his own, “you mustn’t be afraid of *me*. ... You are afraid. You’re my wife,” he said, boyishly. “It’s my job to make you happy—the most important job I’ve got—and to look after you and to keep away from you everything that might—make you afraid.” He lifted her fingers to his lips; they were cold. “I want to take you in my arms and hold you... but not until you want me to. I can wait. ... I can do *anything* that you want me to do. Both of us have just gone through unpleasant things—and they’ve tired and worried you. ... I wish I might comfort you, dear. ...” His voice was low and yearning.

Page 101

She let her hand remain in his, and with eyes from which the terror was fading she looked into his eyes to find them clear, honest, filled with love and care for her. They were good eyes, such as any bride might rejoice to find looking upon her from her husband's face.

"You're—so good," she whispered. Then: "I'm tired, Bonbright, so tired—and—Oh, you don't understand, you *can't* understand. ... I'll be different presently—I know I shall. Don't be angry..."

"Angry!"

"I'll be a good wife to you, Bonbright," she said, tremulously, a bit wildly. "I—You sha'n't be disappointed in me. ... I'll not cheat. ... But wait—*wait*. Let me rest and think. It's all been so quick."

"You asked that," he said, hurt and puzzled.

"Yes. ... It had to be—and now I'm your wife... and I feel as if I didn't know you—as if you were a stranger. Don't you understand?... It's because I'm so helpless now—just as if you owned me and could do what you wanted to with me... and it makes me afraid. ..."

"I—I don't understand very well," he said, slowly. "Maybe it's because I'm a man—but it doesn't seem as if it ought to be that way." He stopped and regarded her a moment, then he said, "Ruth, you've never told me you loved me."

She sensed the sudden fear in his voice and saw the question that had to be answered, but she could not answer it. To-day she could not bring herself to the lie—neither to the spoken lie nor the more difficult lying action. "Not now," she said, hysterically. "Not to-day. ... Wait. ... I've married you. I've given myself to you. ... Isn't that enough for now?... Give me time."

It was not resentment he felt, not doubt of her. Her pitiful face, her cold little hands, the fear that lurked in her eyes, demanded his sympathy and forbearance, and, boy though he was, with all a boy's inexperience, he was man enough to give them, intuitive enough to understand something of the part he must play until she could adjust herself to her new condition.

He pressed her hand—and released it. "I sha'n't bother you," he said, "until you want me. ... But it isn't because I don't want you— don't want to hold you—to *love* you... and to have you love me. ... It will be all right, dear. You needn't be afraid of me. ..."

The car was stopping before the hotel. Now the doorman opened the door and Bonbright helped his bride to alight. She tottered as her feet touched the sidewalk, and he took her arm to support her as he might have helped an invalid. The elevator carried

them up to the floor on which were the rooms that had been prepared for them, and they stopped before the door while he inserted the key and turned the lock for their admission. On the threshold she halted, swept by a wave of terror, but, clenching her hands and pressing shut her eyes, she stepped within. The door closed behind them—-closed out her girlhood, closed out her independence, shut away from her forever that ownership of herself which had been so precious, yet so unrecognized and unconsidered. It seemed to her that the closing of that door—even more than the ceremony of marriage—was symbolical of turning over to this young man the title deeds of her soul and body. ...

Page 102

Bonbright was helping her to rid herself of her wraps, leading her to a sofa.

“Lie down,” he said, gently. “You’re tired and bothered. Just lie down and rest.”

“Are we going away?” she asked, presently. “Have I got to get ready?”

He had promised her they would go away—and had not seen her since that moment to tell her what had happened. Hilda would not let him go to her that morning, so she was in ignorance of the change in his condition, of his break with his family, and of the fact that he was nothing but a boy with a job, dependent upon his wages. Until this moment he had not thought how it might affect her; of her disappointment, of the fact that she might have expected and looked forward to the position he could give her as the wife of the heir apparent to the Foote dynasty. ... It embarrassed him, shamed him as a boy might be shamed who was unable to buy for his girl a trinket she coveted at some country fair. Now she must be told, and she was in no condition to bear disappointments.

“I promised you we should go away,” he said, haltingly, “but—but I can’t manage it. Things have happened. ...I’ve got to be at work in the morning. Maybe I should have told you. Maybe I should have come last night after it happened—”

She opened her eyes, and at the expression of his face she sat up, alarmed. It told her that no ordinary, small, casual mishap had befallen, but something vital, something which might affect him—and her tremendously.

“What is it?” she asked. “What has happened?”

“I went home last night,” he said, slowly. “After—you promised to marry me—I went home to tell father. ...Mother was there. There was a row—but mother was worse than father. She was—rather bad.”

“Rather bad—how, Bonbright?”

“She—didn’t like my marrying you. Of course we knew neither of them would like it, but I didn’t think anything like this would happen. ...You know father and I had a fuss the other day, and I left the office. I had thought things over, and was going back. It seemed as if I ought to go back—as if that was the thing to do. ... Well, mother said things that made it impossible. I’m through with them for good. The Family and the Ancestors can go hang.” His voice grew angry as recollection of that scene presented itself. “Mother said I shouldn’t marry you...”

“You—you don’t mean you’re not going to—to have anything to do with Bonbright Foote, Incorporated—and all those thousands of men?”

“That’s it. ...I couldn’t do anything else. I had to break with them. Father was bad, but it was mother. ...She said she would never receive you or recognize you as my wife—and that sort of thing—and I left. I’m never going back. ... On your account I’m sorry. I can’t give you so much, and I can’t do the things for you that I could. ... We’ll be quite poor, but I’ve got a job. Mr. Lightener gave me a job, and I’ve got to go to work in the morning. That’s why we can’t go away. ...”

Page 103

“You mean,” she said, dully, trying to sense this calamity, “that you will never go back? Never own—that—business?”

“It was a choice of giving you up or that. Mother made that clear. If I married you I should never have anything from them. ...”

She did not see the happiness that might lie for her in the possession of a husband whose love was so great that he could give up the kingdoms of the earth for her. She could not see the strength of the boy, his loyalty, his honor. All she saw was the crushing of her plan before it began to germinate. ... She had given herself for the Cause. She was here, this young man’s wife, alone in these rooms with him, because she loved the Cause and had martyred herself for it. ... Her influence was to ameliorate the conditions of thousands of the Bonbright Foote laborers; she was to usher in a new era for them—and for that she had offered herself up. ... And now, having bound herself forever to this boy that she did not love—loving another man—the possibility of achievement was snatched from her and her immolation made futile. It was as if she plunged into a rapids, offering her life to save a child that struggled there, to find, when she reached the little body, and it was too late to save herself, that it was a wax figure from some shop window. ... But her position was worse than that; what she faced was worse than swift, merciful death. ... It was years of a life of horrid possibilities, tied to a man whose chattel she was. She stood up and clutched his arm.

“You’re joking,” she said, in a tense, metallic voice.

“I’m sorry, dear. It’s very true.”

“Oh!” Her voice was a wail. “It can’t be—it can’t be. I couldn’t bear that—not *that*. ...”

Bonbright seized her by the arms and peered into her face. “Ruth,” he said, “what do you mean? Was *that* why you married me? You’re not like those women I’ve heard about who married—for *money*.”

“No. ...No...” she cried. “Not that—Oh, don’t believe that.”

She spoke the truth, and Bonbright could not doubt it. Truth was in her words, her tone, her face. ...It was a thing she was incapable of, and he knew it. She could not be mean, contemptible. He drew her to him and kissed her, and she did not resent it. A surge of happiness filled him. ...She had been dismayed because of him. There was no other interpretation of her words and actions. She was conscience stricken because she had brought misfortune upon him.

He laughed boyishly. “Don’t worry about me. I don’t care,” he said, gayly, “so long as I have you. You’re worth it a dozen times. ...I’m glad, Ruth—I’m glad I had to pay for you dearly. Somehow it makes me seem worthier—you understand what I mean. ...”

She understood—understood, too, the interpretation he had put on her words. It brought a flush to her white cheeks. ...She disengaged herself gently.

Page 104

“If we’re not going away,” she said, “I can lie down—and rest.”

“Of course.”

“Alone? In the next room?”

He opened the door for her. “I’ll be as quiet as a mouse,” he said. “Have a good sleep. I’ll sit here and read.” She read in his eyes a plea for affection, for another kiss, as she left him, but she had not the strength to give it. She went into the adjoining room, and shut the door after her. Then she stood there silently regarding the door—regarding the *key*. ... If she locked it she was safe from him. He could not come in. ... She could lock him out.

Her hand went to the key, but came away without turning it. No. ... She had no right. She had made her bargain and must abide by it. Bonbright was her husband and she was his wife, and as such she must not turn locks upon him. ... Marriage gave him the right of free access.

Dressed as she was, in the suit that had been her wedding dress, she threw herself upon the bed and gave up her soul to torment. She had taken her all and paid it for a thing desirable in her eyes—and her all had bought her nothing. She had wrenched her love from the man to whom she had given it, and all her life must counterfeit love for a man whom she did not love—and in return she would receive—nothing. She had seen herself a Joan of Arc. That dream was blown away in a breath. ... But the bargain was made. That she did not receive what she had thought to receive was no fault of Bonbright’s—and she must endure what was to be endured. She must be honest with him—as honesty showed its face to her. To be honest with him meant to her to deceive him daily, hourly, to make her life a lie. He was cheated enough as matters stood—and he did not deserve to be cheated. He was good, gentle, a man. She appreciated him—but she did not love him. ... And appreciating him, aware of his strength and his goodness to her, she could not keep her eyes off the door. She lay there eying it with ever increasing apprehension—yet she did not, would not, could not, rise to turn the key. ...

CHAPTER XX

In every formation of a fresh family group there must be readjustments of habit and of thought. Two people who fancy they know each other intimately discover that they are in reality utter strangers. They start a new acquaintanceship at the moment of marriage, and the wonder of it is that so many millions of them manage the thing with success. It is true that a man and woman who join their hands and their fortunes because of a deep-seated, genuine, calm affection have a greater chance of lasting happiness than those who unite because of the spur of sudden, flaring passion. There

are those who contend that friendship and mutual confidence are a firmer foundation for marriage than the emotion that we call love. Thousands of men and women have married because prudence told them a

Page 105

certain other individual would make a trustworthy, efficient, comfortable husband or wife, and as days and weeks and years passed this respect and trust and regard has blossomed into a beautifully permanent flower of love. ...Doubtless happiness has resulted from marriages which resulted from motives purely mercenary, for human beings are blessed by Heaven with a quality called adaptability. Of no marriage can one predict happiness surely. At the altar the best one can do is to hope for the best. ...But what can be said of a marriage brought about by the causes and motives that led Bonbright Foote to Ruth Frazer and Ruth Frazer to Bonbright Foote?

Of the two, Bonbright's reasons most nearly approached the normal, and therefore the safe; Ruth had been urged by a motive, lofty perhaps, visionary, but supremely abnormal. Therefore the adjustments to be made, the problems to be mastered, the difficulties in their road to a comfortable, reasonably happy future, were multiplied many times. Instead of being probable, the success of their little social entity became merely possible, doubtfully possible.

Ruth, being a woman, understood something of this. Bonbright, being a boy, and a singularly inexperienced boy, understood it not at all, and as he sat alone, a closed door between him and his wife, he wearied his brain upon the puzzle of it. He came to the conclusion that the present difficult situation was the natural thing. It was natural for the bride to be timid, frightened, reluctant, for she was entering a dark forest of strange, new experiences. He understood that his own case might be exaggerated because their marriage had been preceded by no ordinary courtship, with the opportunity which a courtship gives to begin the inevitable readjustments, and to become accustomed to intimacy of thought and act.

The ordinary man has little intuition, but a world of good intentions. Men blunder woefully in their relations with women, not because of innate boorishness in the sex, not because of willful brashness, but because of lack of understanding. They mean well, but their performance is deplorable. ... In that moment Bonbright's most valuable possession was a certain intuition, a fineness, a decency, a reserve, a natural modesty. As he sat there alone he reached a conclusion which was, probably, the most profoundly wise conclusion he was to arrive at in his life. It came not so much from taking thought, as by blessed inspiration. This conclusion was that he must court Ruth Frazer as a sweetheart, not approach her as a husband. ...

It was a course that would require infinite patience, forbearance, fineness. In his love for Ruth he felt himself capable of it; felt that it would bring its reward.

So he sat and waited. He did not approach the door which she had watched with apprehensive eyes until weariness had closed them in sleep. ...

The luncheon hour had passed when he heard Ruth moving about within.

Page 106

“Hungry?” he called to her, boyishly. His voice reassured her. It was comradely. There was nothing in it that menaced her security. ...The sleep and the rest had bettered her. She was less tense, more calmly resigned to events. She had marshaled her will; had set it to bear her up and to compel her to carry on bravely and without hysteria the part of a wife.

“I am hungry,” she said, and presently she appeared in the door, stood there a moment, and then walked across the room to Bonbright. “Thank you,” she said, simply, and he understood.

“You don’t mind being poor for a while?” he asked.

“I’ve always been poor,” she said, with something that approached her old smile.

“Because,” he said, “we are poor. I am going to earn about thirty dollars a week. So, you see, we can’t afford to live here. We’ve got to find a little house or flat. ...”

“Let’s begin,” she cried. It was not the delight of a woman at the thought of hunting for her first home, but the idea of having something to do, of escaping from these rooms. “Let’s go right out to look.”

“First,” he said, with pretended severity, “we eat.”

So they went down to the dining room, and after they had eaten they inaugurated their house hunting. Perhaps Providence intervened at this difficult moment to give them occupation. If so, Providence acted with amazing wisdom and kindness.

Ruth found an interest in the search. She forgot. Her mind was taken from morbid breedings as they climbed stairs and explored rooms and questioned agents. Bonbright was very happy—happier because he was openly and without shame adapting his circumstances to his purse. ... They found a tiny flat, to be had for a fourth of their income. Ruth said that was the highest proportion of their earnings it was safe to pay for rent, and Bonbright marveled at her wisdom in such matters. ...

Then there were the furnishings to select. Bonbright left the selection and the chaffering wholly to Ruth—and she enjoyed it. The business rested, refreshed, stimulated her. It pushed her fears into the dim background and brought again to the light of day her old self that Bonbright loved. More than once she turned the light of her famous grin upon him or upon some thrice lucky salesman.

But the end was reached at last; everything was done that could be done, and there was nothing to do but to return to the hotel. Ruth did her best to keep up her spirits, but by every block that they approached the hotel, by so much her lightness vanished, by so much her apprehension, her heartache, the black disappointment of the failure of her great plan, returned.

Bonbright saw the change and it grieved him—it strengthened the determination he had made. When they reached their rooms he drew her over to the sofa.

“Let’s sit here together, dear,” he said. “We haven’t had a decent talk, and there are a heap of things to talk about, aren’t there?”

Page 107

She forced herself to sit down close to him, and waited icily, steeling herself to yield to his demonstrations of affection if he offered them, but he did not.

“I’ve an idea,” he said. “I—I hope you’ll like it. It’ll be sort of--fun. Sort of a game, you know. ... While I sat here this afternoon I was thinking about us—and—how I want to make you happy. ...We were married—suddenly. Most folks play along and get to know each other, and grow to love each other gradually, I guess. ...I didn’t grow to love you gradually. I don’t know how it was with you. But, anyhow, we missed our courtship. We started right in by being husband and wife. Of course I’m glad of that. ...Don’t think I’m not. I wanted you— right away. But—but my idea was that maybe we could—have our courtship now—after we are married. ...Mayn’t we?”

“What—what do you mean?” she asked, fearfully, hopefully.

“We’ll pretend we aren’t married at all,” he said. “We’ll make believe we’re at a house party or something, and I just met you. I’m no end interested in you right off, of course. I haven’t any idea how you feel about me. ...We’ll start off as if we just met, and it’s up to me to make you fall in love with me. ...I’ll bring out the whole bag of tricks. Flowers and candy and such like, and walks and rides. I’ll get right down and pursue you. ...After a while you’ll—maybe— get so far as to call me by my first name.” He laughed like a small boy. “And some day you’ll let me hold your hand—pretending you don’t know I’m holding it at all. ...And I’ll be making love to you to—to beat the band. Regular crush I’ll have on you. ...What do you think?”

“You mean *really*?...You mean we’ll *live* like that? That we won’t be married, but do like you said?” She was staring at him with big, unbelieving eyes.

“That’s the idea exactly. ...We won’t be married till I *win* you. That’s the game. ...And I’ll try hard—you haven’t any notion how hard I’ll try.” There was something pleading, pathetic in his voice, that went to her heart.

“Oh,” she said, breathlessly, “that’s *dear* of you. ... You’re good— so *good*. ... I—I hate myself. ... You’ll do *that*?... I didn’t—know anybody—could be—so—so good.” She swayed, swayed toward him in a storm of tears, and he drew her face down on his shoulder while with awkward hand he patted her shoulder.

“There. ... There...” he said, clumsily, happily. She did not draw away from him, but lay there wetting his coat with her tears, her heart swelling with thanks-giving; fear vanished, and something was born in her breast that would never die. The thing that was born was a perfect trust in this man she had married, and a perfect trust is one of the rarest and most wonderful things under the sun.

For so young a man, Bonbright felt singularly fatherly. He held his wife gently, silently, willing that she should cry, with a song in his heart because she nestled to him and wept

on his shoulder. If he deluded himself that she clung to him because of other, sweeter emotion than grief, relief, it did not diminish his happiness. The moment was the best he had known for months, perhaps the best he had ever known.

Page 108

Ruth sat up and wiped her eyes. He looked into them, saw them cleared now of dread, and it was a sufficient reward. For her part, in that instant, Ruth almost loved Bonbright, not as lovers love, but as one loves a benefactor, some one whose virtues have earned affection. But it was not that sort that Bonbright asked of her, she knew full well.

“Now—er—Miss Frazer,” he said, briskly, “I don’t want to appear forward for a new acquaintance, but if I suggested that there was a bully play in town—sort of tentatively, you know—what would happen to me?”

“Why, Mr. Foote,” she replied, able to enter into the spirit of the pretense, “I think you’d find yourself in the awkward position of a young man compelled to buy two seats.”

“No chaperons?”

“Where I come from,” she said, “chaperons are not in style.”

“And we’ll go some place after the play. ...I want to make the most of my opportunity, because I’ve got to work all day to-morrow. It’s a shame, too, because I have a feeling that I’d like to monopolize you.”

“Aren’t you going a bit fast for a comparative stranger?” she asked, merrily.

He pretended to look crestfallen. “You sha’n’t have to put me in my place again,” he promised; “but wait—wait till we’ve known each other a week!...Do you know, Miss Frazer, you have a mighty charming smile!”

“It has been remarked before,” she said.

“We mustn’t keep our hostess waiting. I’m afraid we’ll be late for dinner, now.” He chuckled at the idea.

“I never have eaten dinner with a man in evening dress,” she said, with a touch of seriousness. “In the country I come from the men don’t wear them.” How true that was—in the country she came from, the country of widows who kept boarding houses, of laborers, of Dulac and their sort! She was in another land now, a land she had been educated to look upon with enmity; the land of the oppressor. Little revolutionist—she was to learn much of that country in the days to come and to know that in it bad men and good men, worthy women and trifling women, existed in about the same ratio as in her own familiar land. ...Bonbright insisted upon buying her violets—the first costly flowers she had ever worn. They occupied desirable seats—and the few plays Ruth had seen she had seen from gallery heights! Fortunately it was a bright play, brimming with laughter and gayety, presenting no squalid problems, holding up to the shrinking eyes of the audience no far-fetched, impossible tangles of sex. They enjoyed it. Ruth enjoyed it. That she could do so is wonderful, perhaps, but then, so many human

capabilities are wonderful! Men about to be hanged eat a hearty meal with relish. ... How much more might Ruth find pleasure since she had been granted a reprieve!

Page 109

When the curtain descended they moved toward the exits, waiting for the crowd to clear the way. Bonbright's attention was all for Ruth, but her eyes glanced curiously about, observing the well-fed, well-kept, brilliantly dressed men and women—men and women of the world to which she belonged now. As one approached them and saw them, they were singularly human. Their faces were not different from faces she was accustomed to. Cleaner they were, perhaps, with something more of refinement. They were better dressed, but there she saw the same smiles, the same weariness, the same charm, the same faces that told their tales of hard work and weary bodies. ... They were just human beings, all of them, *her* sort and these. ...

Suddenly her fingers tightened on her husband's arm. He heard her draw a quick, startled little breath, and looked up to see his father and mother approaching them, from the opposite direction. Bonbright had not expected this. It was the last place in the world he had thought to encounter his parents—but there they were, not to be avoided. He stopped, stiffened. Ruth stole a glance at his face and saw it suddenly older, tenser.

Mr. and Mrs. Foote approached slowly. Ruth knew the moment Mrs. Foote saw her husband, for the stately woman bit her lip and spoke hurriedly to Bonbright's father, who glanced at Bonbright and then at her uncertainly. Ruth saw that Mrs. Foote held her husband's arm, did not allow him to turn aside, but led him straight toward them. ... Bonbright stood stiff, expectant. On came his father and mother, with no quickening of pace. Bonbright's eyes moved from one face to the other as they approached. Now they were face to face. Mrs. Foote's eyes encountered Ruth's, moved away from the girl to her son, moved on—giving no sign of recognition. Mr. Foote looked stonily before him. ...And so they passed, refusing even a bow to their son, the only child that had been given them. ...That others had seen the episode Ruth knew, for she saw astonished glances, saw quick whisperings.

Then she looked up at her husband. He had not turned to look after his parents, but was staring before him, his face white, his eyes burning, little knots of muscle gathered at the points of his jaw. She pressed his arm gently and heard his quick intake of breath—so like a sob.

"Come," he said, harshly. "Come."

"It was cruel—heartless," she said, fiercely, quickly partisan, making his quarrel her own, with no thought that the slight had been for her as well as for him.

"Come," he repeated.

They went out into the street, Bonbright quivering with shame and anger, Ruth not daring to speak, so white, so hurt was his face, so fierce the smolder in his eyes.

"You see..." he said, presently. "You see. ..."

“I’ve cost you *that*,” she said.

“That,” he said, slowly, as if he could not believe his words, “that was my father and—-my mother.”

Page 110

Ruth was frightened. Not until this moment did she realize what she had done; not until now did the teeth of remorse clench upon her. To marry her—because he loved her—-this boy at her side must suffer *this*. It was her doing. ...She had cheated him into it. She had cost him this and was giving nothing to pay for it. He had foreseen it. Last night he had cut adrift from his parents because of her— willingly. She knew he would have made, would make, any sacrifice for her. ...And she had married him with no love in her heart, married him to use him for her own ends!

She dared not doubt that what she had done was right. She dared not question her act, nor that the end justified the means she had used. ...But the end was not to be attained. By the act of marrying Bonbright she had made it impossible for herself to further the Cause. ...It was a vicious circle of events.

As she watched his face she became all woman; revolutionist and martyr disappeared. Her heart ached for him, her sympathy went out to him. "Poor boy!..." she said, and pressed his arm again.

"It was to—be expected," he said, slowly. "I'm glad it's over. ...I knew what would happen, so why should the happening of it trouble me? ...There have been six generations in my family that would do that thing. ... Ruth, the Foote Tradition is ended. It ended with me. Such things have no right to exist. ... Six generations of it. ..."

She did not speak, but she was resolving silently: "I'll be good to him. I'll make him happy. I'll make up to him for this. ..."

He shook himself. "It doesn't matter," he said. "We sha'n't let it interfere with our evening. ...Come, Miss Frazer, where shall we lunch?"

CHAPTER XXI

All of Ruth's life had been spent in contact with the abnormal, the ultraradical. The tradition which time had reared about *her* family— as powerful in its way as the Foote Tradition, but separated from it by a whole world—had brought acquaintanceship and intimacy with strange people and strange cults. In the parlor of her home she had listened to frank, fantastic discussions; to lawless theories. These discussions, beginning anywhere, ended always with the reform of the marriage relation. Anarchist, socialist, nihilist, atheist, Utopian, altruist—all tinkered with the family group, as if they recognized that the civilization they were at war with rested upon this and no other foundation.

So Ruth was well aware how prone the individual is to experiment with the processes of forming and continuing the relations between men and women which have for their cardinal object the peopling of the earth. But in spite of the radicalism which was hers

by right of inheritance and training, she had not been attracted by any of them. A certain basic sense of balance had enabled her to see these things were but vain gropings in the dark; that they might flower successfully in abnormal individual cases—-orchid growths—but that each was doomed to failure as a universal solution. For mankind in bulk is normal, and its safety lies in a continuance of normality. Ages had evolved the marriage relation as it existed; ages might evolve it into something different as sudden revolution could not. It was the one way, and she knew it to be the one way.

Page 111

Therefore she recognized that Bonbright and herself were embarked on one of these unstable, experimental craft. She saw, as he did not, that it was unseaworthy and must founder at the first touch of storm. She pinned no false hopes to it; recognized it as a makeshift, welcome to her only as a reprieve—and that it must soon be discarded for a vessel whose planking was reality and whose sails were woven of normal stuff.

As the days went by and they were settled in their little flat, living the exotic life which temporarily solved their problem, she knew it could not last; feared it might dissolve at any moment. Inevitable signs of the gust that should destroy it had been apparent...and her dread returned. Even Bonbright was able to see that his plan was not a perfect success.

If it had not been for Dulac. ... He complicated the thing unendurably. ... If Bonbright were still heir apparent to the Foote dynasty, and her plan might be carried out. ... She felt a duty toward Dulac—she had promised to hold him always in her thoughts, felt he was entitled to a sort of spiritual loyalty from her. And, deprived of him, she fancied her love for him was as deep as the sea and as enduring as time. ...

Long days alone, with only the slightest labor to occupy her hands and mind, gave her idle time—fertile soil for the raising of a dark crop of morbid thoughts. She brooded much, and, brooding, became restless, unhappy, and she could not conceal it from Bonbright when he came home eagerly for his dinner, ready to take up with boyish hope the absurd game he had invented. She allowed herself to think of Dulac; indeed, she forced herself to think of him. ...

Five days she had been married, when, going to the door in answer to the bell, she opened it, to find Dulac standing there. She uttered a little cry of fright and half closed the door. He held it open with his knee.

Sudden terror, not of him, but of herself, caused her to thrust against the door with all her strength, but he forced it open slowly and entered.

“Go away,” she said, shrinking from him and standing with her back against the wall. “Go away. ...”

“I stayed away as long as I could,” he said. “Now I’m not going away--until we’ve had a talk.”

“There’s nothing for us to—say,” she whispered. “You must be crazy— to come here.”

He was laboring under excitement. She could see the smoldering fire in his black eyes; it was plain that he was worn, tired, a man fighting in the last ditch. His hold upon himself was not secure, but she could not be sorry for him now. The possibilities his presence suggested terrified her and excluded all other thoughts.

He stood with his burning eyes upon her face, not speaking; staring. “Go away,” she begged, but he shook his head.

“You’ve been cheated,” he said, hoarsely. “It doesn’t matter if you gave yourself to *him* for the reason you said you did—or for his money. You’re cheated. ... His kind always cheats. You’re getting *nothing*. ... Are you going to stand it? That’s what I came to find out. ... Are you going to stand it?”

Page 112

She could make no reply.

“What are you going to do about it?” he demanded.

“What can I do?... It’s too late.”

“Look here, you married him to get something—to be able to do something. ... You didn’t have any other reason. You didn’t love him. ... You loved *me*. He’s been kicked out by his family. He doesn’t own anything. He’s out for good, and you can’t get anything or do anything. I want to know what you’re going to do about it.”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?... You’re not going to stick to him. You don’t love him— probably you hate him by this time. ... You couldn’t help it.”

“I married him,” she said. “It isn’t his fault if his family put him out. ... It was *my* fault. They did it because he married me. ... It was I who cheated *him*—and you can see—-what it’s—cost him. ... I’ve got to make it up to him—someway. I—I don’t hate him. ... He’s been good. ... Oh, he’s been wonderfully good.”

“Do you want to live with him?”

“No,” she said. “No. ...”

“What about me?... I love you, don’t I? Wasn’t I before *him*?... Didn’t you give yourself to me? What about me?...”

“That’s all—over,” she said. “Oh, please go away. I mustn’t talk about that. ...I’m *married*. ...”

“Listen,” he said, feverishly. “I love you. This fellow you’ve married doesn’t know what love is. ... What does he know about it? What would he do for you?...” He leaned forward, his face working, his body quivering with passion. She let her eyes fall, unable to support his gaze, and she trembled. His old fascination was upon her; the glamour of him was drawing her. He poured out a flood of passionate words, bared his soul to her starkly, as he talked swiftly, burningly of his love, and what his love meant to him and what it would mean to her. She closed her eyes to shut out the sight of him; she summoned all the strength of her will to preserve her from his fascination, to resist his temptation. ...

“I’d have left you alone,” he said, “if you’d got what you paid for. ...But when you didn’t —when you got nothing—there was no reason for me to stay away. ... You belonged to me. You do belong to me. ... Why should you stick to him? Why?”

She could not answer him. The only reason she should cling to her husband was because he *was* her husband, but she knew that would be no reason to Dulac.

"There's been a marriage ceremony," he said, scornfully. "What of it? It isn't marriage ceremonies that unite men and women. ... It's love— nothing else. ... When you told me you loved me you married me more really than any minister can marry you. That was a real marriage—but you didn't think you were breaking any laws or violating any morals when you left me and married *him*. Just because we hadn't gone to a church. ... You're married to *me* and living with him—that's what it amounts to. ... Now I'm here demanding you. I'm after my wife."

Page 113

“No...” she said, weakly.

“Yes, my wife. ... I want you back and I’m going to have you back. ... With the bringing up you’ve had, you’re not going to let this *convention*—this word—marriage—hold you. ... You’re coming with me.”

The thing was possible. She saw the possibility of it, the danger that she might yield. The man’s power drew her. She *wanted* to go; she *wanted* to believe his sophistry, but there was a stanchness of soul in her that continued to resist.

“No...” she said, again.

“You’ll come,” he said, “because you can’t stand it. I know. ... Every time he touches you you want to scream. I know. It’s torture. ... He’ll find out. Don’t you think he’ll find out you don’t love him—how you feel when he comes near you? And what then?... You’ll come to me willingly now—or you’ll come when he pushes you out.”

“He’ll—not—find out.”

Dulac laughed. “Anybody but a young fool would have known before this. ...But I don’t want to wait for that. I want you now.” He came toward her eagerly to take her in his arms. She could not move; her knees refused to carry her from him. ...Her senses swam. If he touched her it would be the end—she knew it would be the end. If he seized her in his arms she would never be able to escape. His will would master her will. Yet she could not move—she was under his spell. It was only subconsciously that she wanted to escape. It was only the true instinct in her that urged her to escape.

His arms were reaching out for her now; in an instant his hands would touch her; she would be clutched tightly to him—and she would be lost. ...

Her back was against the wall. ...In that supreme instant, the instant that stood between her and the thing that might be, the virtue in her recoiled, the stanchness asserted itself, the command to choose the better from the worse course made itself heard to her will. She cried out inarticulately, thrust out with terrified arms, and pushed him from her.

“Don’t touch me,” she cried. “What you say is not true. I know. ...I’m his wife—and—-you must go. You must—never come back. ...Bonbright is my husband—and I’ll—stay with him. ...I’ll do what I’ve got to do. I sha’n’t listen to you. Go—please, oh, please go— *now*.”

The moment had come to Dulac and he had not been swift enough to grasp it. He realized it, realized he had failed, that nothing he could do or say would avail him now. ...He backed toward the door, never removing his eyes from her face.

“You’re *my* wife,” he said. “You won’t come now, but you’ll come. ...I’ll make you come.” He stopped a moment in the door, gazing at her with haggard eyes. ... “And you know it,” he said. Then he closed the door, and she was alone.

She sank to the floor and covered her face with her hands, not to hide her tears—for there were no tears to flow—but because she was ashamed and because she was afraid. ...She knew how close she had been to yielding, how narrow had been the margin of her rescue—and she was afraid of what might happen next time, of what might happen when her life with Bonbright became unbearable, as she knew it must become unbearable.

Page 114

She crouched and trembled...and then she began to think. It was given her to perceive what she must do. Instead of fondling Dulac in her thoughts, she must put him out of her heart, she must not permit him in her dreams. ...She had promised him he should be always present in her thoughts. That promise she must break. Daily, hourly, she must steel herself against him in preparation for his next appearance, for she knew he would appear again, demanding her. ...It was not in the man to give her up, as it was not in him to surrender any object which he had set his soul to attain.

In spite of cults and theories and makeshifts and sophistries, she knew where her duty lay, where the safety of her soul lay—it was in fidelity to her husband. She resolved that fidelity should be his, and as she resolved it she knew that he deserved it of her. She resolved that she would eject Dulac from her life, and that, with all the strength of her will, she would try to bring herself to give that love to Bonbright which she had promised him by implication, but never by word. She did not know that love cannot be created by an effort of the will. ...

Before she arose from her pitiful posture she considered many plans, and discarded them all. There was no plan. It must all be left to the future. First she believed it was required that she should tell Bonbright she had married him without love, and beg of him to be patient and to wait, for she was trying to turn her love to him. But that, she saw, would not serve. He was being patient now, wonderfully, unbelievably patient. What more could she ask of him? It would only wound him, who had suffered such wounds through her. She could not do that. She could do nothing but wait and hope—and meet her problems as best she could when they arose. It was not an encouraging outlook.

Resolve as she would, she could not quiet her fears. Dulac would come again. He might find her in a weaker moment. Now, instead of one terror she harbored two. ...

CHAPTER XXII

Bonbright, in his business experience, had been like a man watching a play in a foreign language, from a box seat—with an interpreter to translate the dialogue. Now he found himself a member of the cast; very much a member, with abundant lines and business. In his old position as heir apparent to Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, he had been unhappy. Time had hung heavily on his hands. He had not been allowed to participate in actual affairs except as some automatic machine or rubber stamp participates. There every effort of his superiors had been directed to eliminating his individuality and to molding him to the Bonbright Foote type. He had not been required to use his brains—-indeed, had been forbidden to do so.

Page 115

In his new employment the condition was reversed. It seemed as if everything his father had desired him to do was interdicted in Malcolm Lightener's vast organization; everything that had been taboo before was required of him now. He was asked to think; he was taught to make his individuality felt; he was encouraged to suggest and to exercise his intelligence independently. There were actually suggestion boxes in every department where the humblest laborer might deposit a slip of paper telling the boss any notion he had which he deemed of service to the enterprise. More than that—any suggestion accepted was paid for according to its value.

In Bonbright's father's plant change and invention were frowned upon. New devices were regarded as impious. The typewriter was tolerated; the telephone was regarded with shame. The Ancestors had not made use of such things. ...Malcolm Lightener let no instrument for adding efficiency pass untried. It was the same in office and in shop. The plant was modern to the second—indeed, it was a stride ahead of the minute. There was a large experimental laboratory presided over by an engineer of inventive trend, whose business it was to eliminate and combine processes; to produce machines which would enable one man to perform the labor of three; to perform at one process and one handling the work that before required several processes and the passing of the thing worked upon from hand to hand.

If Bonbright had been interested in any phase of his father's business it had been in the machine shops. Now he saw how costly were those antique processes, how wasteful of time and labor. His father's profits were large; Bonbright saw very quickly how a revolution in methods would make them enormous. But he knew that revolution would not take place—the Ancestors forbade. ...

The thing had started at the first moment of his connection with Malcolm Lightener as an employee. He had reported promptly at seven o'clock, and found Lightener already in his office. It was Lightener's custom to come down and to go home later for breakfast.

"Morning," said Lightener. "Where's your overalls?"

"Overalls?" said Bonbright.

"Didn't I tell you to bring some? You'll need 'em. Wait, I'll send a boy out for some—-while we have a talk. ...Now then, you've got a job. After six o'clock you and I continue on the same basis as before; between seven in the morning and six at night you're one of the men who work for me—and that's all. You get no favors. What they get you get. ...There aren't any soft jobs or hangers-on here. Everybody earns what he's paid—or he finds he isn't getting paid. Clear?"

"Perfectly," said Bonbright, not wholly at his ease.

Page 116

“The object of this plant is to make automobiles—to make *good* automobiles, and to make the most of them that can be made. If one man falls down on his job it delays everybody else. Suppose one man finishing *this*”—he held up a tiny forging—“does a botch job. ... There’s just one of these to a car, and he’s held up the completion of a car. That means money. ... Suppose the same man manages to turn out two perfect castings like this in the time it once took to turn out one. ... Then he’s a valuable man, and he hustles up the whole organization to keep even with him. Every job is important because it is a part of the whole operation, which is the turning out of a complete automobile. Understand?”

“Yes.”

“Some men are created to remain laborers or mechanics all their lives. Some are foreordained bookkeepers. A few can handle labor—but that’s the end of them. A very few have executive and organizing and financial ability. The plums are for them. ... Every man in this plant has a chance at them. You have. ... On the other hand, you can keep on earning what you’re getting now until you’re sixty. It’s up to you. ... I’m giving you a start. That’s not sentiment. It’s because you’ve education and brains—and there’s something in heredity. Your folks have been successful—to a degree and in their own way. I’m making a bet on you—that’s all. I’m taking a chance that you’ll pay back at the box office what you’re going to cost for some months. In other words, instead of your paying for your education, I’m sending you to school on the chance that you’ll graduate into a man that will make money for me. But you’ve got to make good or out you go. Fair?”

“Yes,” said Bonbright.

“All right. Remember it. ...You’ve got the stuff in you to make a man at the top—maybe. But you don’t start at the top. You’ve got to scramble up just like anybody else. Right now you’re not worth a darn. You don’t know anything and you can’t do anything. Day labor’s where you belong—but you couldn’t stand it. And it wouldn’t be sense to put you at it, or I would. I’d set you to sweeping out the machine shops if I thought you needed it. ...Maybe you figured on sitting at a mahogany desk?”

“I came to do whatever you put me at,” Bonbright said. “I’ve been fed up on sitting at a mahogany desk.”

“Good—if you mean it. I hear a lot of four flush about what men are willing to do. Heaps of them repeat copybook platitudes. ...You’re going to wear overalls and get your hands dirty. If you don’t like it you can always quit. ...I know how to do darn nearly everything that’s done in this place. The man who gets up near me has got to know it, too.” Here was a hint for Bonbright of the possibilities that Malcolm Lightener opened up to him. “This morning you’re going into the machine shop to run a lathe, and you’re going to stay there till you *know* how it’s done. Then we’ll move you some place else.

Your place is in the office. But how soon you get there, or whether you ever get there, is up to you. Like the looks of it?”

Page 117

Bonbright was silent a moment. When he spoke it was not in reply to Lightener's question, but to put into words a fear that had become apparent.

"The men," he said; "how about them?...You know, father sort of advertised me as a strike breaker and that kind of thing. Our men hate me. I suppose all laboring men feel that way about me."

"We don't have any unions here. I run my own plant, and, by gracious! I always will. I give my men fair pay—better than most. I give them all the opportunity they ask for. I give them the best and safest conditions to work in that can be had. I figure a good crew in a plant is a heap more valuable than good machinery—and I keep my machinery in repair and look after it mighty careful. But no union nonsense. ... You won't have any trouble with the men."

Bonbright was not so sure. ... Presently the boy returned with the overalls. Lightener wrote a note and handed it to the boy. "Take this man to Shop One and give this note to Maguire," he said; then he turned to Bonbright and jerked his thumb toward the door. Bonbright got up without a word and followed the boy.

In a moment the boy opened a big door, and Bonbright stepped through. The sight took away his breath—not that he had never seen this room before, but that he was now seeing it through other eyes, not merely as a spectator, but as a participant. It seemed to him as if the dimensions of the room should be measured not in feet, but in acres. It was enormous, but huge as it was it was all too small for the tangle of machinery it contained. To Bonbright's eyes it seemed a tangle. A labyrinth of shafting, countershafting, hung from the high ceiling, from whose whirring pulleys belts descended to rows upon rows of machines below. It looked like some strange sort of lunar forest, or some species of monstrous, magic banyan tree. Here were machines of a hundred uses and shapes, singly, in batteries—a scrambled mass it seemed. There were small machines—and in the distance huge presses, massive, their very outlines speaking of gigantic power. Bonbright had seen sheets of metal fed into them, to be spewed out at another point bent and molded to a desired form. Overhead conveyers increased the scrambled appearance. Men with trucks, men on hurried errands, hurried here and there; other men stood silently feeding hungry contrivances—men were everywhere, engrossed in their work, paving scant attention to anything outside their task. And rushing up to Bonbright was a wave of composite sounds, a roar, a bellow, a shriek, a rattle, a whir, a grind. ... It seemed the ultimate possibility of confusion.

Page 118

But as he walked down the aisle, dodging from time to time men or trucks that regarded him not at all, but depended on him to clear the way and to look out for himself, he was able to perceive something of the miraculous orderliness and system of it. He was given a hint of the plan—how a certain process would start—a bit of rough metal; how it would undergo its first process and move on by gradual steps from one machine to the next, to the next, in orderly, systematic way. No time was lost in carrying a thing hither and thither. When one man was through with it, the next man was at that exact point, to take it and contribute his bit to its transformation. ... Something very like a thrill of pride passed over Bonbright. He was a part of this marvel. ...

Through this room they walked—the room would have sufficed in extent for a good-sized farm—and into another, not smaller, and into another and another. His destination, Shop One, was smaller, but huge enough. The boy led Bonbright to a short, fat man. in unbelievably grimy overalls and black, visored cap.

“Mr. Maguire,” he shouted, “here’s a man and a note from the boss.” Then he scurried away.

Maguire looked at the note first, and shoved it into his pocket; then he squinted at Bonbright—at his face first; then, with a quizzical glint, at his clothes. Bonbright flushed. For the first time in his life he was ashamed of his clothes, and for a reason that causes few men to be ashamed of their clothes. He wished they were of cheaper cloth, of less expensive tailoring. He wished, most of all, that the bright new overalls in the bundle under his arm were concealing them from view.

“You’re a hell of a looking machinist,” said Maguire.

Bonbright felt it to be a remarkably true saying.

“The boss takes this for a darn kindergarten,” Maguire complained. “Ever run a lathe or a shaper or a planer?”

“No.”

“He said to stick you on a lathe. ... Huh! What’s he know about it?... How’s he expect this room to make a showing if it’s goin’ to be charged with guys like you that hain’t nothin’ but an expense?”

Bonbright got the idea back of that. Maguire was personally interested in results; Maguire wanted his room to beat other rooms in the weekly reports; Maguire was working for something more than wages—he was playing the game of manufacturing to win.

“You go on a planer,” Maguire snapped, “and Gawd help you if you spoil more castings than I figger you ought to. ... The boys here’ll make it hot for you if you pull down their average.”

So the boys were interested, too. The thing extended downward from the bosses!

“Goin’ to work in them clothes?” asked Maguire, with a grin.

“Overalls,” said Bonbright, tapping his parcel.

Maguire went to his desk and took a key from a box. “I’ll show you your locker,” he said; and presently Bonbright, minus his coat, was incased in the uniform of a laborer. Spick and span and new it was, and gave him a singularly uncomfortable feeling because of this fact. He wanted it grimed and daubed like the overalls of the men he saw about him. A boyish impulse to smear it moved him—but he was ashamed to do it openly.

Page 119

Maguire led him to a big contrivance which was called a shaper. A boy of eighteen was operating it. On its bed, which moved back and forth automatically, was bolted a great cake of iron—a casting in the rough. The machine was smoothing its surfaces.

“Show him,” Maguire said to the boy, “then report to me.”

The boy showed Bonbright efficiently—telling him what must be done to that iron cake, explaining how the machine was to be stopped and started, and other necessary technical matters. Then he hurried off. Bonbright gazed at the casting ruefully, afflicted with stage fright. ... He was actually about to perform real labor—a labor requiring a certain measure of intellect. He was afraid he would make a mistake, would do something wrong, and possibly spoil the casting. He started the planer gingerly. It had not seemed to move rapidly when the boy was operating it, but now the bed seemed fairly to fly forward and snap back. He bent forward to look at the cutting he had made; it was right. So far he was all right. ... Surreptitiously he laid his palm in a mass of grease and metal particles and wiped it across his breast. ... It was an operation which he repeated more than once that morning.

Gradually his trepidation passed and he began to enjoy himself. He enjoyed watching that casting move resistlessly under the tool; watched the metal curl up in glittering little curlicues as the tool ate its way across. He looked with pleasure at the surface already planed and with anticipation of the surface still in the rough. ... It was interesting; it was fun. He wondered vaguely if all men who worked at tasks of this kind found pleasure in them, not appreciating that years of doing the same thing over and over might make it frightfully monotonous. The truth was the thing had not yet become work to him. It was a new experience, and all new experiences bring their thrill.

Until the noon whistle blew he hardly took his eyes off his work. He did not know that Maguire passed him a dozen times, not stopping, but watching him closely as he passed. ... With the stopping of work about him he realized that he was tired. He had lifted weights; he had used unaccustomed muscles. He was hot, sweaty, aching. He was hungry.

“Where do we eat?” he asked the man who stood at the next machine.

“Didn’t you bring no lunch?”

“No.”

“Some doesn’t,” said the man, as if he disapproved exceedingly of that class. “They feed at the hash house across the street. ... Hain’t broke, be you?”

Bonbright understood the kindly offer implied. “Thank you—no,” he said, and followed to the big wash room.

He ate his lunch from the top of a tall stool. It was not the sort of food he was accustomed to, and the coffee was far from being the sort that had been served to him in his home or in his club—but he hardly noticed it. When he was through he walked back across the street and stood awkwardly among his mates. He knew none of them.

Page 120

An oldish, smallish man looked at him and at his overalls, and grinned.

“New man?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Thought them overalls wasn’t long off the shelf. You done a good job, though, considerin’.”

Bonbright blushed.

“Where you been workin’?”

How was Bonbright to answer? He couldn’t tell the truth without shaming himself in this man’s eyes, and all at once he found he greatly desired the good opinion of this workingman and of the other workingmen about him.

“I—The last place I worked was Bonbright Foote, Incorporated,” he said, giving his father’s institution its full name.

“Urn. ... Strikin’, eh?”

Bonbright nodded. He had struck. Not with a union, but as an individual.

“’Bout over, hain’t it, from all I hear tell?”

“I think so,” said Bonbright.

“Bad business. ... Strikes is always bad—especially if the men git licked. Unions hain’t no business to call strikes without some show of winnin’.. ... The boys talk that this strike never had no chance from the beginnin’. ... I don’t think a heap of that Foote outfit.”

“Why?”

“Rotten place to work, I hear. A good machinist can’t take no pleasure there, what with one thing and another. Out-of-date machines, and what not. ... That young Foote, the cub, is a hell winder, they say. Ever see him?”

“I’ve seen him.”

“His father was bad enough, by all accounts. But this kid goes him one better. Wonder some of them strikers didn’t git excited and make him acquainted with a brick. I’ve heard of fightin’ strikes hard—but never nothin’ like this one. Seems like this kid’s a

hard one. Wants to smash hell out of the men just to see them smash. ... How'd he strike you?"

"I was sorry for him," said Bonbright, simply.

"Sorry?... What's the idea?"

"I—I don't believe he did what people believe. He didn't really have anything to do with the business, you know. He didn't count. ... All the things that he was said to do—he didn't do at all. His father did them and let the men think it was his son."

"Sounds fishy—but if it's so somebody ought to lambaste the old man. He sure got his son in bad. ... What's this I hear about him marryin' some girl and gettin' kicked out?"

"That's true," said Bonbright.

"Huh!... Wonder what he'll do without his pa. Them kind hain't much good, I notice. ... Maybe he's well fixed himself, though."

"He hasn't a cent," said Bonbright.

"Appears like you know a heap about him. ... Maybe you know what he's doin' now?"

"Working."

"Friends give him a soft job?"

"He's working in a—machine shop," said Bonbright.

"G'wan," said the man, incredulously. Then he looked sharply at Bonbright, at his new overalls, back again at his face.

"What's your name?" he asked, suspiciously.

Page 121

“Foote,” said Bonbright.

“*Him*?”

“Yes,” said Bonbright.

The man paused before he spoke, and there was something not kindly that came into his eyes. “Speakin’ perty well of yourself, wasn’t you?” he said, caustically, and, turning his back, he walked away. ... That action cut Bonbright more deeply than any of the few affronts that had been put upon him in his life had cut. He wanted to call the man back and demand that he listen to the truth. He wanted to explain, to set himself right. He wanted that man and all men to know he was not the Bonbright Foote who had brought on the strike and fought it with such vindictive ruthlessness. He wanted to prove that he was innocent, and to wring from them the right to meet and to be received by his fellow laborers as one of themselves. ...

He saw the man stop beside a group, say something, turn, and point to him. Other men turned and stared. Some snickered. Bonbright could not bear it. He jostled his way through the crowd and sought refuge in the shop.

The morning had been a happy one; the afternoon was dismal. He knew he was marked. He saw men pointing at him, whispering about him, and could imagine what they were saying. In the morning he had been received casually as an equal. Nobody had welcomed him, nobody had paid particular attention to him. That was as it should be. He was simply accepted as another workman. ... The attitude of the men was quite the opposite now. He was a sort of museum freak to them. From a distance they regarded him with curiosity, but their manner set him apart from them. He did not belong. He felt their hostility. ... If they had lined up and jeered him Bonbright would not have felt the hurt so much, for there would have been something to arouse his fighting spirit.

One remark he overheard, which stood aptly for the attitude of all. “Well, he’s gettin’ what’s comin’ to him,” was the sentence. It showed him that the reputation his father had given him was his to wear, and that here he would find no friends, scant toleration, probably open hostility. ... He got no pleasure that afternoon from watching his cake of metal move backward and forward with the planer-bed.

When the whistle blew again he hurried out, looking into no man’s face, avoiding contacts. He sneaked away. ... And in his heart burned a hot resentment against the father that had done this thing. ...

CHAPTER XXIII

Such pretense as Bonbright's and Ruth's is possible only to the morbid, the eccentric, or the unhealthy. Neither of them was morbid, neither eccentric, both abundantly well. Ruth saw the failure of it days before Bonbright had even a hint. After Dulac burst in upon her she perceived the game must be brought to an end; that their life of make-believe was weighted with danger for her. She determined to end it—but, ironically enough, to end

Page 122

it meant to enter upon another make-believe existence far harder to live successfully than the first. One can make believe to love on the stage, uttering skillfully the words of an author and carrying out the instructions of a stage director. An audience may be taken in. ... A play is brief. But to begin a spurious love scene which is to last, not twenty minutes, but for a lifetime, is a matter of quite different color. She determined to begin it. ...

But with the sound of Bonbright's footfall on the stairs her resolution vanished. "To-morrow," she whispered to herself, with sudden dread. "To-morrow. ..." And so she put it off from day to day.

In the beginning Bonbright had been optimistic. He had seen her reluctance, her reserves, vanishing in a few days. But they did not vanish. He found himself no nearer his wife than he had been at the beginning. Optimism became hope, hope dwindled, became doubt, uneasy wonder. He could not understand, and it was natural he should not understand. At first he had believed his experience was the experience of all bridegrooms. Days taught him his experience was unique, unnatural. Ruth saw him often now, sitting moodily, eyes on the floor—and she could read his thoughts. Yet he tried to bolster up the pretense. He had given his promise, and he loved Ruth. He could not, would not do as most men would have done. ... What neither of them saw was that pretense had made a sudden change to reality impossible. ...

Bonbright was unhappy at home, unhappy at work. Just as he was outside his wife's real life, so he was excluded from the lives of the men he worked with. He was not, to them, a fellow laborer; he was Bonbright Foote VII. But he made no complaint or appeal to Malcolm Lightener. ... He did not know how unnecessary an appeal to Lightener would be, for Lightener kept himself well acquainted with the facts, watched and waited, and the satisfaction of the automobile king grew and increased.

"He's no squealer," he said to his daughter. "He's taking his medicine without making a face."

"What's the good, dad? It's mean. ... Why don't you take him into the office?"

"We have a testing department," he said. "Every scrap of metal that goes into a car is tested before we use it. ... Bonbright's in the testing department."

"Isn't it possible to keep on testing a piece of metal till it's all used up?" she said.

"H'm!... Suppose you mind your own business," he said, in his gruff, granite way—not rudely nor offensively. "How's his wife? How are they getting along?"

Hilda shook her head. “They’re queer, dad. Somehow I don’t believe things are working out the way they should. I can’t understand *her*.”

“Squabbling?”

“Never. ... Bonbright’s so gentle with her. He has a sort of wistful way with him as soon as she comes near. It makes me want to cry. Somehow he reminds me of a fine, affectionate dog watching a master who doesn’t give back any affection. You know.”

Page 123

“Doesn’t she?”

“Give back affection?... That’s just it. I don’t know. I’ve been there and seen him come home. She acts queerly. As soon as she hears him coming up the stairs she seems to shut up. It’s as if she turned out the lights. ... Where the ordinary girl would be running to kiss him and make a fuss over him she—doesn’t do anything. ... And she keeps watching him. And there’s something in her eyes like—well, like she was blaming herself for something, and was sorry for him. ... She seems, when she’s with him, as if she were trying to make up to him for something—and didn’t know how.”

“Readjustment,” Lightener grunted. “They jumped into the thing kerplunk. Queer start-off.”

“I don’t know. ... She’s a dear—and he’s a dear. ... It isn’t like anything I’ve ever seen. It’s something peculiar.”

“Must be his fault. I told him—”

“It isn’t his fault.” Hilda spoke with certainty. “If you could see him you’d know it. His manner toward her—why, dad, I never saw a man so sweet and gentle and patient.”

“Maybe that’s the trouble. Too much patience is as bad as too much raising the devil.”

“No. ... It’s something.”

She turned to leave the room, when her father called after her: “Bonbright quit chawing castings to-night. He doesn’t know it, but to-morrow he gets a new job. ... Has all of that he needs. Knows how it feels.”

“What’s he going to do now?”

“Nice, light, pleasant job. ... He’ll be passing rear axles—made by his father—down a chute to the assembling track. Bet he’ll need Saint Jacob’s oil on his back to-morrow night. Give his wife a job.”

“Why,” she scolded, for she was on intimate terms with the factory, “that’s common labor. He’ll be working with Wops and Guineas and Polacks.”

He nodded. “If he stands the gaff I’ll ease up on him.”

“If he doesn’t?”

Lightener shrugged his shoulders.

“Dad,” said Hilda, “sometimes you make me *Mad*. ...”

When the factory heard what had become of Bonbright it laughed. Bonbright was aware it laughed, and he set his teeth and labored. Beside what he was doing now the machine shop had been play. Rear axles are not straws to be tossed about lightly. Nor are Wops, Guineas, Polacks, smelling of garlic, looking at one with unintelligent eyes, and clattering to one another in strange tongues, such workfellows as make the day pass more quickly. ...

Bonbright had to pass down a certain number of axles an hour. At definite, brief intervals a fragment of an automobile would move along the assembling track and pause beneath his spout—and his axle must be ready. There was a constant procession of fragments, and a second's delay brought up to his ears pointed commentary from below. ... The more pointed that those below knew who was above them.

Page 124

He worked feverishly. After a while it became acute torture. He felt as if every axle he handled was the last he could manage—but he forced himself to just one more and then just one more—and another. He worked in a daze. Thought-processes seemed to stop. He was just a mechanism for performing certain set acts. The pain was gone—everything was gone but the stabbing necessity for getting another axle on that chute in time. He wanted to stop at a certain stage, but there was something in him which would not allow it. After that he didn't care. "Another. ... Another. ... Another..." his brain sang over and over endlessly. He was wet with perspiration; he staggered under the weights; he was exhausted, but he could not stop. It was as if he were on a treadmill where he had to keep stepping on and on and on whether he could take another step or not. ... After a century the noon whistle blew.

Bonbright did not leave his place. He simply sagged down in his tracks and lay there, eyes shut, panting. Gradually his brain cleared, but he was too weary to move. Then thirst drove him to motion and he dragged himself to the wash room, cramped, aching, and there he drank and sopped himself with cold water. ... So this was what men did to live! No wonder men were dissatisfied; no wonder men formed unions and struck and rioted!... Bonbright was getting in an efficient school the point of view of the laborer.

In the afternoon Malcolm Lightener stood and watched Bonbright, though Bonbright did not see, for he was working in a red haze again, unconscious of everything but that insistent demand in his brain for "another. ... Another. ... Another. ..." Lightener watched, granite face expressionless, and then walked away.

Bonbright did not hear the evening whistle. He placed another axle on the chute, but no one was below to take it. He wondered dimly what was the matter. ... A Guinea from the next chute regarded him curiously, then walked over and touched his shoulder with dirty hand, and wafted garlic in his face. "Time for quit," said the man.

Bonbright sat down where he was. It was over. That day was over. Not another axle, not another, not another. He laid his head against the chute and shut his eyes. ... Presently he staggered to his feet and walked blindly to the stairway. At the bottom stood Malcolm Lightener, not there by accident, but with design to test Bonbright's metal to the utmost. He placed himself there for Bonbright to see, to give Bonbright opportunity to beg off, to *squeal*.

Bonbright, shoulders drooping, legs dragging, face drawn, eyes burning, would have passed him without recognition, without caring who it was he passed, but that did not suit Lightener's purpose.

"Well, Bonbright?" he said.

Sudden fire flashed in Bonbright's brain. He stopped, and with the knuckles of a hand that was torn and blistered and trembling, he knocked on Lightener's broad chest as he

would have knocked on a door that refused to open. “Damn your axles,” he said, thickly. “I can get them there—another—and another—and another—and another. ... They’re too slow below. ... Make ’em come faster. I can keep up. ...” And all the time he was rapping on Lightener’s chest.

Page 125

He was conscious of what he did and said, but he did not do and say it of his own volition. He was like a man who dimly sees and hears another man. Subconsciously he was repeating: "Not another one till to-morrow. ... Not another one till to-morrow. ..."

Abruptly he turned away from Lightener and, setting down each foot heavily with a clump, he plodded toward the wash room. He was going to rest. He was going to feel cool water on his head and his neck; he was going to revel in cool water... and then he would sleep. *Sleep*! He made toward sleep as one lost in the desert would make toward a spring of sweet water. ...

Lightener stood and looked after Bonbright. His granite face did not alter; no light or shade passed over it. Not even in his gray eyes could a hint of his thoughts be read. Simply he stood and looked after Bonbright, outwardly as emotionless as a block of the rock that he resembled. Then he walked to his office, sat down at his desk, selected and lighted a cigar, and tilted back in his chair.

"There's something to that Bonbright Foote formula," he said to himself. "It's all wrong, but it could produce *that*."

Then, after a few moments of puffing and of studying the thing, he said: "We'll see if he comes back to-morrow. ... If he *does* come back—"

At home that evening Hilda asked him about Bonbright. He was ashamed to confess to her what he had done to the boy—yet he was proud of having done it. To his own granite soul it was right to subject men to such tests, but women would not understand. He knew his daughter would think him a brute, and he did not want his daughter to think any such thing. "If he comes back in the morning—" he promised.

Bonbright came back in the morning, though he had been hardly able to drag himself out of bed. It was not strength of body that brought him, but pure will. He came, looking forward to the day as a man might look down into hell-but he came. "I'll show *them*," he said, aloud, at the breakfast table, as he forced himself to drink a cup of coffee. Ruth did not understand. She did not understand what was wrong with him; feared he was on the verge of an illness. He had come home the night before, scarcely speaking to her, and had gone directly to bed. She supposed he was in his room preparing for dinner, but when she went to call him she found him fast asleep, moaning and muttering uneasily.

"What did you say?" she asked, uneasily.

"Didn't know I spoke," he said, and winced as he moved his shoulders. But he knew what he had said——that he would show *them*. It wasn't Malcolm Lightener he was going to show, but the men—his fellow laborers. The thing that lay in his mind was that

he must prove himself to be their equal, capable of doing what they could do. He wanted their respect—wanted it pitifully.

Page 126

Ruth watched him anxiously as he left the apartment. She knew things were not well with him and that he needed something a true wife should give. First, he needed to tell some one about it. He had not told he If ah had been inside his life, where she belonged, he must have told her. Second, he needed her sympathy, her mothering. ... She might have been able to give him that—after a fashion. ... She felt how it should be done, knew how she would have done it if only she loved him. "I could be the right kind of a wife," she said, wistfully. "I know I could. ..."

Bonbright went doggedly to his place at the mouth of the chute and was ready with the whistle, an axle poised to slide downward to the assembling car below. He was afraid—afraid he would not be able to get through the day—absurdly afraid and ashamed of his physical weakness. If he should play out!...

A boy tapped him on the shoulder. "You're wanted in the office," he heard.

"I've got to—keep up," he said, dully. "Cars are coming along below," he explained, carefully, "and I've got to get the axles to them."

"Here's a man to take your place," said the boy—and so strange is man created in God's image!—he did not want to go. He wanted to see it through till he dropped.

"If you keep the boss waiting—" said the boy, ominously.

Bonbright walked painfully to Lightener's office.

"Well?" said Lightener.

"I can do it—I'll harden to it," Bonbright said.

"Huh!... Take off those overalls. ... Boy, go to Mr. Foote's locker and fetch his things. ..."

"Am—am I discharged?"

"No," said Lightener, bestowing no word of commendation. Men had little commendation from him by word of mouth. He let actions speak for him. When he gave a man a task to perform that man knew he was being complimented. ... But he knew it in no other way.

"That's the way a laborer feels," said Lightener. ... "You got it multiplied. That's because you had to jam his whole life's experience into a day. ..."

"Poor devils!" said Bonbright.

"I'm going to put you in the purchasing department—after that, if you make good—into the sales end. ... Able to go ahead to-day?"

“Yes.”

“Before you amount to a darn as a business man you’ve got to know how to buy. ... That’s the foundation. You’ve got to be able to buy right. Then you’ve got to learn how to make. Selling is easiest of all—and there are darn few real salesmen. If you can buy, you can do anything.”

“I—I would rather stay out of the shops, Mr. Lightener. The men— found out who I was...I’d like to stay there till they—forget it.”

“You’ll go where I put you. Men enough in the purchasing department. Got a tame anarchist there, I hear, and a Mormon, and a Hindu, and a single-taxer. All kinds. After hours. From whistle to whistle they *buy*.”

Page 127

Lightener took Bonbright personally to his new employment and left him. But Bonbright was not satisfied. Once before he had sought contact with men who labored, and he had landed in a cell in police headquarters. That had been mere boyish curiosity to find what it was all about. Now his desire to know was real. He had been—very briefly, it is true—one of them. Now he wanted to know. He wanted to know how they thought, and why they thought that way. He wanted to understand their attitude toward themselves, toward one another, toward the class they largely denominated as Capital. He had caught snatches of conversation—interesting to him, but none had talked to him. He wanted to get on a footing with them which would permit him to listen, and to talk. He wanted to hear arguments. He wanted to go into their homes and see their wives and find out what their wives thought. ... All this had been brought to him by a few days in overalls. He had no idea that Lightener had intended it should be brought to him. ...

However, that must lie in the future; his present business was to do as he was told and to earn his wages. He must earn his wages, for he had a family to support. ... It was his first experience with the ever-present fear of the wage earner—the fear of losing his job.

But he determined to know the men, and planned accordingly. With that end in view, instead of lunching with men in his department, he went to the little hash house across the road to drink vile coffee and rub elbows with laborers in greasy overalls. He would go there every day; he would seek other opportunities of contact. ... Now that he felt the genuine, sympathetic hunger for an understanding of them and their problems, he would not rest until it was his. ...

CHAPTER XXIV

Bonbright found himself a layman in a department of specialists. On all sides of him were men who knew all about something, a few who knew a great deal about several things, and a man or two who appeared to have some knowledge of every element and article that went into a motor car. There was a man who knew leather from cow to upholstery, and who talked about it lovingly. This man had the ability to make leather as interesting as the art of Benvenuto Cellini. Another was a specialist in hickory, and thought and talked spokes; another was a reservoir of dependable facts about rubber; another about gray iron castings; another about paints and enamels, and so on. In that department it would not have been impossible to compile an encyclopedia.

It was impossible that Bonbright should not have been interested. It was not business, it was a fascinating, enthralling debating society, where the debates were not of the “Resolved that the world would be better” sort, but were as to the essential qualities of concrete things. It was practical debate which saved money and elevated the standards of excellence.

Page 128

The department had its own laboratories, its own chemists, its own engineers. Everything was tested. Two articles might appear to the layman equal in virtue; careful examination by experts might not disclose a difference between them, but the skill of the chemist would show that this article was a tenth of one per cent, less guilty of alloy than that, or that the breaking strength of this was a minute fraction greater than that. ... So decisions were reached.

Bonbright was to learn that price did not always rule. He saw orders given for carloads of certain supplies which tested but a point or two higher than its rival—and sold for dollars more a ton. Thousands of dollars were paid cheerfully for those few points of excellence. ... Here was business functioning as he did not know business could function. Here business was an art, and he applied himself to it like an artist. Here he could lay aside that growing discontent, that dissatisfaction, that was growing upon him. Here, in the excitement of distinguishing the better from the worse, he could forget Ruth and the increasingly impracticable condition of his relations with her.

He had come to a realization that his game of make-believe would not march. He realized that Ruth either was his wife or she was not. ... But he did not know what to do about it. It seemed a problem without a solution, and it was—for him. Its solution did not lie in himself, but in his wife. Bonbright could not set the thing right; his potentiality lay only for its destruction. Three courses lay open to him; to assert his husbandship; to send Ruth home to her mother; or to put off till to-morrow and to-morrow and still another to-morrow. Only in the last did hope reside, and he clung to hope. ...

He tried to conceal his unrest, his discontent, his rebellion against the thing that was, from Ruth. He continued to be patient, gentle. ... He did not know how she wept and accused herself because of that gentleness and patience. He did not know how she tried to compel love by impact of will—and how she failed. But he did come to doubt her love. He could not do otherwise. Then he wondered why she had married him, and, reviewing the facts of his hurried marriage, he wondered the more with bitterness and heartache. Against his will his affairs were traveling toward a climax. The approaching footsteps of the day when something must happen were audible on the path.

The day after his installation in the purchasing department he lunched at the little hash house across the street. Sitting on his high stool, he tried to imagine he was a part of that sweating, gulping crowd of men, that he was one of them, and not an outsider, suspected, regarded with unfriendly looks.

Behind him a man began to make conversation for Bonbright's ears. It had happened before.

"The strike up to the Foote plant's on its last legs," said the man, loudly.

Page 129

“So I hear,” answered another.

“Infernal shame. If it was only the closed-shop question I dunno’s I’d feel so. We’re open shop here—but we git treated like human bein’s. ... Over there—” The man shrugged his shoulders. “Look at the way they’ve fought the strike. Don’t blame ’em for fightin’ it. Calc’late they had to fight it, but there’s fightin’ and fightin’. ... Seems like this Foote bunch set out to do the worst that could be done—and they done it.”

“Wonder when it ’ll peter out—the strike?”

“Back’s busted now. Nothin’s holding it up but that man Dulac. There’s a man for you! I’ve knowed labor leaders I didn’t cotton to nor have much confidence in——fellers that jest wagged their tongues and took what they could get out of it. But this Dulac—he’s a reg’lar man. I’ve listened to him, and I tell you he means what he says. He’s in it to git somethin’ for the other feller. ... But he can’t hold out much longer.”

It was true; Dulac could not hold out much longer. That very noon he was fighting with his back against the wall. In Workingman’s Hall he was making his last fierce fight to hold from crumbling the resolution of the strikers who still stood by their guns. ... He threw the fire of his soul into their dull, phlegmatic faces. It struck no answering spark. Never before had he spoken to men without a consciousness of his powers, without pose, without dramatics. Now he was himself, and more dramatic, more compelling than ever before. ... He pleaded, begged, flayed his audience, but it did not respond to his pleadings nor writhe under the whip of his words. It was apathetic, stolid. In its weary heart it knew what it was there to do, and it would do it in spite of Dulac. ... He would not admit it. He would not submit to defeat. He talked on and on, not daring to stop, for with the stoppage of his harangue he heard the death of the strike. It lived only with his voice.

In the body of the hall a man, haggard of face, arose.

“’Tain’t no use, Mr. Dulac,” he said, dully. “We’ve stuck by you—”

“You’ve stuck by yourselves,” Dulac cried.

“Whatever you say. ... But’tain’t no use. We’re licked. Hain’t no use keepin’ up and stretchin’ out the sufferin’. ... I hain’t the least of the sufferers, Mr. Dulac—my wife hain’t with me no more.” The dull voice wabbled queerly. “There’s hunger and grief and sufferin’— willin’ly endured when there was a chance—but there hain’t no chance. ... ’Tain’t human to ask any more of our wirnmin and children. ... It’s them I’m a-thinkin’ of, Mr. Dulac... and on account of them I say this strike ought to quit. It’s got to quit, and I demand a vote on it, Mr. Dulac.”

“Vote!... Vote!... Vote!...” roared up to Dulac from all over the hall. ... It was the end. He was powerless to stay the rush of the desire of those weary men for peace.

Page 130

Dulac turned slowly around, his back to the crowd, walked to a chair, and, with elbows on knees, he covered his face with his hands. There was a silence, as men looked at him and appreciated his suffering. They appreciated his suffering because they appreciated the man, his honesty to their cause, and to his work. He had been true to them. For himself he would gain nothing by the success of the strike—for them he would have gained much. ... It was not his loss that bowed his head, but their loss—-and they knew it. He was a Messiah whose mission had failed.

The vote was put. There was no dissenting voice. The strike was done, and Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, was victor.

Men clustered about Dulac, wringing his hands, speaking words of comfort with voices that broke, and the number of those who turned away with tears was greater than of those whose eyes could remain dry.

Dulac spoke. “We’ll try again-men. ... We’ll start to get ready—to-day—for another—-fight.”

Then, hurriedly, blindly, he forced his way through them and made his way out of the hall. Grief, the heaviness of defeat, was all that he could feel now. Bitterness would come in its time.

Dulac was a soul without restraints, a soul in eternal uproar. His life had been one constant kicking against the pricks, and when they hurt his feet he was not schooled to stifle the cry of pain. He could not endure patiently and in silence; the tumult of his suffering must have an outlet.

Now was the time for an overwrought, overtired man, clothed in no restraint, to try what surcease was to be found in the bottom of a glass. But Dulac was not a drinking man. So he walked. As he walked bitterness awoke, and he cursed under his breath. Bitterness increased until it was rage, and, as man is so constituted that rage must have a definite object, Dulac unconsciously sought a man who would symbolize all the forces that had defeated him—and he chose Bonbright Foote. He chose Bonbright the more readily because he hated the boy for personal reasons. If Dulae and Bonbright had met at this moment there would have happened events which would have delighted the yellower press. But they did not meet. Bonbright was safe in Lightener’s purchasing department, learning certain facts about brass castings.

So Dulac walked and walked, and lashed himself into rage. Rage abated and became biting disappointment and unspeakable heaviness of heart. Again rage would be conjured up only to ebb again and to flood again as the hours went by.

There is an instinct in man which, when his troubles become too weighty to bear alone, sends him to a woman. Perhaps this is the survival of an idea implanted in childhood

when baby runs to mother for sure comfort with broken doll or bruised thumb. It persists and never dies, so that one great duty, one great privilege, one great burden of womankind is to give ear to man's outpourings of his woes, and to offer such comfort as she may. ...

Page 131

Dulac was drawn to Ruth.

This time she did not try to close the door against him. His first words made that impossible.

“I’m—beaten,” he said, dully.

His flamboyance, his threatricality, was gone. He was no longer flashily masterful, no longer exotically fascinating. He sagged. ... He was just a soul-weary, disappointed man, looking at her out of hollow, burning eyes. He had spent himself magnificently into bankruptcy. His face was the face of a man who must rest, who must find peace. ... Yet he was not consciously seeking rest or peace. He was seeking her. ... Seeking her because he craved her, and seeking her to strike at her husband, who had become a symbol of all the antagonists he had been fighting.

His appearance disarmed her; her fear of him and herself was lured away by the appearance of him. She felt nothing but sympathy and tenderness and something of wonder that he—Dulac the magnificent— should be brought to this pass. So she admitted him, regardless even of the lateness of the afternoon hour.

He followed her heavily and sank into a chair.

“You’re sick,” she said, anxiously.

He shook his head. “I’m—beaten,” he repeated, and in truth beaten was what he looked, beaten and crushed. ... “But I’ll—try again,” he said, with a trace of the old gleam in his eyes.

She clasped and unclasped her hands, standing before him, white with the emotions that swayed her. ... Here was the man she loved in his bitterest, darkest moment—and she was barred away from him by unwelcome barriers. She could not soothe him, she could not lighten his suffering with the tale of her love for him, but she must remain mute, holding out no hand to ease his pain.

“I came for you,” he said, dully.

“No,” she said.

“Ruth—I need you—now. ...” This man, who had wooed her boldly, had demanded her masterfully, now was brought to pleading. He needed her. It was plain that he did need her, and, realizing it, she saw the danger of it. It was a new, a subtle attack, and it had taken her unawares.

“I can’t. ... I can’t. ... I mustn’t...” she said, breathlessly.

“I must have you,” he said, with dead simplicity, as one states a bare, essential fact. Then Bonbright was visualized before him, and rage flooded once more. “He sha’n’t keep you!... You’re mine—you were mine first. ... What is he to you? I’m going to take you away from him. ... I can do *that*. ...”

He was less dangerous so. Perhaps instinct told him, for his passion stilled itself, and he became tired, pitiful again.

“We’ve got a right to be happy,” he said, in his tired voice. “You’re not happy—and I’m—beaten. ... I want you—I need you. ... You’ll come with me. You’ve got to come with me.”

Page 132

She was moved, swayed. He needed her. ... She had cheated Bonbright in the beginning. She was not his wife. ... He had none of her love, and she believed this man had it wholly. ... She had wronged Bonbright all she could wrong him—what would this matter? It was not this that was wrong, but the other—the marrying without love. ... And she, too, was beaten. She had played her game and lost, not going down to defeat fighting as Dulac had gone down, but futilely, helplessly. She had given herself for the Cause—to no profit. ... And her heart yearned for peace, for release.

“I’m his wife,” she said, still struggling flutteringly.

“You’re *my* wife.” He lifted his arms toward her, and she swayed, took a step toward him—a step toward the precipice. Suddenly she stopped, eyes startled, a deeper pallor blighting her face—for she heard Bonbright’s step on the stairs. ... She had forgotten the lateness of the hour.

“Oh’.” she said.

“What is it?”

“*He* is—here.”

She was awakened by the shock of it, and saw, saw clearly. She had stood upon the brink—and *he* had come in time. ... And then she was afraid.

Neither of them spoke. Dulac got to his feet, his breath coming audibly, and so they waited.

Bonbright opened the door. “Ruth,” he called, putting what pretense of gayety he could into his voice. “You’ve got company. The chronic visitor is here.” He was playing his game bravely.

She did not answer.

“Ruth,” he called again, and then stood in the door. She could not see him, but she felt his presence, felt his silence, felt the look of surprise changing to suspicion that she knew must be in his eyes.

For a moment he stood motionless, not comprehending. Then the attitude of his wife and of Dulac spoke eloquently, and he whitened.

“I don’t understand,” he said. The words were meaningless, pointless, perhaps, but they stabbed Ruth to the heart. She turned to him, saw him step forward slowly, looking very tall, older than she had ever known him. He had drawn within himself, and there manifested itself his inheritance from his ancestors. He was like his father, but with an even more repressed dignity than was his father’s.

“You don’t understand,” snarled Dulac. “Then I’ll tell you. I’m glad you came. ... I’m after your wife. She’s going away with me.”

“No. ... No...” Ruth whispered.

“Be still. ... She’s mine, Foote—and always was. You thought she was yours—well, she’s one thing you can’t have. I’m going to tell you why she married you. ...”

Ruth cried out in incoherent fright, protesting.

Page 133

“She married you to use you. ... Not even for your money. She married you because her heart was with the men your kind is grinding down. ... She saw you were the kind of man a woman could twist around her finger—and you owned five thousand men. ... Get the idea?... She was going to do things for them—with you. You were nothing but a button she would push. So she married you—and you cheated her. ... So she’s done with you. You can’t give what she paid for, and she’s going away with me. ... She *loves* me. She was promised to marry me—when she saw what she could do with you—and I let her go. ... If she could give, so could I. ... But I loved her and she loved me—and we’re going away.”

It was true. Bonbright knew it was true, but he would not admit his belief until he had confirmation from his wife’s lips.

“Is this true?” he asked, quietly.

She was shaking with sobs, crouching against the wall.

“Don’t be afraid,” Bonbright said again, in a strange, quiet, courteous voice. “Is it true?”

“Yes,” she whispered, for she could not lie with his eyes upon her.

“I knew there was—something,” he said, with a little halt in his voice. ... That was all. He did not look at Dulac, but stood looking at her for a moment steadily, almost with grave inquiry. ... She looked from him to Dulac. Subconsciously she compared them. ... Bonbright did not speak again, but turned slowly and walked steadily out of the room. ... Ruth heard the outer door close behind him and knew he was gone. ... Gone!

Dulac laughed shortly. “That settled *him*,” he said. “Now you’ll come.”

She stood regarding him as she might have regarded some strangely endowed person she had never seen before. Then with a sudden, passionate vehemence she burst out upon him:

“Never. ... Never. ... I’ll never go with you. I’m his wife—his wife. ... Oh, what have you done?... I hate you—I hate you! Don’t ever dare—come near me again. ... I hate you. ...”

She turned and fled to her room and locked the door. Though he knocked and called, though he pleaded and threatened, she made no reply, but sat dry-eyed, on her bed, until she heard him go away raging. ...

CHAPTER XXV

Hilda Lightener's electric stopped before the apartment house where Bonbright Foote lived, and Hilda alighted. She ignored bell and speaking tube and ran upstairs to Bonbright's door, on which she knocked as a warning. Then she opened the door and called: "It's me. Anybody home?"

Nobody replied. She called again, and walked into the little living room where Ruth and Bonbright and Dulac had faced one another an hour before. ... She called again. This time she heard a sound, muffled, indistinct, but recognizable as a sob.

"Ruth!" she called, and went to the bedroom door. Now she could hear Ruth within, sobbing alarmingly.

Page 134

“Ruth Foote,” said Hilda, “what’s the matter?... Where’s Bonbright?... I’m coming in.”

She opened the door, saw Ruth outstretched on the bed, face buried in her pillow, sobbing with a queer, startling dryness. It was not the sob of a woman in an attack of nerves, not the sob of a woman merely crying to rest herself, nor the sob of a bride who has had a petty quarrel with her husband. It was different, alarmingly different. There was despair in it. It told of something seriously awry, of stark tragedy.

Hilda’s years were not many, but her intuition was sure. She did not demand explanations, did not command Ruth to stop crying and tell what ailed her, but sat down quietly on the bed and stroked the sobbing girl’s hair, crooning over her softly. “There!... There!...”

Gradually the tenseness, the dry, racking, tearing quality of Ruth’s sobs, softened, ameliorated. Presently she was crying, quietly, pitifully. ... Hilda breathed with relief. She did not know that for an hour Ruth had sat on the edge of her bed, still, tearless, staring blindly before her—her soul drying up and burning within her for lack of tears. She had been unable to cry. She had uttered no sound until Hilda’s voice came in to her. Then she had thrown herself prone in that paroxysm of wrenching sobs. ...

“There!... There!...” Hilda crooned.

Ruth’s hand crept out fumblingly, found Hilda’s dress, and clutched it. Hilda laid her warm hand over Ruth’s cold fingers—and waited.

“He’s—gone,” Ruth sobbed, presently.

“Never mind, honey. ... Never mind, now.”

Ruth mumbled incoherently. After a time she raised herself on her arms and crouched beside Hilda, who put her arms around her and held her close, as she would have held a troubled child.

“You’ll—despise me,” Ruth whispered.

“I guess not.” Hilda pressed Ruth’s slenderness against her more robust body reassuringly. “I don’t despise folks, as a rule. ... Want to talk now?”

She saw that the time for speech had come.

“He won’t-come back. ... I saw it in his eyes.”

“Who won’t come back, dear?”

“Bonbright.” Ruth drew a shuddering breath. Then haltingly, whimperingly, sobs interrupting, she talked. She could not tell it fast enough. It must be told, her mind must be relieved, and the story, pent up so long within her, rushed forth in a flood of despairing, self-accusing words. It came in snatches, fragments, as high lights of suffering flashed upon her mind. She did not start at the beginning logically and carry through—but the thing as a whole was there. Hilda had only to sort it and reassemble it to get the pitiful tale complete.

“You—you don’t mean you married Bonbright like some of those Russian nihilist persons one hears about—just to use him and your position— for some socialist or anarchist thing? You’re not serious, Ruth?... Such things aren’t.”

Page 135

“I—I’d do *that* again,” she said. “It was right—to do that—for the good of all those men. ... It’s not that—but the rest—not keeping to my bargain—and—Dulac. I would have—gone with him.”

Hilda shook her head. “Not farther than the door,” she said. “You couldn’t—not after Bonbright has been such—such an idiotic angel about you.”

“I would have—*then*.”

“But you wouldn’t now?”

“I—I can’t bear to *think* of him. ...”

“Um!...” Hilda’s expressive syllable was very like her father’s. It was her way of saying, “I see, and I’ll bet you don’t see, and I’m not surprised particularly, but you’ll be surprised when you find it out.” It said all that—to Hilda’s satisfaction.

“He’s been gone hours,” Ruth said, plaintively, and Hilda understood her to refer to Bonbright.

“Time he was coming back, then,” she said.

“He—won’t come back—ever. ... You don’t know him the way I do.” There was something very like jealousy in Ruth’s tone. “He’s good— and gentle—but if he makes up his mind—If he hadn’t been that way do you think he could have-lived with me the way he *has*?”

“He must have loved you a heap,” Hilda said, enviously.

“He did. ... Oh, Hilda, it wasn’t wrong to marry him for what I did. ... I hadn’t any right to consider him—or me. I hadn’t, had I?”

“I don’t belong,” said Hilda. “If I wasn’t a wicked capitalist I might agree with you—-*maybe*. I’m not going to scold you for it— because you *thought* it was right, and that always makes the big difference. ... You thought you were doing something splendid, didn’t you—and then it fizzled. It must have been tough—I can get that part of it. ... To find you’d married him and couldn’t get out of it —and that he didn’t have any thousands of men to—tinker with. ... Especially when you loved Mr. Dulac.” Hilda added the last sentence with shrewd intent.

“I don’t love him—I don’t. ... If you’d seen him—and Bonbright...”

“But you did love him,” Hilda said, severely Ruth nodded dumbly.

“You’re sure Bonbright won’t come back?”

“Never,” said Ruth.

“Then you’d better go after him.”

Ruth did not answer. She was calmer now, more capable of rational thought. What *should* she do? What was to be done with this situation?... Her brief married life had been a nightmare with a nightmare’s climax; she could not bear a return to that. Her husband was gone. She was free of him, free of her dread of the day when she must face realities with him. ... And Bonbright—she felt certain he would not want her to run after him, that, somehow, it would lower her even farther in his eyes if she did so. There was a certain dignity attaching to him that she dared not violate, and to run after him would violate it. There would, of necessity, be a scene. She would have to explain,

Page 136

beg, promise—lie. She did not believe she could lie to him again—nor that she could make him believe a lie. ... Pretense between them had become an impossibility. ... She wanted him to know she had not gone with Dulac, would not go with Dulac. It seemed to her she could not bear to have him think *that* of her. She had made his love impossible, but she craved his respect. That was all. ... She was freed from him—and it was better so. The phase of it that she did not analyze was why her heart ached so. She did not study into that.

"I don't want him—back," she said to Hilda. "It would be just like it was—before."

"What *are* you going to do, then? You've got to do something."

"I don't know. ... Why must I do something? Why can't I just wait— and let him do what —whatever is done?"

"Because—if I know anything about Bonbright—he won't do a thing. ... He'll just step aside quietly and make no fuss. I'm afraid he's— hurt. And he's been hurt so much before."

"I'm—sorry." The words sounded weak, ineffectual. They did not express her feelings, her remorse, her self-accusation.

"Sorry?... You haven't cut a dance with him, you know, or kept him waiting while you did your hair. ... You've more or less messed up his life. Yes, you have. There isn't any use mincing words. Your motives may have been lofty and noble and all that sort of thing— from your point of view. But *his* point of view is what I'm thinking about now. ... Sorry!"

"Don't scold. I can't—bear it. I can't bear anything more. ... Please go away. I know you despise me. Leave me alone. Go away..."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. You're all upset-and you deserve a heap more than scolding. ... But I like you." Hilda was always direct. "You're more or less of a little idiot, with your insane notions and your Joan of Arc silliness, but I like you. You're not fit to be left alone. I'm in charge. ... So go and dabble cold water on your eyes, so you don't look like Nazimova in the last act, and come along with. me. We'll take a drive, and then I'm coming back to stay all night with you. ... Yes, I am," she said, with decision, as Ruth started to object. "You do what I say."

Hilda drove Ruth to her own house. "I've got to tell mother I'm going to stay with you," she said. "Will you come in?"

"No—please," Ruth answered.

“I won’t be but a jiffy, then.” And Hilda left Ruth alone in the electric. Alone! Suddenly Ruth was afraid of being alone. She was thankful for Hilda, thankful Hilda was going to see her through.

Hilda’s father and mother were in the library.

“Thought you were going some place with Bonbright and his wife,” said Malcolm Lightener.

“Dad,” said Hilda, with characteristic bluntness and lack of preface, “they’re in a dickens of a mess.”

“Bonbright?”

Page 137

“And Ruth.”

“Huh! ...” Lightener’s grunt seemed to say that it was nothing but what he expected. “Well—go ahead.”

Hilda went ahead. Her father punctuated her story with sundry grunts, her mother with exclamations of astonishment and sorrow. Hilda told the whole story from the beginning, and when she was done she said: “There it is. You wouldn’t believe it. And, dad, Bonbright Foote’s an angel. A regular angel with wings.”

“Sometimes it’s mighty hard to tell the difference between an angel and a damn fool,” said Lightener. “I suppose you want me to mix into it. Well, I won’t.”

“You haven’t been asked,” said Hilda. “I’m doing the mixing for this family. I just came to tell you I am going to stay all night with Ruth—and to warn you not to mix in. You’d do it with a sledge hammer. I don’t suppose it’s any use telling you to keep your hands off—for you won’t. But I wish you would.”

“You’ll get your wish,” he said.

“I won’t,” she answered.

“Poor Bonbright,” Mrs. Lightener said, “it does seem as if about every misfortune had happened to him that can happen. ... And he can’t go to his mother for sympathy.”

“He isn’t the kind to go to anybody for sympathy,” said Lightener.

“Then don’t you go to him with any,” said Hilda.

“I told you I wasn’t going to have anything to do with it.”

“I haven’t any patience with that girl,” said Mrs. Lightener. “Such notions! Wherever did she get them? ... It’s all a result of this Votes for Women and clubs studying sociology and that. When I was a girl—”

“You wore hoop skirts, mammy,” said Hilda, “and if you weren’t careful when you sat down folks saw too much stocking. ... Don’t go blaming Ruth too much. She thought she was doing something tremendous.”

“I calc’late she was,” said Malcolm Lightener, “when you come to think of it. ... Too bad all cranks can’t put the backbone they use in flub dub to some decent use. I sort of admire ’em.”

“Father!” expostulated Mrs. Lightener.

“You’ve got to. They back their game to the limit. ... This little girl did. ... Tough on Bonbright, though.”

Hilda walked to the door; there she stopped, and said over her shoulder: “Tell you what I think. I think she’s mighty hard in love with him—and doesn’t know it.”

“Rats!” said her father, elegantly.

At that moment Bonbright was writing a letter to his wife. It was a difficult letter, which he had started many times, but had been unable to begin as it should be begun. ... He did not want to hurt her; he did not want her to misunderstand; so he had to be very clear, and write very carefully what was in his heart. It was a sore heart, but, strangely, there was no bitterness in it toward Ruth. He found that strange himself, and marveled at it. He did not want to betray his misery to her—for that would hurt her, he knew. He did not want

Page 138

to accuse. All he wanted to do was to do what he could to set matters right for her. For him matters could never be set right again. It was the end. ... The way of its coming had been a shock, but that the end had come was not such a shock. He perceived now that he had been gradually preparing himself for it. He saw that the life they had been living could have ended in nothing but a crash of happiness. ... He admitted now that he had been afraid of it almost since the beginning. ...

“My Dear Ruth,” he wrote. Then he stopped again, unable to find a beginning.

“I am writing because that will be easier for both of us,” he wrote— and then scratched it out, for it seemed to strike a personal note. He did not want to be personal, to allow any emotion to creep in.

“It is necessary to make some arrangements,” he began once more. That was better. Then, “I know you will not have gone away yet.” That meant away with Dulac, and she would so understand it. “I hope you will consent to stay in the apartment. Everything there, of course, is yours. It is not necessary for us to discuss money. I will attend to that carefully. In this state a husband must be absent from his wife for a year before she can be released from him. I ask you to be patient for that time.” That was all of it. There was nothing more to say. He read it, and it sounded bald, cold, but he could not better it.

At the end he wrote, “Yours sincerely,” scratched it out, and wrote, “Yours truly,” scratched that out, and contented himself by affixing merely his name. Then he copied the whole and dispatched it to his wife by messenger.

It arrived just after Ruth and Hilda returned.

“It’s from him,” said Ruth.

“Open it, silly, and see what he says.”

“I’m afraid. ...”

Hilda stamped her foot. “Give it to me, then,” she said.

Ruth held the note to her jealously. She opened it slowly, fearfully, and read the few words it contained.

“Oh...” she said, and held it out to Hilda. She had seen nothing but the bareness, the coldness of it.

“It’s perfect,” said Hilda. “It’s *Bonbright*. He didn’t slop over—he was trying not to slop over, but there’s love in every letter, and heartache in every word of it. ... And you couldn’t love him. Wish *I* had the chance.”

“You—you will have,” said Ruth, faintly.

“If I do,” said Hilda, shortly, “you bet I *won’t waste* it.”

CHAPTER XXVI

Hilda knew her father. He could not keep his hands off any matter that interested him, and most matters did interest him. He had grown to have an idea that he could take hold of almost any sort of tangle or enterprise or concern and straighten it out. Probably it was because he was so exceedingly human. ... Therefore he was drawn irresistibly to his purchasing department and to Bonbright Foote.

Page 139

“Young man,” he said, gruffly, “what’s this I hear?”

Bonbright looked up inquiringly.

“Come over here.” Lightener jerked his head toward a private spot for conversation. “About you and that little girl,” he said.

“I would rather not talk about it,” said Bonbright, slowly.

“But I’m going to talk about it. It’s nonsense. ...”

Bonbright looked very much like his father; tall, patrician, coldly dignified. “Mr. Lightener,” he said, “it is a thing we will not mention—now or later.” Seven generations contributed to that answer and to the manner of it. It was final. It erected a barrier past which even Malcolm Lightener could not force his way, and Lightener recognized it.

“Huh!...” he grunted, nonplused, made suddenly ill at ease by this boy. For a moment he looked at Bonbright, curiously, appraisingly, then turned on his heel and walked away.

“Young spriggins put me in my place,” he said to Mrs. Lightener that evening. “I wish I knew how to do it—valuable. Made me feel like he was a total stranger and I’d been caught in his hen house. ... That Bonbright Foote business isn’t all bad by a darn sight.”

From that day Bonbright tried to work himself into forgetfulness. Work was the only object and refuge of his life, and he gave himself to it wholly. It was interesting work, and it kept him from too much thinking about himself. ... If a man has ability and applies himself as Bonbright did, he will attract notice. In spite of his identity Bonbright did attract notice from his immediate superiors. It was more difficult for him, being who he was, to win commendation than it would have been for an unmarked young man in the organization. That was because even the fairest-minded man is afraid he will be tempted into showing favoritism—and so withholds justice. ... But he forced it from his laborers-not caring in the least if he had it or not. And word of his progress mounted to Malcolm Lightener.

His craving for occupation was not satisfied with eight hours a day spent in the purchasing department. It was his evenings that he feared, so he filled them with study—study of the manufacture of the automobile. Also he studied men. Every noon saw him in the little hash house; every evening, when he could arrange it so, saw him with some interested employee, boss, department boss, or somebody connected with Malcolm Lightener’s huge plant, pumping them for information and cataloguing and storing it away in his mind. He tried to crowd Ruth out of his mind by filling it so full of automobile there would be no room for her. ... But she hid in unexpected crannies, and stepped forth to confront him disconcertingly.

Gradually the laboring men changed their attitude toward him and tolerated him. Some of them even liked him. He listened to their talk, and tried to digest it. Much he saw to call for his sympathy, much that they considered vital he could not agree with; he could not, even in a majority of things, adapt his point of view to theirs. For he was developing a point of view.

Page 140

On that evening when he had gone down to see what a mob was like he had no point of view, only curiosity. He had leaned neither toward his father's striking employees nor against them. ... His attitude was much the same now—with a better understanding of the problems involved. He was not an ultracapitalist, like his father, nor a radical like Dulac. ... One thing he believed, and that was in the possibility of capital and labor being brought to see through the same eyes. He believed the strife between them, which had waged from tune immemorial, was not necessary, and could be eliminated. ... But as yet he had no cure for the trouble.

He did not lean to socialism. He was farther away from that theory than he was from his father's beliefs. He belonged by training and by inheritance to the group of employers of labor and utilizers of capital. ... Against radicalism he had a bitter grievance. Radicalism had given him his wife—for reasons which he heard expressed by laboring men every day. He had no patience with fanaticism; on the other hand, he had little patience with bigotry and intolerance. His contact with the other side was bringing no danger of his conversion. ... But he was doing what he never could have done as heir apparent to the Foote dynasty—he was asserting in thought his individuality and forming individual opinions. ... His education was being effectively rounded out.

News of the wrecking of Bonbright's domestic craft came to his father quickly, carried, as might have been anticipated, by Hangar.

"Your son is not living with his wife, Mr. Poote," Rangar announced.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Foote, concealing both surprise and gratification under his habitual mask of suave dignity. "That, I fear, was to have been anticipated. ... Have you the particulars?"

"Only that she is living in their apartment, and he is boarding with one of the men in his department at Lightener's."

"Keep your eye on him, Rangar—keep your eye on him. And report."

"Yes, sir," said Rangar, not himself pleased by the turn affairs had taken, but resolved to have what benefit might lie thereabouts. His resentment was still keen to keep him snapping at Bonbright's heels.

The breach between himself and his son had been no light blow to Mr. Foote. It threatened his line. What was to become of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, with no heir to hand the business over to when his hands could drop it? He wanted his son, not as a father wants his son, but because a Bonbright Foote VII was requisite. He had hoped for this thing that had happened; indeed, had felt confident it would happen, and that he would have Bonbright back unencumbered, purged of nonsense.

He spoke of it with satisfaction to his wife when he returned to his home that afternoon to take up the important matter of adding to the manuscript of his philosophical biography of the Marquis Lafayette.

Page 141

“Perhaps I should see Bonbright,” he suggested.

“No,” said Mrs. Foote. “He must come to you. He’s got to have all his wildness crushed out of him. He’ll come. He must have had enough of it before this.”

But Bonbright did not come, showed no signs of coming, and Mr. Foote grew impatient, so impatient that he disregarded his wife’s advice. He could not bring his pride to allow him to seek out Bonbright in person, but sent Hangar as his ambassador.

Rangar found Bonbright in his room, reading a book devoted to the ailments of the internal-combustion engine, and acquitted himself of his mission with that degree of diplomacy which his desire for success dictated.

“Well?” said Bonbright, as the door opened to admit the ambassador.

“Your father sent me, Mr. Foote.”

“Yes.”

“He has heard that—er—the marriage which caused your—er— estrangement has ended as he feared.”

Bonbright arose slowly and walked toward Rangar, who appeared in two minds whether to remain or to depart to other places.

“Tell my father,” Bonbright said, “that I can appreciate his satisfaction. Tell him also that if he has anything to say to me to say it in person. ... That is all.”

“Your father—”

“That is all,” repeated Bonbright, and Rangar made up his mind. He slammed the door after him.

In the morning he reported to Mr. Foote, who compressed his lips at the recitation of his son’s words. Let his son come to him, then, when he had eaten his fill of husks.

But Bonbright did not come. After several days had elapsed Mr. Foote considered his duty, and interpreted it to impel him to call in person upon his son—clothed in dignity and with the demeanor of outraged parenthood. Mrs. Foote was not privy to the project.

He met his son descending the steps of the house where he boarded. Bonbright could not have evaded his father if he would. He stopped and waited for his father to speak.

“I have come to talk to you, Bonbright,” he said, severely.

“Very well, sir,” Bonbright said.

“I have come, not from inclination or delight in an interview which must be distasteful to both of us, but because I believe it my duty to point out the thanklessness of your conduct and to see if you cannot be brought to a proper sense of your obligations.”

“Our ideas of my obligations are rather far apart, sir.”

“They shouldn’t be. You’re a mere boy—my son. You should derive your ideas from me until you are capable of formulating correct ideas yourself.”

“I’m afraid we can never agree on that,” said Bonbright, patiently.

“Your marriage has ended the way such marriages are fated to end,” said Mr. Foote.

“We will not discuss that, please,” said Bonbright.

“You made your own bed—”

“And am not complaining about the discomfort of it.”

Page 142

“It is essential that you return to your duty. Your unpleasant experience is over. You are old enough to understand your position as my son, and the responsibilities and duties of it. You are Bonbright Foote VII and the future head of our family. I am being very patient and lenient with you. ... You have defied me openly, but I am willing to overlook that, and I am sure your mother will overlook your conduct toward her, providing you return to your place in a frame of mind proper for my son. I think you understand what that is.”

“Perfectly, sir. It means to be jammed back in a mold that will turn me out to the family pattern. It means a willingness to give up thinking for myself and accept *your* thoughts and shape my life by them. It means being a figurehead as long as you live and a replica of yourself when you are gone. That’s it, isn’t it?”

“That is it,” said Mr. Foote, shortly. “You are rid of that woman. ... I am willing to give you another chance.”

Bonbright’s hold upon himself was firm. “If you wish to continue this conversation you will not speak in that way of my wife. Let me make that very clear. ... As to coming back to the office—there is nothing under heaven that would bring me back to what I escaped from. Nothing. ... If I were ever to come it would have to be on terms of my own making, and you would never agree to them. And whatever terms you agreed to I should not come until you and mother—both of you— went to my wife and made the most complete apology for the thing you did to her in the theater that night. ... I am not thinking of myself. I am thinking of her. My mother and father passed my wife and myself on our wedding night, in a public place, and refused to recognize us. ... It was barbarous.” Bonbright’s voice quivered a trifle, but he held himself well in hand. “That apology must come before anything else. After you have made it, we will discuss terms.”

“You—you—” Mr. Foote was perilously close to losing his dignity.

“No,” said Bonbright; “on second thought, we will not discuss terms. You can have my final reply now. ... You have nothing to give me that will take the place of what I have now. I will not come back to you. Please understand that this is final.”

Mr. Foote was speechless. It was moments before he could speak; then it was to say, in a voice that trembled with rage: “In the morning I shall make my will—and your name will not appear in it except as a renegade son whom I have disowned..., Probably you regarded the property as under entail and that it would come to you after me. ... For six generations it has gone from father to son. You shall never touch a penny of it.”

“I prefer it that way, sir.”

Mr. Foote glared at his son in quite unrestrained, uncultured rage, and, whirling on his heel, strode furiously away. Bonbright looked after him curiously.

“I wonder how the thing missed out with me,” he thought. “It worked perfectly six generations—and then went all to smash with me. ... Probably I’d have been a lot happier. ...”

Page 143

It had been a month since he saw Ruth. He had not wanted to see her; the thought of seeing her had been unbearable. But suddenly he felt as if he must see her—have a glimpse of her. He must see how she looked, if she had changed, if she were well. ... He knew it would bring refreshed suffering. It would let back all he had rigidly schooled himself to shut out—but he must see her.

He set his will against it and resolutely walked away from the direction in which her apartment lay, but the thing was too strong for him. As a man surrenders to a craving which he knows will destroy him, yet feels a relief at the surrender, he turned abruptly and walked the other way.

The apartment in which they had lived was on the second floor of a small apartment house. He passed it on the opposite side of the street, looking covertly upward at the windows. There was a light within. She was there, but invisible. Only if she should step near the window could he see her. ... Again and again he passed, but she did not appear. Finally he settled himself guiltily in the shadows, where he could watch those windows, and waited—just for that distant sight of her. There was a lamp on the table before the window. Before she retired she would have to come to shut it off. ... He waited for that. He would then see her for a second, perhaps.

At last she came, and stood an instant in the window—just a blur, with the light behind her, no feature distinguishable, yet it was her—her. “Ruth...” he whispered, “Ruth. ...” Then she drew down the shade and extinguished the light.

For a moment he stood there, hands opened as if he would have stretched them out toward her. Then he turned and walked heavily away. He had seen her, but It had not added to his happiness. He had seen her because he must see her. ... And by that he knew he must see her again and again and again. He knew it. He knew he would stand there in the shadows on innumerable nights, watching for that one brief second of her presence. ... And she loved another man. In a year she would be free to marry Dulac!

He returned to his room and to his book on the ailments of internal-combustion engines; but it was not their diagrams his eyes saw, but only a featureless blur that represented a girl standing in an upper window——forever beyond his reach. ...

CHAPTER XXVII

Malcolm Lightener’s plant, huge as it was, could not meet the demands of the public for the car he manufactured. Orders outran production. New buildings had been under construction, but before they were completed and equipped their added production was eaten up and the factory was no nearer to keeping supply abreast with demand than it had been in the beginning.

Lightener was forced to make contracts with other firms for parts of his cars. From one plant he contracted for bodies, from another for wheels. He urged Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, to increase their production of axles by ten thousand a year—and still dealers in all parts of the country wrote and telephoned and telegraphed for more cars—more cars.

Page 144

Hitherto Lightener had made his own engines complete. From outside manufactories he could obtain the other essential parts, but his own production of engines held him back. The only solution for the present was to find some one to make engines to his specifications, and he turned to Bonbright Foote, Incorporated. Whatever might be said of the Foote methods, their antiquity, their lack of modern efficiency, they turned out work whose quality none might challenge— and Malcolm Lightener looked first to quality.

He reached his determination at noon, while he was eating his luncheon, and to Mrs. Lightener's amazement sprang up from the table and lunged out of the room without so much as a glance at her or a word of good-by. In some men of affairs this might not be remarkable, but in Malcolm Lightener it was remarkable. Granite he might be; crude in his manner, perhaps, more dynamic than comfortable, but in all the years of his married life he had never left the house without kissing his wife good-by.

He drove his runabout recklessly to his office, rushed into the engineering department, and snatched certain blue prints and specifications from the files. He knew costs down to the last bolt or washer on the machine he made, and it was the work of minutes only to determine what price he could afford to pay for the engines he wanted.

His runabout carried him to the entrance to Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, and he hurried up the stairs to the office.

"Mr. Foote in?" he snapped.

"Just returned, Mr. Lightener."

"Want to see him—right off—quick."

"Yes, sir."

The girl at the switchboard called Mr. Foote and informed him.

"He says to step right in, sir," she said, and before she was done speaking Lightener was on his way down the corridor.

Mr. Foote sat coldly behind his desk. He held no kindness for Malcolm Lightener, for Lightener had befriended Bonbright in his recalcitrancy. Lightener had made it possible for the boy to defy his father. Lightener's wife and daughter had openly waged society war against his wife in behalf of his son's wife. ... But Mr. Foote was not the man to throw away an enormous and profitable business because of a personal grudge.

Lightener paused for no preliminaries.

“Foote,” he said, “I want ten thousand engines complete. You can make ’em. You’ve got room to expand, and I can give you approximate figures on the costs. You make good axles and you can make good engines. What d’you think about it?”

Mr. Foote shrugged his shoulders. “It doesn’t attract me.”

“Huh!... You can have that plant up in six months. I’ll give you a contract for five years. Two years’ profits will pay for the plant. Don’t know what your profits are now, but this ought to double them. ... Doesn’t half a million a year extra profit make you think of anything?”

Page 145

“Mr. Lightener, this business was originally a machine shop. It has grown and developed since the first Bonbright Foote founded it. I am the first to deviate in any measure from the original plan, and I have done so with doubt and reluctancy. I have seen with some regret the manufacturing of axles overshadow the original business—-though it has been profitable, I admit. But I shall go no farther. I am not sure my father and my grandfather would approve of what I have done. I know they would not approve of other changes. ... More money does not attract me. This plant is making enough for me. What I want is more leisure. I wish more time to devote to a certain literary labor upon which I have been engaged...”

“Literary flub-dub,” said Lightener. “I’m offering you half a million a year on a silver platter.”

“I don’t want it, sir. ... I am not a young man. I have not been in the best of health-owing, perhaps, to worries which I should not have been compelled to bear. ... I am childless. With me Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, comes to an end. Upon my death these mills close, the business is to be liquidated and discontinued. Do I make myself clear?... I am not interested in your engines.”

“What’s that you said?” Lightener asked. “Childless? Wind up this business? You’re crazy, man.”

“I had a son, but I have one no longer. ... In some measure I hold you responsible for that. You have taken sides with a disobedient son against his father...”

“And you’ve treated a mighty fine son like a dog,” said Lightener, harshly.

“I have done my duty. ... I do not care to discuss it with you. The fact I want to impress is that my family becomes extinct upon my death. My wife will be more than amply provided for. I may live ten years or twenty years—but I shall live them in such comfort as I can obtain. ... Is there anything else you wish to talk to me about?”

It was a dismissal, and Malcolm Lightener was not used to being dismissed like a troublesome book agent.

“Yes,” he said, getting to his feet. “There is something, and I’ll be short and sweet about it. You have a son, and if I’m any judge, he’s about four times the man his father is. You don’t want him!... Well, I do. I want him in my business, and he won’t lose such a lot by the change. It’s your ledger that shows the loss, and don’t you forget it. You did what you could to warp him out of shape—and because he wouldn’t be warped you kicked him out. Maybe the family ends with you, but a new Foote family begins with him, and it won’t be any cut-and-dried, ancestor-ridden outfit, either. One generation of his kind will be worth more to this country than the whole six of yours. ... I hope you live to see it.”

Lightener stuffed his blue prints and specifications into his pocket and left the office truculently. Once more in his own office he summoned a boy.

“Fetch Mr. Foote from the purchasing department,” he said.

Page 146

Malcolm Lightener was acting on impulse again. He had no clear idea why he had sent for Bonbright, nor just what he should say when the boy came—but he wanted to talk to him. Lightener was angry—angry because Bonbright's father had rejected his proposition to manufacture engines; more angry at the way Mr. Foote had spoken concerning his son. In the back of Lightener's mind was the thought that he would show a Foote. ... Just what he would show him was not determined.

Bonbright came in. He was not the Bonbright of six months before. The boy in him was gone, never to return. He had lost none of his old look of breeding, of refinement, of blood—but he had lost that air which rich young men bear about with them. It is an air, not of carelessness, precisely, but of absence of care; a sort of nonchalance, bred of lack of responsibilities and of definite ambitions. It is an air that makes one think of them that they would fit better into the scenery of a country club or a game of golf than into an office where men strain their intelligence and their bodies to attain important aims. This was gone with his boyishness. In its place was an alertness, an awakeness, born of an interest in affairs. His eyes were the eyes of a man who concentrated much, and was keenly interested in the object of his concentration. His movements were quicker. He seemed to see and catalogue more of what was going on about him. If one had seen him then for the first time, the impression received would have been that here was a very busy young man who was worth watching. There was something aggressive about him. He looked competent.

One could not question that his new life had improved him, but it had not made him happy. It would be absurd to say that he looked sad. A boy of his age cannot look ead continually, unless sadness is a pose with him, which he is enjoying very much indeed. But Bonbright was no poser. ... And he did not look happy. There were even times when there was a worn, haggard look about his eyes when he came down in the morning. This was when he had allowed himself to think too much.

"Just came from your father's office," said Lightener. "I offered him a chance to clean up half a million a year—and he turned it down... because his great-grandfather might not like it."

Bonbright understood perfectly. He knew how his father would do such a thing. Lightener's statement seemed to call for no reply, so he made none.

"I wanted to look at you," said Lightener, "to make sure you aren't anything like him. ... But you *are* like him. You stand like him and you look like him—only you don't. If I thought you'd grow to think the way he does I'd send you to the cashier for your pay, in a second. But I don't believe it." He scowled at Bonbright. "No, by Jove! you don't *look* it."

"I don't think father and I are much alike," said Bonbright, slowly.

Lightener switched the subject. “You ought to know considerable about this business. Been here six months. From what I hear you’ve picked up quite a lot outside of office hours.”

Page 147

“I’ve been studying hard. It gave me something to do.”

“Darn it all, why couldn’t you and Hilda have taken to each other!...” Lightener stopped, and stared at his desk. Perhaps it was not too late yet. Bonbright’s marriage had been no success; Bonbright was young; and it was not thinkable that he would not recover from that wound in time to marry again. Of course he would. ... Then why should he not marry Hilda? Not the least reason in the world. In the affair Bonbright was guiltless—merely unfortunate. The thing was worth bearing in mind. Perhaps something might be done; at any rate, he would talk it over with his wife.

“I want you to put in another six months learning this business,” he said. “If you pan out I’ll have a job for you. ... I haven’t heard of your falling down any place yet. ... Know what I told your father? He said the Foote family ended with him—became extinct. Well, I said the family just started with you, and that one generation of your kind was worth the whole six of his. And I hoped he lived to see it.”

“Somehow I can’t feel very hard toward father, Mr. Lightener. Sometimes I’m—sorry for him. To him it’s as bad as if I’d been born with a hunchback. Worse, maybe, because, hunchback and all, I might have been the sort he wanted. ... He doesn’t understand, that’s it. I can understand him—so I don’t have any hard feelings-except on *her* account. ... He said the family was extinct?”

“Yes.”

“I guess it is,” said Bonbright. “The family, as he thought of it, meant something that went on and on as he and his ancestors went. ... Yes, it’s extinct. I don’t know why I was different from them, but I was. Always. I’m glad.”

“He must be worth five millions, anyhow, maybe more.”

“I don’t know,” said Bonbright.

“You won’t get a cent of it, from what he says.”

“I suppose not. ... No, I won’t get a cent.”

“You don’t make much fuss about it.”

“I had that out with myself six months ago. It was hard to give it up. ... Nobody wants to be poor when he can be rich. If it hadn’t been for Ruth I suppose I should have been there yet—pretty well made over to fit by this time.”

As Bonbright and Malcolm Lightener talked, Mr. Foote sat in his office, his head upon his desk, one arm stretched out across the blotter, the other shielding his face. He did not move. ...

After Malcolm Lightener left the room he had sat for a time staring at the door. He did not feel well. He was troubled. None but himself knew how deep was his disappointment, his bitterness, because of his son's failure to stand true to his type. It was not the grief of a father at the loss of a son; it was the suffering of a man whose supreme motive is the carrying on of family and of family traditions. He had just told Lightener the family became extinct with his passing. Now he reaffirmed it, and, reaffirming it, he felt the agony of ultimate affliction.

Page 148

Six generations the family and the family's business had endured honorably according to its beliefs and tenets; with the sixth generation it ended because of the way-wardness of a boy—his boy!

Mr. Foote felt a trifle dizzy, a bit oppressed. He leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes. He would go home for the day as soon as the dizziness passed, he said to himself. ... It passed. He opened his eyes and leaned toward his desk, but he stopped suddenly, his right hand flying to his breast. There was a sudden pain there; such a pain as he had never experienced before. It was near his heart. With each heartbeat there came a twisting stab of agony. Presently the spasm passed, and he sank back, pale, shaking, his forehead damp with clammy moisture. ... He tried to pull himself together. Perhaps it would be best to summon some one, but he did not want to do that. To have an employee find him so would be an invasion of his dignity. Nobody must see him. Nobody must know about this. ...

The spasm returned-departed again, leaving him gasping for breath. ... It would come again. Something told him it would come again-once more. He *knew*. ... A third time it would come, but never again.

He forced himself to rise. He would meet it standing. For the honor of the Foote family he would meet it on his feet, looking into its eyes. He would not shrink and cringe from it, but would face it with dignity as a Foote should face it, uttering no cry of pain or fear. It was a dignified moment, the most dignified and awful of his life. ... Five generations were looking on to see how he met it, and he was conscious of their eyes. He stared before him with level eyes, forcing a smile, and waited the seconds there remained to wait.

It was coming. He could feel its first approach, and drew himself up to the fullness of his slender height. Never had he looked so much a Foote as in that instant, never had he so nearly approached the ideal he had set for himself—for he knew.

The spasm came, but it tore no cry from him. He stood erect, with eyes that stared straight before him fearlessly until they became sightless. He held his head erect proudly. ... Then he sighed, relaxed into his chair, and lay across his desk, one arm outstretched, the other protecting his face. ...

The telephone on Malcolm Lightener's desk rang.

"Hello!" said Lightener. "What is it? Who?... Yes, he's right here." He looked up to Bonbright. "Somebody wants to speak to you."

Bonbright stepped to the instrument. "Yes," he said, "this is Bonbright Foote. ... Who is it? Rangar?..." Suddenly he turned about and faced Malcolm Lightener blankly. He

fumbled with the receiver for its hook. “My father is dead,” he said, in a hushed voice. “They just found him—at his desk. ...”

CHAPTER XXVIII

Page 149

Ruth had continued to live in the apartment. It had not been her intention to do so. From the moment of reading Bonbright's succinct note she was determined to go back to the little cottage and to her mother. But she put it off for a day, then for another day, and days grew into weeks and months. "To-morrow I'll move," she told herself each night, but next day she was no nearer to uprooting herself than she had been the day before.

She gave herself no reasons for remaining. If she had been asked for a reason she might have said it was because Dulac still boarded with her mother. He had not left the city with the breaking of the strike, but had remained. He had remained because he had asked the union he represented to let him remain and had been able to show them reasons for granting his request. He wanted to stay on the ground to work quietly underground, undoing the harm that had been done by the strike; quietly proselyting, preaching his gospel, gaining strength day by day, until he should have reared an organization capable of striking again. The courage of the man was unquenchable. ... And he wanted to be near Ruth. Just as he had set his will to force Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, to bow to the will of the men, so he had set his will to force Ruth to bow to his will. ... So he remained and labored.

But his presence at her mother's was not the real reason that impelled Ruth to continue in the home Bonbright had made for her. It was something more intangible. She found the thought of leaving that spot unendurable, but she did not, dared not, seek in her heart for what made it unendurable.

For a week she scarcely ventured outside the door; then the loneliness, the lack of occupation, drove her out. She must be busy, for when she sat idly in a room her thoughts became torture. There were many sides to her affliction. First in her mind she placed the failure of her great project. She had wrecked her life for it without accomplishment. Second in the rank of her griefs stood the fact that she had been on the point of giving herself to Dulac. She would have gone with him, disregarding convention, breaking her vows of marriage. For that she despised herself... despised herself the more because she knew now that she did not love Dulac, that she had never loved Dulac. That discovery had shocked and shaken her, and when she thought of what might have happened if she had gone with him a numbness of horror crept over her, leaving her cold and trembling. ... She would have gone, and she did not love him. She would not have known she did not love him until it was too late to draw back... and then she would have lived, but her soul would have died!

She accused herself bitterly for mistaking glamour for love. She knew now that Dulac had called from her nothing deeper than a foolish, girlish fascination. His personality, his work, his enthusiasm had enmeshed her, blinded her—and she had mistaken her feelings for love! Of this she was certain. ... There were moments when she felt she must tell Bonbright. Once she actually took writing materials to do so, but she did not tell him. ... She wanted him to know, because, she thought, it would be a sort of

vindication in his eyes. But she was wrong. She wanted him to know for quite another reason than that.

Page 150

Third in the order of her griefs was the consciousness that she had caused Bonbright grief. She dealt ungently with herself because of it, for Bonbright had not deserved it at her hands. She could appreciate how good he had been to her, how solicitous, how patient, how tender. If a man ever deserved well of a woman, he deserved it. She told herself that a hundred times daily. She remembered small thoughtfulnesses which had been a part of his daily conduct to her. She recalled small forbearances. She pictured to herself the life they had lived together, and saw how it was only the character of her husband that had made it possible at all. ... And in the end he had not uttered one word of censure; had not even looked at her with just anger. ... There had been no pretense about him, no labored effort to be kind. He had simply been himself.

These were her thoughts; this is how she remembered him. ...

The house was unbearably lonely. As evening approached she found herself more than once listening for Bonbright's step on the stairs and his hand on the door. ... At such times she cried. She puzzled herself. She did not understand why she should be so lonely, nor why the expectation of Bonbright's step—with quick awakening to the knowledge that no foot of his would ever sound at her door again— should bring her tears. ... She knew she should have been glad, relieved. With Bonbright she had lived in daily dread. She had not loved him, and the fear that his restraint would break, that he would force his love upon her, had made her days a ghastly dream. ... She should be crying out with the joy and relief of his removal. But she felt no relief, felt no joy. ... She could not understand it.

If Hilda Lightener, who came often and stayed long, had asked her if she missed Bonbright or were lonely without him, she would have denied it hotly. But Hilda did not ask. ... Ruth did not ask that question of herself. She knew she was lonely, miserable, and she thought she knew why—but Bonbright's absence had nothing to do with it.

Hilda watched, she did not talk about Bonbright, for she saw her task was to help Ruth over these first few days. Her suspicions were her own, but, being a woman, she understood the baffling psychology of another woman and what harm a premature word might work. ... If the thing she believed were true, then time would bring its realization to Ruth. Ruth must discover the truth for herself. ...

"I can't stand this," Ruth said one evening. "I can't bear to stay here alone in these rooms. If there were work enough to keep me busy —but there's nothing."

"If you'd only go the places I ask you to," said Hilda.

"I don't want to meet people—your sort of people. They must know what has happened. ... I couldn't have them looking at me with their catty, curious eyes."

"Most of them would be very kind," Hilda said.

Page 151

“No. ... I’m going to work. I’m going to find a place and work. ...”

“But—” Hilda wondered what Bonbright would think of that. She imagined he would not like it.

“I know what you were going to say. He wouldn’t want me to. Maybe he wouldn’t—but if he knew he’d let me do it. I tell you I’ve got to, Hilda.”

“You’ve got to decide for yourself,” Hilda admitted, so Ruth became a job hunter, and because intelligent stenographers are by no means as plentiful as daisies in a July field, she was not long in finding employment. ... From that day life was easier. She found her wages were ample to support herself and pay the rent of her apartment. Ample, in that they sufficed. There was no surplus. So she folded and put away the weekly checks she received from Bonbright. She did not send them back to him because, to her mind, that would have been a weekly slap in his face. But she would not cash them. There was a difference to her; probably there was a real difference.

Of a Sunday Ruth often went driving with Hilda, and Hilda noticed how closely her companion watched the sidewalks, how she scrutinized the passing crowds. It was as though Ruth were trying to catch sight of somebody. ... While daylight lasted Hilda saw that Ruth was drawn to her windows to sit looking down at the street. Once Hilda ventured dangerously.

“Why do you always sit there watching folks go by?” she asked.

Ruth turned and looked at her strangely. “I—why, I don’t know,” she said.

Of herself Ruth rarely mentioned Bonbright; never unless in some recollection of him, or if Hilda meddled with some portion of the household that had been peculiarly Bonbright’s. As, for instance:

“Why don’t you move that leather chair out of the other bedroom?” Hilda asked. “It’s doing no good there and it looks mighty comfortable.”

“That was *his* chair,” Ruth said, quickly. “He used to sit there and read after—after I had gone to bed.”

Once Ruth asked for news of Bonbright. After that Hilda brought her news voluntarily. Not too frequently, but often enough according to her notion. Betweentimes she gave Ruth plenty of time to wonder what was happening to her husband. Ruth knew Hilda saw him often. She wondered if they talked about her, and what they said, but that she never asked, nor did Hilda refer to such conversations. Indeed, these were few and sparing, for Bonbright could not be made to talk about his wife—even to her. But she gave Bonbright news of Ruth just as she gave Ruth news of Bonbright.

Sometimes Hilda tormented Ruth with set purpose.

“Bonbright looks mighty thin,” she said. “I think he’s working too hard. If he keeps it up he’ll make himself sick.”

“Oh...” said Ruth—nothing more, but for the rest of that Sunday she was quiet—very quiet.

Once Hilda found Ruth in a passion of tears, and when she sought the reason she learned that Ruth had met Dulac on the street, face to face, and that he had spoken to her. He had told Ruth that he was staying in the city because of her; that he would not go without her. ... He had been careless of listening ears, not concealing his emotions.

Page 152

“Well, he didn’t hurt you, did he?”

“No,” said Ruth.

“You weren’t afraid of him?”

“No.”

“You—didn’t want to go away with him?”

“No. ... No. ...”

“Then what are you making all the fuss about? He can’t carry you off”

’*He* might have seen us together,” said Ruth. “And—and it made me— remember—that horrid afternoon.”

“What if Bonbright did see you together? Don’t you suppose Bonbright thinks you are seeing him? Of course he does. What else would he think? Naturally he supposes you are going to have your divorce when the year is up, and marry Mr. Dulac.” Hilda was merciless.

“Does he think that? Are you sure?”

Hilda shrugged her shoulders.

“He mustn’t think it,” Ruth said, affrightedly. “Why, he—If he thought that—”

“If he thought that—what?”

Ruth bit her lips and turned away. “Nothing,” she said. Then: “Can’t you let him know?... Not tell him, you know, but—sort of let him understand.”

“If I can see a good chance,” Hilda said; but in her mind was the resolution that she would never see the chance.

“Does he—seem cheerful?” Ruth asked. “It’s been quite a long time now—months. ... He—must have gotten over—caring for me now. Do you think so?” Her voice was anxious, pleading.

Hilda could not hold out against that appeal. “No, silly, he hasn’t. He isn’t that sort. ... It’s too bad.”

“Yes—it’s too bad,” said Ruth, but it was not sympathy that put the tiny thrill into her voice.

“He’s just a boy. ... He can’t go on all his life loving a girl that doesn’t want him. Some day he’s going to fall in love again. It’s natural he should.”

“Has he—Do you think—”

“No, I haven’t seen any signs of it yet. ... And I’d be jealous if he did. I think I could manage to fall in love with him myself if—”

“—he wasn’t tied to me,” interrupted Ruth, with a little whimper. “I—I wish he knew—-about Mr. Dulac. ... He wouldn’t think so—hard of me, maybe... if he knew I didn’t—-never did—love Mr. Dulac. ...”

“The only thing that would make any difference to him would be to know that you loved him,” said Hilda.

Ruth had no answer, but she was saying to herself, with a sort of secret surprise: “If I loved him. ... If I loved him. ...” Presently she spoke aloud: “You won’t be angry with me, Hilda?... You won’t misunderstand, but—but won’t yop please—go away?... Please. ... I— I don’t want to see anybody. I want to be alone.”

“Well, of all things!” said Hilda. But she was not offended. Her resemblance to her father was very faint indeed, at that moment. She looked more like her mother, softer, more motherly. She put on her hat and went away quietly. “Poor Bonbright!” she was thinking. Then: “It’s come to her. ... She’s got a hint of it. It will come now with a rush. ...”

Page 153

Ruth sat in her chair without movement. “If I loved him...” she said, aloud, and then repeated it, “... loved him. ...” She was questioning herself now, asking herself the meaning of things, of why she had been lonely, of why she had sat in her window peering down into the street—and she found the answer. As Hilda had said in her thoughts, it was coming with a rush. ... She was frightened by it, dared not admit it. ... She dared not admit that the biggest, weightiest of her woes was that she no longer had Bonbright with her; that she was lonesome for him; that her heart had been crying out for him; that she loved him! She dared not admit that. It would be too bitter, too ironically bitter. ... If she loved him now she had loved him then! Was her life to be filled with such ironies—? Was she forever to eat of Dead Sea fruit?

Did she love Bonbright? At last she dared to put the question squarely. ... Her answer came quickly. “Oh, I do... I do!” she cried, aloud. “I love him. ...” A surge of happiness welled up from her heart at the words. “I love him,” she repeated, to hear the sound of them again.

The happiness was of short life. “I love him—but it’s too late. ... It’s always too late,” she sobbed. “I’ve lost him. ... He’s gone. ...”

The girl who could give herself to a man she did not love for the Cause was not weak; she did not lack resolution, nor did she lack the sublimity of soul which is the heritage of women. She had lost her happiness; she had wrecked her life, and until this moment there seemed no possibility of recovering anything from the wreckage. ... But she loved. ... There was a foundation to build from. If she had been weak, a waverer, no structure could have risen on the foundation; it must have lain futile, accusing. But there was strength in her, humility, a will that would dare much, suffer much, to fight its way to peace.

“If he loves me still,” she thought; and there hope was born.

“If I go to him. ... If I tell him—everything?” she asked herself, and in asking made her resolution. She would venture, she would dare, for her happiness and for his. She would go, and she would say: “Bonbright, I love you. ... I have never loved anybody but you. ... You must believe me.” He would believe her, she knew. There was no reason why he should not believe her. There was nothing for her to gain now by another lie. “I’ll make him believe,” she said, and smiled and cried and smiled again. “Hilda will tell me where he lives and I’ll go to him—now. ...”

At that instant Hilda was coming to her, was on the stairs, and Hilda looked grave, troubled. She walked slowly up the stairs and rapped on the door. “Ruth,” she called, “it’s Hilda. ... May I come in now?”

Ruth ran to the door and threw it open. “Come in. ... Come in.” Her voice was a song. “Oh, Hilda...”

“Honey,” said Hilda, holding her at arm’s length, ’-his father is dead. They found him dead just after noon. ...”

Page 154

“Oh!...” said Ruth. It was an instant before the full significance of this news was shown to her. Then she clutched Hilda with terror-stricken fingers. “No. ... No!...” she cried. “It can’t be. ... It mustn’t be. ...”

“Why—what is it? I—I didn’t think you’d take it like this. ...”

“I love him. ... I love Bonbright,” Ruth said, in a blank, dead voice. “I was going to him. ... I was going to tell him... and he would have believed. But now——he wouldn’t believe. He would think I came—because his father was dead—because he—he was what I thought he was when I married him. ... Don’t you see? He’d think I was coming to him for the same reason. ... He’d think I was willing to give myself to him—for that. ...”

Hilda took the slight form in her arms and rocked her to and fro, while she thought. ... “Yes,” she said, sorrowfully, “you can’t go to him now. ... It would look—oh, why couldn’t his father have made a will, as he was going to?... If he’d left his old money to charity or something. ... We thought he had. ... But there has been no will. Everything is Bonbright’s. ...”

“I’m always—too—late...” Ruth said, quietly.

CHAPTER XXIX

Bonbright was in his own home again—in the house that had been his father’s, and that was now his. He stood in the room that had been his since babyhood. He had not thought to stand there again, nor did he know that the room and the house were his own. He had come from the shops but a half hour before; had come from that room where his father lay across his desk, one arm outstretched, the other shielding his face. There had been no time to think then; no time to realize. ... What thought had come to him was one of wonder that the death of his father could mean so little to him. Shock he felt, but not grief. He had not loved his father. Yet a father is a vital thing in a son’s life. Bonbright felt this. He knew that the departing of a father should stand as one of the milestones of life, marking a great change. It marked no change for him. Everything would go on as it had gone—even on the material side. It was inevitable that he should remember his father’s threat to disinherit him. Now the thing had come—and it made little difference, for Bonbright had laid out his life along lines of his own. ... His father would be carried to the grave, would disappear from the scene—that was all.

He saw that the things were done which had to be done, and went home to his mother, dreading the meeting. He need not have dreaded it, for she met him with no signs of grief. If she felt grief she hid it well. She was calm, stately, grave—but her eyes were not red with weeping nor was her face drawn with woe. He wondered if his father

meant as little to his father's wife as it did to his father's son. It seemed so. There had been no affectionate passage between Bonbright and his mother. She had not unbent to him. He had hardly expected her to, though he had been prepared to respond. ...

Page 155

Now he was in his room with time to think—and there was strangely little to think of. He had covered the ground already. His father was dead. When Bonbright uttered that sentence he had covered the episode completely. That was it—it was an *episode*.

A servant came to the door.

“Mr. Richmond wishes to speak with you on the phone, Mr. Bonbright,” the man said, and Bonbright walked to the instrument. Richmond had been his father’s counsel for many years.

“Bonbright?” asked Mr. Richmond.

“Yes.”

“I have just had the news. I am shocked. It is a terrible thing.”

“Yes,” said Bonbright.

“I will come up at once—if you can see me. The death of a man like your father entails certain consequences which cannot be considered too soon. May I come?”

“If you think it is necessary,” said Bonbright.

“It is necessary,” said Mr. Richmond.

In twenty minutes Richmond was announced and Bonbright went to meet him in the library. Richmond extended his hand with the appropriate bearing for such an occasion. His handshake was a perfect thing, studied, rehearsed, just as all his life was studied and rehearsed. He had in stock a manner and a handshake and a demeanor which could be instantly taken off the shelf and used for any situation which might arise. Richmond was a ready man, an able man. On the whole, he was a good man, as men go, but cut and dried.

“Your father was a notable man,” he declared. “He will be missed.”

Bonbright bowed.

“There will be a great deal for you to look after,” said the lawyer, “so I will be brief. The mass of detail can wait—until after—er— until you have more leisure.”

“I think, Mr. Richmond, it is my mother you wish to see, not myself. I thought you would understand my position. I am surprised that you do not, since you have been so close to my father. ... My father and I did not agree on matters which both of us considered vital. There were differences which could not be abridged. So I am here merely as his son, not as his successor in any way.”

“I don’t understand.”

“My father,” said Bonbright, with a trace of impatience, “disowned me, and—-disinherited, I believe, is the word—disinherited me.”

“Oh no! No!... Indeed no! You are laboring under a misapprehension. ... You are mistaken. I am glad to be able to relieve your mind on that point. Nothing of the sort was done. I am in a position to know. ... I will admit your father discussed such action, but the matter went no farther. Perhaps it was his intention to do as you say, but he put it off. ... He seemed to have a prejudice against making a will. As a matter of fact, he died intestate...”

“You mean—”

“I mean that your father’s wealth—and it was considerable, sir—will be disposed of according to the statutes of Descent and Distribution. In other words, having failed to dispose of his property by testament, the law directs its disposition. With the exception of certain dower rights the whole vests in yourself.”

Page 156

Here was something to think of. Here was a new and astounding set of circumstances to which he must adapt himself. ... He experienced no leap of exultation. The news left him cold. Queerly, his thoughts in that moment were of Ruth and of her great plan.

“If she had waited...” he thought.

No, he was glad she had not waited. He did not want her that way. ... It was not her he wanted, but her love. He thought bitterly that he would willingly exchange all that had become his for that one possession. He could have anything—everything—he wanted now but that. ...

“I am glad to be able to give you such news,” said Mr. Richmond.

“I was thinking of something else,” said Bonbright.

Richmond looked at the young man obliquely. He had heard that Bonbright was queer. This rumor seemed not without foundation. Richmond could not comprehend how a young man could think of anything else when he had just learned that he was several tunes a millionaire.

“Sit down,” said Bonbright. “This, of course, makes a difference.”

Richmond seated himself, and drew documents from his green bag. For half an hour he discussed the legal aspects of the situation and explained to Bonbright what steps must be taken at once.

“I think that is all that will be necessary to-day,” he said, finally.

“Very well. ... There is no reason why affairs may not go on for a couple of days as they are—as if father were alive?”

“No, I see no reason why they should not.”

“Very well, then. ... Will you see to it? The—the funeral will be on Saturday. Monday I shall be in the office.”

“I hope you will call upon me for any assistance or advice you find necessary. ... Or for any service of whatsoever nature. ... Good afternoon. ... Will you convey my sympathy to Mrs. Foote?”

The rest of that day, and of the days that followed it, Bonbright was trying to find the answer to the question, What does this mean to me? and to its companion question, What shall I do with it?

One paper Richmond had left in Bonbright's hands, as Richmond's predecessors had left it in the hands of preceding Bonbright Footes. It was a copy of the will of the first Bonbright Foote, and the basic law, a sort of Salic law, a family pragmatic sanction for his descendants, through time and eternity. It laid upon his descendants the weight of his will with respect to the conduct of the business of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated. Five generations had followed it faithfully, deviating only as new conditions made deviation necessary. It was all there, all set forth minutely. Bonbright could visualize that first of his line from the reading of it—and he could visualize his father. His father was the sort of man that will would create. ... He considered himself. He was not off that piece. ...

Page 157

His father had tried to press him in the family mold, and he remembered those unbearable days. Now, from his remote grave the first Bonbright Foote reached out with the same mold and laid his hands on the hope of the line. ... Bonbright read the words many times. His was the choice to obey or to disobey, to remain an individual, distinct and separate from all other individuals since the world began, or to become the sixth reincarnation of Bonbright Foote I. ... The day following his father's burial he chose, not rashly in haste, nor without studied reason. To others the decision might not have seemed momentous; to Bonbright it was epoch-marking. It did mark an epoch in the history of the Foote family. It was the Family's French Revolution. It was Martin Luther throwing his inkpot at the devil—and overturning the ages.

Bonbright's decision required physical expression. Most human decisions require physical expression to give them effect. He had a feeling as though six disembodied Bonbright Footes stood about in an agony of anxiety, watching to see what he would do as he took the emblematical paper in his hands. He tore it very slowly, tore it again and again into ribbons and into squares, and let them flutter into his wastebasket. ... If others had been present to assert that they heard a groan he would not have denied it, for the ancestors were very real to him then... their presence was a definite fact.

"There..." he said. The king was dead. Long live the king!

It was after that he had his talk with his mother. Perhaps he was abrupt, but he dreaded that talk. Perhaps his diplomacy was faulty or lacking. Perhaps he made mistakes and failed to rise to the requirements of the conditions and of his relationship with her. He did his best.

"Mother," he said, "we must talk things over."

She sat silently, waiting for him to speak.

"Whatever you wish," he said, "I shall do... if I can."

"There is a qualification?" she said.

"Suppose you tell me what you want done," he said.

"I want you to come to your senses and realize your position," she said, coldly. "I want you to get rid of that woman and, after a decent interval, marry some suitable girl. ..."

"I was discussing your affairs, mother, not mine. We will not refer to my wife."

"All I want," she said, "is what I am entitled to as your father's widow."

"This house, of course," he said. "You will want to stay here. I want you to stay here."

“And you?”

“I prefer to live as I am.”

“You mean you do not care to come back here?”

“Yes.”

“You must. I insist upon it. You have caused scandal enough now. ... People would talk.”

“Mother, we might as well understand each other at once. I am not Bonbright Foote VII. Let that be clear. I am Bonbright Foote. I am myself, an individual. The old way of doing things is gone. ... Perhaps you have heard of the family law—the first Bonbright’s will. ... I have just torn it up.”

Page 158

She compressed her lips and regarded him with hostility. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

“I suppose I must make the best of it. I realize I am powerless.” She realized it fully in that moment; realized that her son was a man, a man with force and a will, and that it would be hopeless to try to bring him to submit to her influence. “There is nothing for us to discuss. I shall ask for what I need. ...”

“Very well,” he said, not coldly, not sharply, but sorrowfully. There was no need to try to approach nearer to his mother. She did not desire it. In her the motherly instinct did not appear. She had never given birth to a son; what she had done was to provide her husband with an heir, and, that being done, she was finished with the affair. ...

He went from his mother to his own room, where he sat down at his desk and wrote a brief letter to his wife. It was not so difficult to compose as the other one had been, but it was equally succinct, equally barren of emotion. Yet he was not barren of emotion as he wrote it.

My dear Ruth [he said],-My father is dead. This makes a very material change in my financial condition, and the weekly sum I have been sending you becomes inadequate. Hereafter a suitable check will be mailed you each week until the year expires. At that time I shall make a settlement upon you which will be perfectly satisfactory. In the meantime, should you require anything, you have but to notify me, or, if you prefer, notify Mr. Manley Richmond, who will attend to it immediately.

This letter he mailed himself. ... Not many days later it was returned to him with “Not Found” stamped upon it in red ink. Bonbright fancied there must be some error, so he sent it again by messenger. The boy returned to report that the apartment was vacant and that no one could furnish the present address of the lady who had occupied it. Bonbright sent to Ruth’s mother, who could only inform him that Ruth had gone away, she did not know where, and such goings-on she never saw, and why she should be asked to bear more than she had borne was a mystery..—

There was but one conclusion for Bonbright. Ruth had been too impatient to wait for the year to expire and had gone away with Dulac. ...

Hilda could have corrected that belief, but he did not see Hilda, had not seen her, for his new duties and new problems and responsibilities occupied him many more hours a day than any labor union or legislature would have permitted an employee to be required to work. His hours of labor did not stop with the eighth nor with the tenth. ... There were days when they began with daylight and continued almost to daylight again.

Ruth had gone with Dulac. ... She was hidden away. Not even Hilda Lightener knew where she was, but Hilda knew why she had gone. ... There is an instinct in most

animals and some humans which compels them to hide away when they suffer wounds. Hilda knew Ruth had crept away because she had suffered the hardest to bear of all wounds—and crushing of hope. ...

Page 159

She had gone the morning after Bonbright's father died, leaving no word but that she was going, and she had not gone far. It is simple to lose oneself in a city. One may merely move to the next ward and be lost to one's friends. Only chance will cause a meeting, and Ruth was determined to guard against that chance.

She found a cheap, decent boarding house, among laboring people; she found a new position... that was all. She had to live; to continue was required of her, but it must be among strangers. She could face existence where there were no pitying eyes; where there was none to remind her of her husband. ... She hid away with her love, and coddled it and held it up for herself to see. She lived for it. It was her life. ... Even at her darkest moment she was glad she loved. She devoted herself wholly to that love which had been discovered just too late—which was not the wise nor the healthful thing to do, as any physician could have informed her.

CHAPTER XXX

For a few days after the commencement of his reign Bonbright remained quiescent. It was not through uncertainty, nor because he did not know what he was going to do. It was because he wanted to be sure of the best way of doing it. Very little of his time was spent in the room that had been his father's and was now his own; he walked about the plant, studying, scrutinizing, appraising, comparing. He did not go about now as he had done with Rangar on the day his father inducted him into the dignity of heir apparent and put a paper crown on his head and a wooden scepter in his hand.

He was aware that the men eyed him morosely. Bitterness was still alive in their hearts, and the recollection of suffering fresh in their minds. They still looked at him as a sort of person his father had made him appear, and viewed his succession as a calamity. The old regime had been bad enough, they told one another, but this young man, with his ruthlessness, his heartlessness, with what seemed to be a savage desire to trample workingmen into unresisting, unprotesting submission—this would be intolerable. So they scowled at him, and in their homes talked to their wives with apprehension of dark days ahead.

He felt their attitude. It could not be helped—yet. His work could not be started with the men, it must start elsewhere. He would come to the men later, in good time, in their proper order.

His third morning in the office he had called Malcolm Lightener on the telephone.

"Is your proposition to manufacture ten thousand engines still open?"

"Yes."

"I'll take the contract—providing we can arrive at terms."

“I’ll send over blue prints and specifications—and my cost figures. Probably our costs will be lower than yours. ...”

“They won’t be,” said Bonbright, with a tightening of his jaw. “Can you lend me Mershon for a while?” Mershon was Lightener’s engineer, the man who had designed and built his great plant.

Page 160

“I can’t, but I will.”

“As soon as he can arrange it, please. I want to get started.”

“He’ll be there in half an hour.”

Mershon came, a gray, beefy, heavy-faced man—with clear, keen, seeing eyes.

“Mr. Lightener has loaned you to me, Mr. Mershon. It was a tremendous favor, for I know what you can do.”

Mershon nodded. He was a man who treasured up words. He must have had a great store of them laid by, for in his fifty years he had used up surprisingly few.

“This is what I want,” Bonbright said. “First, I want a plant designed with a capacity of twenty thousand Lightener engines. You designed Lightener’s engine plant—so you’re about the one man to give me one that will turn out more engines with less labor and at lower cost than his. That’s what I want.”

Mershon’s eyes lighted. “It will cost money,” he said.

“I’ll find the money; you give me the plant,” Bonbright said. “And second, I want a survey made of this present plant. I know a lot of it is junk, but I’m not competent to say how much. You will know what to do. If I have to junk the whole outfit I’ll do it. I don’t want to waste money, but I want these mills to be the equal of any mills in the country. ... Not only in efficiency, but as a place to work. I want them safe. You will understand. I want the men considered. Give them light and air. Wait till you see our wash rooms!” He shrugged his shoulders. “It isn’t enough to have the best machines,” he said. “I want the men to be able to do the best that’s in them. ... You understand?”

Mershon nodded.

“The next room is yours.” Bonbright pointed toward his old office, the one it had been the family custom to close on the accession of the heir apparent, and never to reopen until a new heir was ready to take up his duties. He felt a sort of pleasure in this profanation. “You’ll find it large enough. If you need more room, ask for it. ... Get what assistants you need.”

“No more interruption of production than necessary,” said Mershon.

“Exactly. ... And we need that new plant in a hurry. I’ve taken a contract to make ten thousand engines for Mr. Lightener this year.”

It was that day that he called Rangar into the room. Hangar had been uneasy, fearful, since his old employer had died. He had been an important figure under the old order;

a sort of shadow behind the throne. He wondered what would happen to him now. More especially if Bonbright had a notion of some of his duties under Bonbright's father. He was not kept in suspense.

"Mr. Rangar," said Bonbright, "I have been looking through the files. Some of your duties have become clear to me. I was familiar with others. ... Perhaps my father required a man like yourself. I do not. The old way of doing things here is gone, and you and I could not be happy together. I shall direct the cashier to give you a check for six months' salary..."

Page 161

“You mean—”

“Exactly what I say.”

“But—you don’t understand the business. Who is going to run it while you learn?”

“I don’t want to know how this business was run. It’s not going to be run that way. ... There’s nothing you could teach me, Mr. Hangar. ... Good afternoon.”

Rangar went white with rage. Animosity toward this young man he had harbored since the beginning; it flowered into hatred. But he dared not voice it. It was not in Hangar’s nature to be open, to fight without cover. If he spoke, the check for six months’ salary might be withdrawn, so, uttering none of the venom that flooded to his lips, he went away. ... Rangar was the sort of man who vows to get even. ...

That evening Bonbright sat in his window and watched the army of his employees surge out of the big gate and fill the street. Five thousand of them. ... It was a sight that always fascinated him, as it had that first evening when he saw them, and came to a realization of what it meant to be overlord to such a multitude. More than ever he realized it now—for he was their overlord. They were his men. It was he who gave them the work that kept them alive; he who held their happiness, their comfort, their very existence in the hollow of his hand. ... And he knew that in every one of those five thousand breasts burned resentment toward him. He knew that their most friendly feeling toward him was suspicion.

It was easy to rebuild a plant; it was simple to construct new mills with every device that would make for efficiency. That was not a problem to awe him. It needed but the free expenditure of money, and there was money in plenty. ... But here was a task and a problem whose difficulty and vastness filled him with misgiving. He must turn that five thousand into one smooth-running, willing whole. He must turn their resentment, their bitterness, their suspicion, into trust and confidence. He must solve the problem of capital and labor. ... An older, more experienced man might have smiled at Bonbright—-at his daring to conceive such a possibility. But Bonbright dared to conceive it; dared to set himself the task of bringing it about.

That would be his work, peculiarly. No one could help him with it, for it was personal, appertaining to him. It was between Bonbright Foote and the five thousand.

It was inevitable that he should feel bitterness toward his father, for, but for his father, his work would now be enormously more simple. If these men knew him as he was-knew of his interest in them, of his willingness to be fair-he would have had their confidence from the start. His father had made him appear a tyrant, without consideration for labor; had made him a capitalist of the most detestable type. It was a deep-seated impression. It had been proven. The men had experienced it; had felt the

weight of Bonbright's ruthless hand. ... How could he make them believe it was not his hand? How could he make them believe that the measures taken to crush the strike had not been his measures; that they had been carried out under his name but against his will? It sounded absurd even to himself. Nobody would believe it.

Page 162

Therefore he must begin, not at the beginning, but deeper than the beginning. He could not start fairly, but under a handicap so great as to make his chances of winning all but negligible. ... It would be useless to tell his men that he had been but a figurehead. For him the only course was to blot out what had gone—to forget it—and to start against odds to win their confidence. It would be better to let them slowly come to believe he was a convert-that there had been a revolution in his heart and mind. Indeed, there was no other way. He must show them by daily studied conduct that he was not what they feared he was. ...

He did not know what he was himself. His contact with Malcolm Lightener's workingmen had given him certain sympathies with the theories and hopes of labor; but they had made him certain of fallacies and unsoundness in other theories and ambitions. He was not the romantic type of wealthy young man who, in stories, meets the under dog and loves him, and is suddenly converted from being an out-and-out capitalist to the most radical of socialists. It was not in him to be radical, for he was steadied by a quietly running balance wheel. ... He was stubborn, too. What he wanted was to be fair, to give what was due—and to receive what was *his* due. ... He could not be swayed by mawkish sentimental sympathy, nor could he be bullied. Perhaps he was stiff-necked, but he was a man who must judge of the right or wrong of a condition himself. Perhaps he was too much that way, but his experiences had made him so.

If his men tried to bulldoze him they would find him immovable. What he believed was right and just he would do; but he had his own set notions of right and justice. He was sympathetic. His attitude toward the five thousand was one of friendliness. He regarded them as a charge and a responsibility. He was oppressed by the magnitude of the responsibility. ... But, on the other hand, he recognized that the five thousand were under certain responsibilities and obligations to him. He would do his part, but he would demand their part of them.

His father had been against unions. Bonbright was against unions. His reason for this attitude was not the reason of his father. It was simply this: That he would not be dictated to by individuals who he felt were meddling in his affairs. He had arrived at a definite decision on this point: his mills should never be unionized. ... If his men had grievances he would meet with them individually, or committees sent by them-committees of themselves. He would not treat with so-called professional labor men. He regarded them as an impertinence. Whatever differences should arise must be settled between his men and himself—with no outside interference. This was a position from which nothing would move him. ... It will be seen he was separated by vast spaces from socialism.

Page 163

He called together his superintendents and department foremen and took them into his confidence regarding his plans for improving and enlarging the plant. They came, if not with an air of hostility, at least with reserve, for they were nearer to the men than they were to Bonbright. They shared the prejudices of the men. Some of them went away from the meeting with all of their old prejudices and with a new belief that Bonbright added hypocrisy to his other vices; some withheld judgment, some were hopeful. Few gave him implicit belief.

When he was done describing the plans for the factory, he said: "There is one more thing I want to speak about. It is as vital as the other. ... We have recently gone through a strike which has caused bitterness toward this institution on the part of the men. There has been especial bitterness toward myself. I have no defense of myself to make. It is too late to do that. If any of you men know the facts--you know them. On that point I have nothing to say. ... This is what I want to impress on you men who are in authority. I want to be fair to every man in this plant. I am going to give them a fit place to work. Many parts of this plant are not now fit places. From every man I shall demand a day's work for a day's pay, but no more. You are in direct authority. I want each of you to treat his men with consideration, and to have an eye for their welfare. Perhaps I shall not be able to make the men feel toward me as I want them to feel, but if it can be brought about, I want them to know that their interests are my interests. ... That is all, except that to-morrow notices will be posted in every department stating that my office door is open to any man who works for me-any man may come to me with complaint or with suggestion at any time. The notices will state that I want suggestions, and that any man who can bring me an idea that will improve his work or the work in his department or in the plant will be paid for it according to its value. In short, I want the co-operation of every man who draws wages from this concern. ..."

As they went back to their departments the men who left the meeting discussed Bonbright, as he knew they would and hoped they would.

"It's a four flush," declared one old fellow, hotly.

"I don't know. ... Wait and see," said another. "He looked like he meant it."

Wait and see! That was the general attitude. They took nothing on trust, but put it squarely up to Bonbright to prove himself by his actions.

Mershon came into the office. "How about this construction work?" he asked. "Need an army of bricklayers. What about the unions?"

Was this question coming up so quickly? Bonbright frowned. His attitude toward the unions must become public and would inevitably raise another obstacle between himself and the men, but he was determined on the point.

“A man has a right to join the Masons or the Knights of Columbus, or the Bricklayers’ Union,” he said, presently. “That’s for him to say, but when he comes to work here he comes as an individual.”

Page 164

“Open shop?”

“Yes.”

“You won’t recognize any union? I want to know how I stand with them at the beginning.”

“I’ll recognize no union,” said Bonbright.

The card of a young man from Richmond’s office was brought in. Bonbright sent word for him to be admitted.

“I came about that Hammil accident case,” said the young man. “Hammil was hurt yesterday, pretty badly, and the report makes it look as if we’d be stuck if the thing goes to a jury.”

“I know nothing about it,” said Bonbright, with a little shock. It was possible, then, for a man to be maimed or killed in his own plant and news of it to reach him after days or perhaps never. He made a note to rectify *that* state of affairs. “You mean that this man Hammil was hurt through our fault?”

“I’m afraid a jury would say so.” The young man explained the accident in detail. “He complained about the condition of his machine, and his foreman told him he could stick to his job there or quit.”

“Forced him to work on an unsafe machine or quit?”

“Yes.”

Bonbright stared at his blotter a moment. “What did you want to see me about?”

“We’d better settle. Right now I can probably run up and put a wad of bills under Hammil’s nose and his wife’s, and it’ll look pretty big. Before some ambulance-chaser gets hold of him. He hasn’t been able to talk until awhile ago, so nobody’s seen him.”

“Your idea is that we could settle for less than a jury would give him?”

The young man laughed. “A jury’d give him four or five thousand, maybe more. Doctor says the injury is permanent. I’ve settled more than one like it for three or four hundred.”

“The man won’t be able to work again?”

“Won’t be good for much.”

“And we’re responsible!” Bonbright said it to himself, not to the young man. “Is this thing done often—settling these things for—what we can squeeze them down to?”

“Of course.” The young man was calloused. His job was to settle claims and save money. His value increased as his settlements were small.

“Where’s Hammil?”

“At the General Hospital.”

Bonbright got up and went to the closet for his hat. “Come on,” he said.

“You’re not going up there, are you?”

“Yes.”

“But—but I can handle it all right, Mr. Foote. There’s no need to bother you.”

“I’ve no doubt you can handle it—maybe too well,” said Bonbright.

They were driven to the hospital and shown up to Jim Hammil’s room. His wife was there, pale, tearless, by his bedside. Jim was bandaged, groaning, in agony. Bonbright’s lips lost their color. He felt guilty. It was *he* who had put this man where he was, had smashed him. It was *his* fault.

He walked to the bedside. “Jim,” he said, “I am Mr. Foote.”

“I—know—you,” said the man between teeth set to hold back his groans.

Page 165

“And I know you,” said his wife. “I know you. ... What do you want here?”

“I came to see Jim,” said Bonbright. “I didn’t know he was hurt until a few minutes ago. ... It’s useless to say I’m sorry.”

“They made him work on that machine. He knowed it wasn’t safe. ... He had to work on it or lose his job. ...”

“I know that *now*, Mrs. Hammil. ... What was he earning?”

“Two-seventy-five a day. ... And now. ... How’ll we live, with him in the hospital and maybe never able to work again?”

“Here...” protested Hammil, weakly, glaring at Bonbright. “We’ll come out all right. He’ll pay. ... You’ll pay, that’s what you will. A jury’ll make you pay. Wait till I kin see my lawyer. ...”

“You won’t need any lawyer, Jim,” said Bonbright. It was hard for him to talk. He could not speak to these people as he wanted to, nor say the words that would make their way through their despair and rage to their hearts. “You won’t need any lawyer,” he repeated.

“If you think I’m—goin’—to sign—one of them—releases—you’re damn—mistaken,” moaned the man.

“Jim,” said Bonbright, “you needn’t sign anything. ... What’s done can’t be mended. ... It was bad. It was criminal...”

“Mr. Foote,” protested the young lawyer.

“I’ll attend to this,” said Bonbright, shortly. “It’s between Jim and me. ... I’ll make it as nearly right as it can be made. ... First we’ll have you out of this ward into a room. ... As long as you are laid up your wife shall have your full pay every week, and then you and I will have a talk to see what can be done. Only don’t worry. ... Don’t worry, Mrs. Hammil. ...”

Hammil uttered a sound that was intended for a laugh. “You can’t catch me,” he said, in a dreadful voice. “I’m—up to—them sharp tricks. ... You’re lyin’. ... Git out of here, both of you. ... You’re—jest here—to cheat me.”

“You’re wrong, Jim.”

“I know—you and—your kind,” Jim said, trying to lift himself on his elbow. “I know—-what you—done durin’—the strike. ... I had a baby— and she—*died*. ... You killed her!” His voice rose almost to a scream.

“Better go, sir,” said a nurse. “He’s hurting himself.”

Bonbright gazed at her blankly. “How can I go?” he asked. “He won’t believe me. He’s got to believe me. ...”

“You lie!... you lie!...” Hammil cried. “I won’t talk-to you. ... My lawyer’ll—do my talkin’.”

Bonbright paused a moment. Then he saw it would do no good to remain. The man’s mind was poisoned against him; was unable to conceive of a man in Bonbright’s place meaning him otherwise than treachery. ... It went deeper than suspicion of an individual; it was suspicion of a class.

“I’ll do what I promised, Jim. ... That’ll prove it to you.”

“You—lie. ... You lie...” the man called after him, and Bonbright heard the words repeated again and again as he walked down the long corridor.

Page 166

CHAPTER XXXI

Bonbright worked feverishly. These were the best days he had known since he left college, but they were not happy days. He could not forget Ruth—the best he could do was to prevent himself from remembering too much, and so he worked. He demanded of himself more than it is in a single man to give, but he accomplished an astonishingly large part of it. Day and night he drove himself without relaxation and without pause. If he stopped, the old feeling of emptiness, of the futility of his existence, and the bitterness of his fortune returned. His nature might have become warped, but for the labor.

The building of the new shops he left to Mershon, knowing himself incompetent. He knew what sort of shops he wanted; Mershon knew how to produce them, and Mershon was dependable. Bonbright had implicit confidence in the engineer's ability and integrity, and it was justified. The new mills were rising. ...

Bonbright's part in that was enough to keep one man occupied, for, however much he might leave to Mershon, there were countless details that he must decide; innumerable points to be referred to him and discussed. But his chief interest was not in producing a plant to manufacture engines, but in producing a crew of men to operate the plant; not merely hiring capable workingmen, but producing a condition where himself and those working-men would be in accord; where the men would be satisfied, happy in their work; a condition millennial in that the known as labor unrest should be eliminated. He had set himself to find a solution to the age-old problem of capital and labor. ...

He had not realized how many elements entered into the matter, and what a high degree of specialized knowledge must be brought to the task. In the beginning he had fancied himself as capable of working out the basis for ideal relations between him and his employees as any other. He soon discovered himself to be all but unequipped for the effort. ... It was a saving quality of Bonbright's that he would admit his own futilities. Therefore he called to conference the country's greatest sociologist, Professor Witzer.

The professor, a short, wabbling individual, with watery eyes that could read print splendidly if it were held within six inches of them, and who, when he did read, moved book or paper back and forth in front of his spectacles in a droll, owlish, improbable way, instead of letting his eyes travel across the lines of print, was skeptical at first. He suspected Bonbright of being a youth scratching the itch of a sudden and transient enthusiasm. But he became interested. Bonbright compelled his interest, for he was earnest, intense, not enthusiastic, not effervescing with underdone theories.

"What you want to do, as I understand it," said the professor, "is merely to revolutionize the world and bring on the millennium."

“What I want to do,” said Bonbright, “is to formulate a plan that will be fair to labor and fair to me. I want a condition where both of us will be satisfied—and where both will know we are satisfied. It can be done.”

Page 167

“Um!...” said the professor. “Are you, by chance, a socialist?”

“Far from it.”

“What are your theories?”

“I haven’t any theories. I want facts, working facts. There’s no use palavering to the men. What they want and what I want is something concrete. I want to know what they want, and how much of it will be good for them. I want something that will work in dollars and cents, in days’ work, in making life more comfortable for the women and children at home. If merely paying wages will do it, then I’ll pay the wages. ...”

“It won’t,” said the professor. “But it ’ll go quite some distance.”

“It isn’t a matter of sentiment with me,” Bonbright said. “It’s a matter of business, and peace of mind, and all-around efficiency. I don’t mean efficiency in this plant, but efficiency in *living*. ... For the men and their families.”

“It can’t be done by giving them rest rooms with Turkish rugs nor porcelain bathtubs, nor by installing a moving-picture show for them to watch while they eat lunch,” said the professor. “It can’t be done with money alone. It would work in isolated cases. Give some men a sufficient wage and they would correct their ways of living; they would learn to live decently, and they would save for the rainy day and for old age. I don’t venture an estimate of the proportion. ... But there would be the fellows whose increased pay meant only that much more to spend. Mighty little would filter through to improve the conditions of their actual living. ... In any scheme there will have to be some way of regulating the use of the money they earn—and that’s paternalism.”

“Can it be made to work? It’s your honest opinion I’m after.”

“I don’t believe it, but, young man, it will be the most interesting experiment I ever engaged in. Have you any ideas?”

“My basic idea is to pay them enough so they can live in comfort. ...”

“And then you’ve got to find some machinery to compel them to live in comfort.”

“I’d like to see every employee of this concern the owner of his home. I’d like to feel that no man’s wife is a drudge. An astonishingly large number of wives do washing, or work out by the day. ... And boarders. The boarder is a problem.”

“You *have* been thinking,” said the professor. “Do I understand that you are offering me the chance to work with you on this experiment?”

“Yes.”

“I accept. ... I never dreamed I’d have a chance to meddle with human lives the way you seem to want to meddle with them. ...”

So they went to work, and day after day, week after week, their plan grew and expanded and embraced unforeseen intricacies. Bonbright approached it from the practical side always. The professor came to view him with amazement—and with respect.

“I’m sticking my finger into the lives of twenty thousand human beings!” the professor said to himself many times a day, with the joy of the scientist. “I’m being first assistant to the world’s greatest meddler. That young man is headed for a place as one of the world’s leaders, or for a lamp-post and a rope. ... I wonder which. ...”

Page 168

The thing that Bonbright asked himself many, many times was a different sort of question. “Is this the sort of thing she meant? Would she approve of doing this?”

He was not embarked on the project for Ruth’s sake. It was not Ruth who had driven him to it, but himself, and the events of his life. But her presence was there. ... He was doing his best. He was doing the thing he thought would bring about the condition he desired, and he hoped she would approve if she knew. ... But whether she approved or not, he would have persisted along his own way. ... If he had never known her, never married her, he would have done the same thing. Some day she would know this, and understand it. It would be another irony for her to bear. The man she had married that she might influence him to ameliorate the conditions of his workingmen was doing far more than she had dreamed of accomplishing herself—and would have done it if she had never been born. ...

Neither she nor Bonbright realized, perhaps would never realize, that it is not the individual who brings about changes in the social fabric. It is not fanatics, not reformers, not inspired leaders. It is the labored working of the mass, and the working of the mass brings forth and casts up fanatics, reformers, leaders, when it has gestated them and prepared the way for their birth. The individual is futile; his aims and plans are futile save as they are the outcome of the trend of the mass. ...

Ruth was not so fortunate as Bonbright. Her work did not fill her time nor draw her interest. It was merely the thing she did to earn the necessities of life. She was living now in a boarding house on the lower side of the city, where a room might be had for a sum within her means. It was not a comfortable room. It was not a room that could be made comfortable by any arrangement of its occupant. But it was in a clean house, presided over by a woman of years and respectable garrulity.

Six days of the week Ruth worked, and the work became daily more exhausting, demanding more of her nervous organism as her physical organism had less to give. She was not taking care of herself. It is only those who cling to life, who are interested in life and in themselves, who take care of their bodies as they should be taken care of. She had been slight; now she was thin. No one now would have dreamed of calling her the Girl with the Grin. She looked older, lifeless, almost haggard at times. Her condition was not wholly the result of unhappiness. It was due to lack of fresh air and exercise, for she went seldom abroad. It was fear of meeting acquaintances that shut her in her room—fear of meeting Bonbright, fear of encountering Dulac. It was loneliness, too. She made no new acquaintances, and went her way in solitude. She had not so much as a nodding acquaintance with most of her fellow lodgers. Not one of them could boast of conversation with her beyond the briefest passing of the day. ...

Page 169

At first they gossiped about her, speculated about her, wove crude stories about her. Some chose to think her exclusive, and endeavored to show her by their bearing that they thought themselves as good as she—and maybe better. They might have saved themselves their trouble, for she never noticed. Lack of proper nourishment did its part. Women seem prone to neglect their food. The housewife, if her husband does not come home to the midday meal, contents herself with a snack, hastily picked up, and eaten without interest. Ruth had no appetite. She went to the table three times a day because a certain quantity of food was a necessity. She did not eat at Mrs. Moody's table, but "went out to her meals. ..." She ate anywhere and everywhere.

Mrs. Moody alone had tried to approach Ruth. Ruth had been courteous, but distant. She wanted no prying into her affairs; no seekers after confidences; no discoverers of her identity. For gossip spreads, and one does not know what spot it may reach. ...

"It hain't healthy for her to set in her room all the time," Mrs. Moody said to the mercenary who helped with the cooking. "And it hain't natural for a girl like her never to have comp'ny. Since she's been here there hain't been a call at the door for her—nor a letter."

"I hain't seen her but once or twict," said the mercenary. "If I was to meet her face to face on the street, I hain't sure I'd know it was her."

"She didn't look good when she come, and she's lookin' worse every day. First we know we'll have her down on her back. ... And then what?... S'pose she was to be took sudden? Who'd we notify?"

"The horspittle," said the mercenary, callously.

"She's sich a mite of a thing, with them big eyes lookin' sorry all the while. I feel sort of drawed to her. But she won't have no truck with me... nor nobody. ... She hain't never left nothin' layin' around her room that a body could git any idee about her from. Secretive, I call it."

"Maybe," said the mercenary, "she's got a past."

"One thing's certain, if she don't look better 'fore she looks worse, she won't have a long future."

That seemed to be a true saying. Ruth felt something of it. It was harder for her to get up of mornings, more difficult to drag herself to work and hold up during the day. Sometimes she skipped the evening meal now and went straight home to bed. All she wanted was to rest, to lie down. ... One day she fainted in the office. ...

Her burden was harder to support because it included not grief alone, but remorse, and if one excepts hatred, remorse is the most wearing of the emotions. ... As she became weaker, less normal, it preyed on her.

Then, one morning, she fainted as she tried to get out of bed, and lay on the floor until consciousness returned. She dragged herself back into bed and lay there, gazing dully up at the ceiling, suffering no pain... only so tired. She did not speculate about it. Somehow it did not interest her very much. Even not going to work didn't bother her—-she had reached that point.

Page 170

Mrs. Moody had watched her going and coming for several days with growing uneasiness. This morning she knew Ruth had not gone out, and presently the woman slap-slapped up the stairs in her heelless slippers to see about it. She rapped on Ruth's door. There was no response. She rapped again. ...

"I know you're in there," she said, querulously. "Why don't you answer?"

Inside, Ruth merely moved her head from side to side on the pillow. She heard—but what did it matter?

Mrs. Moody opened the door and stepped inside. She was prepared for what she saw.

"There you be," she said, with a sort of triumphant air, as of one whose prophecy had been fulfilled to the letter, "flat on your back."

Ruth paid no attention.

"What ails you?"

No answer.

"Here now"—she spoke sharply—"you know who I be, don't you?"

"Yes," said Ruth.

"Why didn't you answer?"

"I am—so—tired," Ruth said, faintly.

"You can't be sick here. Don't you go doin' it. I hain't got no time to look after sick folks." She might as well have spoken to the pillow. Ruth didn't care. She had simply reached the end of her will, and had given up. It was over. She was absolutely without emotion.

Mrs. Moody approached the bed and felt of Ruth's hand. She had expected to find it hot. It was cold, bloodless. It gave the woman a start. She looked down at Ruth's face, from which the big eyes stared up at her without seeming to see her.

"You poor mite of a thing," said Mrs. Moody, softly. Then she seemed to jack herself up to a realization that softness would not do and that she could not allow such goings-on in her house. "You're sick, and if I'm a judge you're mighty sick," she said, sharply. "Who's goin' to look after you. Say?"

The tone stirred Ruth. ... "Nobody..." she said, after a pause.

“I got to notify somebody,” said Mrs. Moody. “Any relatives or friends?”

Ruth seemed to think it over as if the idea were hard to comprehend.

“Once I—had a—husband...” she said.

“But you hain’t got him now, apparently. Have you got anybody?”

“... Husband...” said Ruth. “... husband. ... But he—went away. ... No, *I*—went away... because it was—too late then. ... It was too late—*then*, wasn’t it?” Her voice was pleading.

“You know more about it than me,” said Mrs. Moody. “I want you should tell me somebody I can notify.”

“I—loved him... and I didn’t know it. ... That was—queer—wasn’t it?... He *never* knew it. ...”

“She’s clean out of her head,” said Mrs. Moody, irritably, “and what’ll I do? Tell me that. What’ll I do, and her most likely without a cent and all that?... Why didn’t you go and git sick somewheres else? You could of. ...”

She wrung her hands and called Providence to witness that all the arrows of misfortune were aimed at her, and always had been.

Page 171

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself—a growd woman like you—makin’ me all this nuisance. I sha’n’t put up with it. You’ll go packin’ to the horspittle, that’s what you’ll do. Mark my word.”

Mrs. Moody’s method of packing Ruth off to the hospital was unique. It consisted of running herself for the doctor. It consisted of listening with bated breath to his directions; it consisted of giving up almost wholly the duties—A conducting her boarding house, and in making gruels and heating water and sitting in Ruth’s room wielding a fan over Ruth’s ungrateful face. It consisted in spending of her scant supply of money for medicines, in constant attendance and patient, faithful nursing—accompanied by sharp scoldings and recriminations uttered in a monotone guaranteed not to disturb the sick girl. Perhaps she really fancied she was being hard and unsympathetic and calloused. She talked as if she were, but no single act was in tune with her words. ... She grumbled—and served. She complained—and hovered over Ruth with clumsy, gentle hands. She was afraid somebody might think her tender. She was afraid she might think so herself. ... The world is full of Mrs. Moodys.

Ruth lay day after day with no change, half conscious, wholly listless. ... It seemed to Mrs. Moody to be nothing but a waiting for the end. But she waited for the end as though the sick girl were flesh of her flesh, protesting to heaven against the imposition, ceaselessly.

CHAPTER XXXII

If Bonbright’s handling of the Hammil casualty created a good impression among the men, his stand against the unions more than counterbalanced it. He was able to get no nearer to the men. Perhaps, as individuals became acquainted with him, there was less open hostility manifested, but there remained suspicion, resentment, which Bonbright was unable to convert into friendship and co-operation.

The professor of sociology peered frequently at Bonbright through his thick spectacles with keen interest. He found as much enjoyment in studying his employer as he did in working over his employer’s plan. Frequently he discussed Bonbright with Mershon.

“He’s a strange young man,” he said, “an instructive psychological study. Indeed he is. One cannot catalogue him. He is made up of opposites. Look you, Mershon, at his eagerness to better the conditions of his men—that’s why I’m abandoning classes of boys who ought to be interested in what I teach them, but aren’t—and then place beside it his antagonism to unionism. ...”

Mershon was interested at that instant more in the practical aspects of the situation. “The unions are snapping at our heels. Bricklayers, masons, structural steel, the whole lot. I’ve been palavering with them—but I’m about to the end of my rope. We’ve

needed men and we've got a big sprinkling of union men. Wages have attracted them. I'm afraid we've got too many, so many the unions

Page 172

feel cocky. They think they're strong enough to take a hand and try to force recognition on us. ... He won't have it." Mershon shrugged his shoulders. "I've got to the end of my rope. Yesterday I told him the responsibility was one I didn't hanker for, and put it up to him. He's going to meet with the labor fellows to-day. ... And we can look for fireworks."

"If I were labor," said the professor, "I think I should leave that young man alone—until I saw where he headed. They're going to get more out of him than organization could compel or even hope for. If they prod him too hard they may upset things. He's fine capacity for stubbornness."

The labor representatives were on their way to the office. When they arrived they asked first for Mershon, who received them and notified Bonbright.

"Show them in," he said. "We may as well have it over." There were four of the men whom Mershon led through the door into Bonbright's office, but Bonbright saw but one of them-Dulac!

The young man half rose from his chair, then sat down with his eyes fixed upon the man into whose hands, he believed, his wife had given herself. It was curious that he felt little resentment toward Dulac, and none of that murderous rage which some men might have felt. ...

"Mr. Dulac," he said, "I want to—talk with you. Will you ask these— other gentlemen if they will step outside for—a few moments. ... I have a-personal matter to discuss with —Mr. Dulac."

Dulac was not at his ease. He had come in something like a spirit of bravado to face Bonbright, and this turn to the event nonplused him. However, if he would save his face he must rise to the situation.

"Just a minute, boys," he said to his companions, and with Mershon they filed into the next room.

"Dulac," said Bonbright, in a voice that was low but steady, "is she well and—happy?"

"Eh?..." Dulac was startled indeed.

"I haven't kept you to—quarrel," said Bonbright. "I hoped she would--wait the year before she went—to you, but it was hers to choose. ... Now that she has chosen—I want to know if it has—made her happy. I want her to be happy, Dulac."

Dulac came a step nearer the desk. Something in Bonbright's voice and manner compelled, if not his sympathy, at least something which resembled respect.

"Do you mean you don't know where Ruth is?" he asked.

"No."

"You thought she was with me?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Foote, she isn't with me. ... I wish to God she was. I've seen her only once since—that evening. It was by accident, on the street. ... I tried to see her. I found the place empty, and nobody knew where she'd gone. Even her mother didn't know. I thought you had sent her away."

"Dulac," said Bonbright, leaning forward as though drawn by spasmodic contraction of tense muscles, "is this true?"

Page 173

For once Dulac did not become theatrical, did not pose, did not reply to this doubt, as became labor flouting capital. Perhaps it was because the matter lay as close to his stormy heart as it did to Bonbright's. "Yes," he said.

"Then where..."

"I don't—know."

"She's out there alone," said Bonbright, dully. "She's been out there alone—all these months. She's so little. ... What made her go away?... Something has happened to her. ..."

"Haven't you had any word—anything?" Dulac was becoming frightened himself.

"Nothing—nothing."

Bonbright leaped to his feet and took two steps forward and two back. "I've got to know," he said. "She must be found. ... Anything could have happened. ..."

"It's up to us to find her," said Dulac, unconsciously, intuitively coupling himself with Bonbright. They were comrades in this thing. The anxiety was equally theirs.

"Yes. ... Yes."

"She wasn't the kind of a girl to—"

"No," said Bonbright, quickly, as if afraid to hear Dulac say the words, "she wouldn't do *that*. ... Maybe she's just hiding away—or hurt—or sick. I've got to know."

"Call back the boys. ... Let's get this conference over so we can get at it."

Bonbright nodded, and Dulac stepped to the door. The men re-entered.

"Now, gentlemen," said Bonbright.

"We just came to put the question to you squarely, Mr. Foote. We represent all the trades working on the new buildings. Are you going to recognize the unions?"

"No," said Bonbright.

"More than half the men on the job are union."

"They're welcome to stay," said Bonbright.

“Well, they won’t stay,” said the spokesman. “We’ve fiddled along with this thing, and the boys are mighty impatient. This is our last word, Mr. Foote. Recognize the unions or we’ll call off our men.”

Bonbright stood up. “Good afternoon, gentlemen,” said he.

With angry faces they tramped out, all but Dulac, who stopped in the door. “I’m going to look for her,” he said.

“If you find anything—hear anything—”

Dulac nodded. “I’ll let you know,” he said.

“I’ll be—searching, too,” said Bonbright. Mershon came in. “Here’s a letter—” he began.

Bonbright shook his head. “Attend to it—whatever it is. I’m going out. I don’t know when I shall be back. ... You have full authority. ...”

He all but rushed from the room, and Mershon stared after him in amazement. Bonbright did not know where he was going, what he was going to do. There was no plan, but his need was action. He must be doing something, searching. ... But as he got into his machine he recognized the futility of aimlessness. There was a way of going about such things. ... He must be calm. He must enlist aid.

Suddenly he thought of Hilda Lightener. He had not seen her for weeks. She had been close to Ruth; perhaps she knew something. He drove to the Lightener residence and asked for her. Hilda was at home.

Page 174

“She’s *lost*,” said Bonbright, as Hilda came into the room.

“What? Who are you talking about?”

“’Ruth. ... She’s not with Dulac. He doesn’t know where she is-she was never with him.”

“Did you think she was?” Hilda said, accusingly. “You—you’re so—Oh, the pair of you!”

“Do you know where she is?”

“I haven’t seen nor heard of her since the day—your father died.”

“Something must have happened. ... She wouldn’t have gone away like that—without telling anybody, even her mother. ...”

“She would,” said Hilda. “She—she was hurt. She couldn’t bear to stay. She didn’t tell me that, but I know. ... And it’s your fault for—for being blind.”

“I don’t understand.”

“She loved you,” said Hilda, simply. “No. ... She told me. She never--loved—me. It was him. She married me to—”

“I know what she married you for. I know all about it. ... And she thought she loved him. She found out she didn’t. But I knew it for a long time,” Hilda said, womanlike, unable to resist the temptation to boast of her intuition. “It all came to her that day—and she was going to tell you. ... She was going to do that—going to go to you and tell you and ask you to take her back. ... She said she’d make you believe her. ...”

“No,” said Bonbright, “you’re—mistaken, Hilda. She was my wife. ... I know how she felt. She couldn’t bear to have me pass close to her. ...”

“It *is* true,” Hilda said. “She was going to you. ... And then I came and told her your father was dead. ... That made it all impossible, don’t you see?... Because you knew why she had married you, and you would believe she came back to you because—you owned the mills and employed all those men. ... That’s what you *would* have believed, too. ...”

“Yes,” said Bonbright.

“And then—it was more than she could bear. To know she loved you and had loved you a long time—and that you loved her. You do, don’t you?”

“I can’t—help it.”

“So that made it worse than anything that had gone before—and she went away. She didn’t tell even me, but I ought to have known. ...”

“And you haven’t even a trace?”

“Bonbright, if you find her—what?”

“I don’t know. ... I’ve just got to find her. I’ve got to know what’s happened. ...”

“Are you going to tell her you love her—and take her back?”

“She wouldn’t want me. ... Oh, you think you are right, Hilda. But I know. I lived with her for weeks and I saw how she felt. You’re wrong. ... No, I’ll just *find* her. ...”

“And leave her as bad off as she was before.”

“I’ll do anything for her—you know that.”

“Except the one thing she can’t do without. ...”

“You don’t understand,” he said, wearily.

“And you’re dense and blind—and that’s what makes half the cruelty in the world.”

Page 175

“Let’s not—talk about that part of it, Hilda. Will you help me find her?”

“No,” said Hilda. “She’s where she wants to be. I’m not going to torture her by finding her for you—and then letting her slip back again—into hopelessness. If you’ll promise to love her and believe she loves you—I’ll try to find her.”

Bonbright shook his head.

“Then let her be. No matter where she is, she’s better off than she would be if you found her—and she tried to tell you and you wouldn’t believe. ... You let her be.”

“She may be hurt, or sick. ...”

“If she were she’d let somebody know,” said Hilda, but in her own mind was a doubt of this. She knew Ruth, she knew to what heights of fanaticism Ruth’s determination could rise, and that the girl was quite capable, more especially in her state of overwrought nerves, of dying in silence.

“I won’t help you,” she said, firmly.

Bonbright got up slowly, wearily. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I thought you—would help. ... I’ll have to hunt alone, then. ...” And before she could make up her mind to speak, to tell him she didn’t mean what she said, and that she would search with him and help him, he was gone.

The only thing he could think of to do was to go once more to their apartment and see if any trace of her could be picked up there. Somebody must have seen her go. Somebody must have seen the furniture going or heard where it was going. ... Perhaps somebody might remember the name on the van.

He did not content himself with asking the janitor and his wife, who could tell him nothing. He went from tenant to tenant. Few of them remembered even that such a girl had lived there, for tenants in apartment houses change with the months. But one woman, a spinster of the sort who pass their days in their windows and fill their lives meagerly by watching what they can see of their neighbors’ activities, gave a hint. She was sure she remembered that particular removal on account of the young woman who moved looking so pale and anxious. Yes, she was sure she did, because she told herself that something must have happened, and it excited her to know that something had happened so close to her. Evidently she had itched with curiosity for days.

“It was a green van—I’m sure it was a green van,” she said, “because I was working a centerpiece with green leaves, and the van was almost the same shade. ... Not quite the same shade, but almost. I held my work up to the window to see, and the van was a little darker. ...”

“Wasn’t there a name on it? Didn’t you notice the name?”

The spinster concentrated on that. “Yes, there was a name. Seems to me it began with an ‘S,’ or maybe it was a ‘W.’ Now, wasn’t that name Walters? No, seems more as if it was Rogers, or maybe Smith. It was one of those, or something like it. Anyhow, I’m sure it began with a ’B.’...”

That was the nearest Bonbright came to gleaning a fact. A green van. And it might not have been a green van. The spinster’s memory seemed uncertain. Probably she had worked more than one centerpiece, not all with green leaves. She was as likely to have worked yellow flowers or a pink design. ... But Bonbright had no recourse but to look for a green van.

Page 176

He drove to the office of a trucking and moving concern and asked if there were green vans. The proprietor said *his* vans were always yellow. Folks could see them farther and the paint wore better; but all men didn't follow his judgment. Yes, there *were* green vans, though not so good as his, and not so careful of the furniture. He told Bonbright who owned the green vans. It was a storage house.

Bonbright went to the huge brick storage building, and persuaded a clerk to search the records. A bill from Bonbright's pocketbook added to the persuasion. ... An hour's wait developed that a green van belonging to the company had moved goods from that address—and the spinster was vindicated.

"Brought 'em here and stored 'em," said the young man. "Here's the name—Frazer. Ruth Frazer."

"That's it," said Bonbright. "That's it."

"Storage hain't been paid. ... No word from the party. Maybe she'll show up some day to claim 'em. If not, we'll sell 'em for the charges."

"Didn't she leave any address?"

"Nope."

It had been only a cul de sac. Bonbright had come to the end of it, and had only to retrace his steps. It had led him no nearer to his wife. What to do now? He didn't see what he could do, or that anybody could do better than he had done. ... He thought of going to the police, but rejected that plan. It was repulsive to him and would be repulsive to Ruth. ... He might insert a personal in the paper. Such things were done. But if Ruth were ill she would not see it. If she wanted to hide from him she would not reply.

He went to Mrs. Frazer, but Mrs. Frazer only sobbed and bewailed her fate, and stated her opinion of Bonbright in many confused words. It seemed to be her idea that her daughter was dead or kidnapped, and sometimes she appeared to hold both notions simultaneously. ... Bonbright got nothing there.

Discouraged, he went back to his office, but not to his work. He could not work. His mind would hold no thought but of Ruth. ... He must find her. He *must*. ... Nothing mattered unless he could find her, and until he found her he would be good for nothing else.

He tried to pull himself together. "I've got to work," he said. "I've got to think about something else. ..." But his will was unequal to the performance. ... "Where is she?... Where is she?.." The question, the *demand*, repeated itself over and over and over.

CHAPTER XXXIII

There was a chance that a specialist, a professional, might find traces of Ruth where Bonbright's untrained eyes missed them altogether. So, convinced that he could do nothing, that he did not in the least know how to go about the search, he retained a firm of discreet, well-recommended searchers for missing persons. With that he had to be content. He still searched, but it was because he had to search; he had to feel that he was trying, doing something, but no one realized the uselessness of it more than himself. He was always looking for her, scanned every face in the crowd, looked up at every window.

Page 177

In a day or two he was able to force himself to work steadily, unremittingly again. The formula of his patent medicine, with which he was to cure the ills of capital-labor, was taking definite shape, and the professor was enthusiastic. Not that the professor felt any certainty of effecting a permanent cure; he was enthusiastic over it as a huge, splendid experiment. He wanted to see it working and how men would react to it. He had even planned to write a book about it when it should have been in operation long enough to show what its results would be.

Bonbright was sure. He felt that it would bridge the gulf between him and his employees—that gulf which seemed now to be growing wider and deeper instead of disappearing. Mershon's talk was full of labor troubles, of threatened strikes, of consequent delays.

"We can finish thirty days ahead of schedule," he said to Bonbright, "if the unions leave us alone."

"You think I ought to recognize them," Bonbright said. "Well, Mr. Mershon, if labor wants to cut its own throat by striking—let it strike. I'm giving it work. I'm giving it wages that equal or are higher than union scale. They've no excuse for a strike. I'm willing to do anything within reason, but I'm going to run my own concern. Before I'll let this plant be unionized I'll shut it down. If I can't finish the new shops without recognizing the unions, then they'll stand as they are."

"You're the boss," said Mershon, with a shrug. "Do you know there's to, be a mass meeting in the armory to-night? I think the agitator people are going to try to work the men up to starting trouble."

"You think they'll strike?"

"I *know* they will."

"All the men, or just the steel workers and bricklayers and temporary employees on the new buildings?"

"I don't know. ... But if any of them go out it's going to make things mighty bad."

"I'll see what can be done," said Bonbright.

The strike must be headed off if possible. It would mean a monstrously costly delay; it might mean a forfeiture of his contract with Lightener. It might mean that he had gone into this new project and expended hundreds of thousands of dollars to equip for the manufacture of engines in vain. ... The men must not strike.

There seemed no way to avert it but to surrender, and that Bonbright did not even consider. ... He called in the professor.

“The plan is practically complete, isn’t it?” he asked.

“I’d call it so. The skeleton is there and it’s covered with flesh. Some of the joints creak a little and maybe there’s an ear or an eyebrow missing. ... But those are details.”

Bonbright nodded. “We’ll try it out,” he said. “To-night there’s a mass meeting—to stir our men up to strike. They mustn’t strike, and I’m going to stop them—with the plan.”

“Eh?” said the professor.

“I’m going to the meeting,” said Bonbright.

Page 178

“You’re—young man, you’re crazy.”

“I’m going to head off that strike. I’m going there and I’m going to announce the plan.”

“They won’t let you speak.”

“I think they will. ... Curiosity will make them.”

The young man did understand something of human nature, thought the professor. Curiosity would, most likely, get a hearing for him.

“It’s dangerous,” said he. “The men aren’t in a good humor. There might be some fanatic there—”

“It’s a chance,” said Bonbright, “but I’ve got to take it.”

“I’ll go with you,” said the professor.

“No. I want to be there alone. This thing is between my men and me. It’s personal. We’ve got to settle it between ourselves.”

The professor argued, pleaded; but Bonbright was stubborn, and the professor had previous acquaintance with Bonbright’s stubbornness. Its quality was that of tool steel. Bonbright had made up his mind to go and to go alone. Nobody could argue him out of it.

Bonbright did go alone. He went early in order to obtain a good position in the hall, a mammoth gathering place capable of seating three thousand people. He entered quietly, unostentatiously, and walked to a place well toward the front, and he entered unobserved. The street before the hall was full of arguing, gesticulating men. Inside were other loudly talking knots, sweltering in the closeness of the place. In corners, small impromptu meetings were listening to harangues not on the evening’s program. Already half the seats were taken by the less emotional, more stolid men, who were content to wait in silence for the real business of the meeting. There was an air of suspense, of tenseness, of excitement. Bonbright could feel it. It made him tingle; it gave him a Sensation of vibrating emptiness resembling that of a man descending in a swift elevator.

Bonbright was not accustomed to public speaking, but, somehow, he did not regard what he was about to say as a public speech. He did not think of it as being kindred to oratory. He was there to talk business with a gathering of his men, that was all. He knew what he was going to say, and he was going to say it clearly, succinctly, as briefly as possible.

In half an hour the chairs on the platform were occupied by chairman, speakers, union officials. The great hall was jammed, and hundreds packed aboat the doors in the street without, unable to gain admission. ... The chairman opened the meeting briefly. Behind him Bonbright saw Dulac, saw the members of the committee that had waited on him, saw other men known to him only because he had seen their pictures from time to time in the press. It was an imposing gathering of labor thought.

Bonbright had planned what he would do. It was best, he believed, to catch the meeting before it had been excited by oratory, before it had been lashed to anger. It was calmer, more reasonable now than it would be again. He arose to his feet.

Page 179

“Mr. Chairman,” he said, distinctly.

The chairman paused; Bonbright’s neighbors turned to stare; men all over the hall rose and craned their necks to have a view of the interrupter.

“Sit down!...Shut up!” came cries from here and there. Then other cries, angry cries. “It’s Foote!... It’s the boss! Out with him!... Out with him!”

“Mr. Chairman,” said Bonbright, “I realize this is unusual, but I hope you will allow me to be heard. Every man here must admit that I am vitally interested in what takes place here to-night. ... I come in a friendly spirit, and I have something to say which is important to me and to you. I ask you to hear me. I will be brief...”

“Out with him!... No!... Throw him out!” came yells from the floor. The house was on its feet, jostling, surging. Men near to Bonbright hesitated. One man reached over the shoulders of his fellows and struck at Bonbright. Another shoved him back.

“Let him talk. ... Let’s hear him,” arose counter-cries. The meeting threatened to get beyond control, to become a mob.

The chairman, familiar with the men he dealt with, acted quickly. He turned to Dulac and whispered, then faced the hall with hands upheld.

“Mr. Foote is here uninvited,” he said. “He requests to be heard. Let us show him that we are reasonable, that we are patient. ... Mr. Dulac agrees to surrender a portion of his time to Mr. Foote. Let us hear what he has to say.”

Bonbright pushed his way toward the aisle and moved forward. Once he stumbled, and almost fell, as a man thrust out a foot to trip him— and the hall laughed.

“Speak your piece. Speak it nice,” somebody called, and there was another laugh. This was healthier, safer.

Bonbright mounted the platform and advanced to its edge.

“Every man here,” he said, “is an employee of mine. I have tried to make you feel that your interests are my interests, but I seem to have failed—or you would not be here. I have tried to prove that I want to be something more than merely your employer, but you would not believe me.”

“Your record’s bad,” shouted a man, and there was another laugh.

“My record is bad,” said Bonbright. “I could discuss that, but it wouldn’t change things. Since I have owned the mills my record has not been bad. There are men here who could testify for me. All of you can testify that conditions have been improved. ... But I

am not here to discuss that. I am here to lay before you a plan I have been working on. It is not perfect, but as it stands it is complete enough, so that you can see what I am aiming at. This plan goes into effect the day the new plant starts to operate."

"Does it recognize the unions?" came from the floor.

"No," said Bonbright. "Please listen carefully. ... First it establishes a minimum wage of five dollars a day. No man or woman in the plant, in any capacity, shall be paid less than five dollars a day. Labor helps to earn our profits and labor should share in them. That is fair. I have set an arbitrary minimum of five dollars because there must be some basis to work from. ..."

Page 180

The meeting was silent. It was nonplused. It was listening to the impossible. Every man, every employee, should be paid five dollars a day!

“Does that mean common labor?”

“It means everyone,” said Bonbright. “It means the man who sweeps out the office, the man who runs the elevator, the man who digs a ditch. Every man does his share and every man shall have his share.

“I want every man to live in decent comfort, and I want his wife and babies to live in comfort. With these wages no man’s wife need take in washing nor work out by the day to help support the family. No man will need to ask his wife to keep a boarder to add to the family’s earnings. ...”

The men listened now. Bonbright’s voice carried to every corner and cranny of the hall. Even the men on the platform listened breathlessly as he went on detailing the plan and its workings. Nothing like this had ever happened before in the world’s history. No such offer had ever been made to workingmen by an employer capable of carrying out his promises. ... He told them what he wanted to do, and how he wanted to do it. He told them what he wanted them to do to co-operate with him—of an advisory board to be elected by the men, sharing in deliberations that affected the employees, of means to be instituted to help the men to save and to take care of their savings, of a strict eight-hour day. ... No union had ever dreamed of asking such terms of an employer.

“How do we know you’ll do it?” yelled a man.

“You have my word,” said Bonbright.

“Rats!”

“Shut up... shut up!” the objector was admonished.

“That’s all, men,” Bonbright said. “Think it over. This plan is going into effect. If you want to share in it you can do so, every one of you. ... Thank you for listening.”

Bonbright turned and sat down in a chair on the platform, anxious, watching that sea of faces, waiting to see what would happen.

Dulac leaped to his feet. “It’s a bribe,” he shouted. “It’s nothing but an attempt to buy your manhood for five dollars a day. We’re righting for a principle—not for money. ... We’re—”

But his voice was drowned out. The meeting had taken charge of itself. It wanted to listen to no oratory, but to talk over this thing that had happened, to realize it, to weigh it, to determine what it meant to them. Abstract principle must always give way to

concrete fact. The men who fight for principle are few. The fight is to live, to earn, to continue to exist. Men who had never hoped to earn a hundred dollars a month; men who had for a score of years wielded pick and shovel for two dollars a day or less, saw, with eyes that could hardly believe, thirty dollars a week. It was wealth! It was that thirty dollars that gripped them now, not the other things. Appreciation of them would come later, but now it was the voice of money that was in their ears. What could a man do with five dollars a day? He could live—not merely exist. ... The thing that could not be had come to pass.

Page 181

Dulac shouted, demanded their attention. He might as well have tried to still the breakers that roared upon a rocky shore. Dulac did not care for money. He was a revolutionist, a thinker, a man whose work lay with conditions, not with individuals. Here every man was thinking as an individual; applying that five dollars a day to his own peculiar, personal affairs. ... Already men were hurrying out of the hall to carry the amazing tidings home to their wives.

Dulac stormed on.

One thing was apparent to Bonbright. The men believed him. They believed he had spoken the truth. He had known they would believe him; somehow he had known that. The thing had swept them off their feet. In all that multitude was not a man whose life was not to be made easier, whose wife and children were not to be happier, more comfortable, removed from worry. It was a moving sight to see those thousands react. They were drunk with it.

An old man detached himself from the mass and rushed upon the platform. “It’s true?... It’s true?” he said, with tears running down his face.

“It’s true,” said Bonbright, standing up and offering his hand.

That was the first of hundreds. Some one shouted, hoarsely, “Hurrah for Foote!” and the armory trembled with the shout.

The thing was done. The thing he had come to do was accomplished. There would be no strike.

Dulac had fallen silent, was sitting in his chair with his face hidden. For him this was a defeat, a bitter blow.

Bonbright made his way to him.

“Mr. Dulac,” he said, “have you found her?”

“You’ve bribed them. ... You’ve bought them,” Dulac said, bitterly.

“I’ve given them what is theirs fairly. ... Have you found any trace of her?” Even in this moment, which would have thrilled, exalted another, which would have made another man drunk with achievement, Bonbright could think of Ruth. Even now Ruth was uppermost in his mind. All this mattered nothing beside her. “Have you got any trace?” he asked.

“No,” said Dulac.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Next morning the whole city breakfasted with Bonbright Foote. His name was on the tongue of every man who took in a newspaper, and of thousands to whom the news of his revolutionary profit-sharing or minimum-wage plan was carried by word of mouth. It was the matter of wages that excited everyone. In those first hours they skipped the details of the plan, those details which had taken months of labor and thought to devise. It was only the fact that a wealthy manufacturer was going to pay a minimum wage of five dollars a day.

Page 182

The division between capital and labor showed plainly in the reception of the news. Capital berated Bonbright; labor was inclined to fulsomeness. Capital called him on the telephone to remonstrate and to state its opinion of him as a half-baked idiot of a young idealist who was upsetting business. Labor put on its hat and stormed the gates of Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, seeking for five-dollar jobs. Not hundreds of them came, but thousands. The streets were blocked with applicants, every one eager for that minimum wage. The police could not handle the mob. It was there for a purpose and it intended to stay. ... When it was rebuked, or if some one tried to tell them there were no jobs for it, it threw playful stones through the windows. It was there at dawn; it still remained at dark.

A man who had an actual job at Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, was a hero, an object of admiring interest to his friends and neighbors. The thing touched him. There had been a miraculous laying on of hands, under which had passed away poverty. So must the friends and acquaintances of a certain blind man whose sight was restored by a bit of divine spittle have regarded him.

Malcolm Lightener did not content himself with telephoning. He came in person to say his say to Bonbright, and he said it with point and emphasis.

“I thought I taught you some sense in my shop,” he said, as he burst into Bonbright’s office. “What’s this I hear now? What idiocy are you up to? Is this infernal newspaper story true?”

“Substantially,” said Bonbright.

“You’re crazy. What are you trying to do? Upset labor conditions in this town so that business will go to smash? I thought you had a level head. I had confidence in you—-and here you go, shooting off a half-cocked, wild-eyed, socialistic thing! Did you stop to think what effect this thing would have on other manufacturers?”

“Yes,” said Bonbright.

“It’ll pull labor down on us. They’ll say we can afford to pay such wages if you can.”

“Well,” said Bonbright, “can’t you?”

“You’ve sowed a fine crop of discontent. It’s damned unfair. You’ll have every workingman in town flocking to you. You’ll get the pick of labor.”

“That’s good business, isn’t it?” Bonbright asked, with a smile. “Now, Mr. Lightener, there isn’t any use thrashing me. The plan is going into effect. It isn’t half baked. I haven’t gone off half cocked. It is carefully planned and thought out—and it will work. There’ll be flurries for a few days, and then things will come back to the normal for you

fellows. ... I wish it wouldn't. You're a lot better able than I am to do what I'm doing, and you know it. If you can, you ought to."

"No man has a right to go ahead deliberately and upset business."

"I'm not upsetting it. I'm merely being fair, and that's what business should have been years ago. I'm able to pay a five-dollar minimum, and labor earns it. Then it ought to have it. If you can pay only a four-dollar minimum, then you should pay it. Labor earns it for you. ... If there's a man whose labor earns for him only a dollar and seventy-five cents a day, and that man pays it, he's doing as much at I am ..."

Page 183

“Bonbright,” said Malcolm Lightener, getting to his feet, “I’m damn disappointed in you.”

“Come in a year and tell me so, then I’ll listen to you,” said Bonbright.

“This nonsense won’t last a year. It won’t pan out. You’ll have to give it up, and then what? You’ll be in a devil of a pickle, won’t you?”

“All you see is that five dollars. In a day or two the whole plan will be ready. I’m having it printed in a pamphlet, and I’ll send you one. If you read it carefully and can come back and tell me it’s nonsense, then I don’t know you. You might let me go under suspended sentence at least.”

Lightener shrugged his heavy shoulders. “Take one chunk of advice,” he said. “Keep away from the club for a few days. If the boys feel the way I do they’re apt to take you upstairs and drown you in a bathtub.”

That was the side of the affair that Bonbright saw most during the day. Telephone messages, letters, telegrams, poured in and cluttered his desk. After a while he ceased to open them, for they were all alike; all sent to say the same thing that Malcolm Lightener had said. Capital looked upon him as a Judas and flayed him with the sharpest words they could choose.

He read all the papers, but the papers reflected the estimated thought of their subscribers. But to all of them the news was the big news of the day. No headline was too large to announce it ... But the papers, even those with capitalistic leanings, were afraid to be too outspoken. Gatherers of news come to have some knowledge of human nature, and these men saw deeper and farther and quicker than the Malcolm Lighteners. They did not commit themselves so far but that a drawing back and realignment would be possible ... No little part of Bonbright’s day was spent with reporters.

The news came to every house in the city. It came even to Mrs. Moody’s obscure boarding house, and the table buzzed with it. It mounted the stairs with Mrs. Moody to the room where Ruth lay apathetically in her bed, not stronger, not weaker, taking no interest in life.

Mrs. Moody sat daily beside Ruth’s bed and talked or read. She read papers aloud and books aloud, and grumbled. Ruth paid slight attention, but lay gazing up at the ceiling, or closed her eyes and pretended she was asleep. She didn’t care what was going on in the world. What did it matter, for she believed she was going to leave the world shortly. The prospect did not frighten her, nor did it gladden her. She was indifferent to it.

Mrs. Moody sat down in her rocker and looked at Ruth triumphantly. “I’ll bet this’ll interest you,” she said. “I’ll bet when I read this you won’t lay there and pertend you don’t hear. If you do it’s because somethin’s wrong with your brains, that’s all I got to say. Sick or well, it’s news to stir up a corpse.”

She began to read. The first words caught Ruth’s attention. The words were Bonbright Foote. She closed her eyes, but listened. Her thoughts were not clear; her mental processes were foggy, but the words Mrs. Moody was reading were important to her. She realized that. It was something she had once been interested in—terribly interested in ... She tried to concentrate on them; tried to comprehend. Presently she interrupted, weakly:

Page 184

“Who—who is it—about?” she asked.

“Bonbright Foote, the manufacturer. I read it out plain.”

“Yes ... What is it? ... I didn’t—understand very well. What did he —do?”

Mrs. Moody began again, impatiently. This time it was clearer to Ruth ... Once she had tried to do something like this thing she was hearing about—and that was why she was here ... It had something to do with her being sick ... And with Bonbright ... It was hard to remember.

“Even the floor sweepers git it,” said Mrs. Moody, interpreting the news story. “Everybody gits five dollars a day at least, and some gits more.”

“Everybody?...” said Ruth. “*He’s*—giving it to—them?”

“This Mr. Foote is. Yes.”

Suddenly Ruth began to cry, weakly, feebly. “I didn’t help,” she wailed, like an infant. Her voice was no stronger. “He did it alone— all alone ... I wasn’t there ...”

“No, you was right here. Where would you be?”

“I wonder—if he did—it—for me?” Her voice was piteous, pleading.

“For you? What in goodness name have *you* got to do with it? He did it for all them men—thousands of ’em. ... And jest think what it’ll mean to ’em! ... It’ll be like heaven comin’ to pass.”

“What—have I—got to do—with it?” Ruth repeated, and then cried out with grief. “Nothing ... Nothing. ... *Nothing*. If I’d never been born—he would have done it—just the same.”

“To be sure,” said Mrs. Moody, wondering. “I guess your head hain’t jest right to-day.”

“Read ... Please read ... Every word. Don’t miss a word.”

“Well, I swan! You be int’rested. I never see the like.” And the good woman read on, not skipping a word.

Ruth followed as best she could, seeing dimly, but, seeing that the thing that was surpassed was the thing she had once sacrificed herself in a futile effort to bring about ... It was rather vague, that past time in which she had striven and suffered ... But she had hoped to do something ... What was it she had done? It was something

about Bonbright ... What was it? It had been hard, and she had suffered. She tried to remember. ... And then remembrance came. She had *married* him!

“He’s good—so good,” she said, tearfully. “I shouldn’t have—done it ... I should have—trusted him ... because I knew he was good—all the tune.”

“Who was good?” asked Mrs. Moody.

“My husband,” said Ruth.

“For the land sakes, *what’s he* got to do with this? Hain’t you listenin’ at all?”

“I’m listening ... I’m listening. Don’t stop.”

Memory was becoming clearer, the fog was being blown away, and the past was showing in sharper outline. Events were emerging into distinctness. She stared at the ceiling with widening eyes, listening to Mrs. Moody as the woman stumbled on; losing account of the reading as her mind wandered off into the past, searching, finding, identifying ... She had been at peace. She had not suffered. She had lain in a lethargy which held away sharp sorrow and bitter thoughts. They were now working their way through to her, piercing her heart.

Page 185

“Oh!...” she cried. “Oh!...”

“What ails you now? You’re enough to drive a body wild. What you cryin’about? Say!”

“I—I love him ... That’s why I hid away—because I—loved him—and— and his father died. That was it. I remember now. I couldn’t bear it...”

“Was it him or his father you was in love with?” asked Mrs. Moody, acidly.

“I—hated his father ... But when he died I couldn’t tell *him*—I loved him ... He wouldn’t have believed me.”

“Say,” said Mrs. Moody, suddenly awakening to the possibilities of Ruth’s mood, “who was your husband, anyhow?”

Ruth shook her head. “I—can’t tell you ... You’d tell him ... He mustn’t find me—-because I—couldn’t bear it.”

The mercenary came to the door. “Young woman at the door wants to see you,” she said.

“Always somebody. Always trottin’ up and down stairs. Seems like a body never gits a chance to rest her bones. ... I’m comin’. Say I’ll be right downstairs.”

In the parlor Mrs. Moody found a young woman of a world with which boarding houses have little acquaintance. She glanced through the window, and saw beside the curb a big car with a liveried chauffeur. “I vum!” she said to herself.

“I’m Mrs. Moody, miss,” she said. “What’s wanted?”

“I’m looking for a friend ... I’m just inquiring here because you’re on my list of boarding houses. I guess I’ve asked at two hundred if I’ve asked at one.”

“What’s your friend’s name? Man or woman?”

“Her name is Foote. Ruth Foote.”

“No such person here ... We got Richards and Brown and Judson, and a lot of ’em, but no Foote.”

The young woman sighed. “I’m getting discouraged. ... I am afraid she’s ill somewhere. It’s been months, and I can’t find a trace. She’s such a little thing, too. ... Maybe she’s changed her name. Quite likely.”

“Is she hidin’ away?” asked Mrs. Moody.

“Yes—you might say that. Not hiding because she *did* anything, but because—her heart was broken.”

“Um! ... Little, was she? Sort of peaked and thin?”

“Yes.”

“Ever hear the name of Frazer?”

“Why, Mrs. Moody—do you—That was her name before she was married ...”

“You come along with me,” ordered Mrs. Moody, and led the way up the stairs. “Be sort of quietlike. She’s sick ...”

Mrs. Moody opened Ruth’s door and pointed in. “Is it her?” she asked.

Hilda did not answer. She was across the room in an instant and on her knees beside the bed.

“Ruth! ... Ruth! ... how could you?...” she cried.

Ruth turned her head slowly and looked at Hilda. There was no light of gladness in her eyes; instead they were veiled with trouble. “Hilda ...” she said. “I didn’t—want to be found. Go away and—and unfind me.”

“You poor baby! ... You poor, absurd, silly baby!” said Hilda, passing her arm under Ruth’s shoulders and drawing the wasted little body to her closely. “I’ve looked for you, and looked. You’ve no idea the trouble you’ve made for me ... And now I’m going to take you home. I’m going to snatch you up and bundle you off.”

Page 186

“No,” said Ruth, weakly. “Nobody must know ... *He*—mustn’t know.”

“Fiddlesticks!” “Do you know? ... He’s done something—but it wasn’t for me ... I didn’t have *anything* to do with it ... Do you know what he’s done?”

“I know,” said Hilda. “It was splendid. Dad’s all worked up over it, but I think it is splendid just the same.” “Splendid,” said Ruth, slowly, thoughtfully—“splendid ... Yes, that’s it—*splendid*.” She seemed childishly pleased to discover the word, and repeated it again and again.

Presently she turned her eyes up to Hilda’s face, lifted a white, blue-veined, almost transparent hand, and touched Hilda’s face. “I”— she seemed to have difficulty to find a word, but she smiled like a tiny little girl—“I—*like* you,” she said, triumphantly. “I’m—-sorry you came—but I—like you.”

“Yes, dear,” said Hilda. “You’d *better* like me.”

“But,” said Ruth, evidently striving to express a differentiation, “I—*love* him.”

Hilda said nothing; there was nothing she could say, but her eyes brimmed at the pitifulness of it. She abhorred tears.

“I’m going now, dear,” she said. “I’ll fix things for you and be back in no time to take you home with me. ... So be all ready.”

“No...” said Ruth.

“Yes,” Hilda laughed. “You’ll help, won’t you, Mrs. Moody?”

“Hain’t no way out of it, I calc’late,” said the woman.

“I won’t be half an hour, Ruth ... Good-by.”

But Ruth had turned away her face and would not answer.

“Say,” said Mrs. Moody, in a fever of curiosity which could not be held in check after they had passed outside of Ruth’s room, “who is she, anyhow? ... *Somebody*, I’ll perdict. Hain’t she somebody?”

“She’s Mrs. Foote ... Mrs. Bonbright Foote.”

“I *swan* to man! ... And me settin’ there readin’ to her about him. If it don’t beat all ... Him with all them millions, and her without so much as a nest like them beasts and birds of the air, in Scripture. I never expected nothin’ like this would ever happen to me ...”

Hilda saw that Mrs. Moody was glorifying God in her heart that this amazing adventure, this bit out of a romance, had come into her drab life.

“Is that there your auto?” Mrs. Moody asked, peering out with awe at the liveried chauffeur.

Hilda nodded. “And who be you, if I might ask?” Mrs. Moody said.

“My name is Hilda Lightener, Mrs. Moody.”

“Not that automobile man’s daughter—the one they call the automobile king?”

“They call dad lots of things,” said Hilda, with a sympathetic laugh. She liked Mrs. Moody. “I’ll be back directly,” she said, and left the good woman standing in an attitude suggestive of mental prostration, actually, literally, gasping at this marvel that had blossomed under her very eyes.

As Hilda’s car moved away she turned, picked up her skirts, and ran toward the kitchen. The news was bursting out of her. She was leaking it along the way as she sought the mercenary to pour it into her ears.

Page 187

Hilda was driving, not to her home, but to Bonbright Foote's office.

CHAPTER XXXV

Dulac was on his way to Bonbright's office, too. He had started before Hilda, and arrived before she did. If he had been asked why he was going, it is doubtful if he could have told. He was going because he had to go ... with fresh, burning hatred of Bonbright in his heart. Bonbright was always the obstacle he encountered. Bonbright upset every calculation, brought his every plan to nothing. He believed it was Bonbright who had broken the first strike, that strike upon which he had pinned such high hopes and which meant so much to labor. It had been labor's entering wedge into the automobile world. Then Bonbright had married the girl he loved. Some men can hate sufficiently for that cause alone ... Ruth had loved him, but she had married Bonbright. He had gone to take her away, had seen her yielding to him—and Bonbright had come. Again he had intervened. And now, better equipped than for the first strike, with chances of success multiplied, Bonbright had intervened again—with his plan.

Dulac did not consider the plan; did not perceive virtues in it, not the intent that was behind it. He did not see that labor was getting without effort benefits that no strike could bring. He did not see the happiness that it brought to thousands ... All he saw was that it had killed the new strike before birth. He regarded it as sharp practice, as a scheme for his undoing. The thing he fought for was the principle of unionization. Nothing else mattered; not money, not comforts, not benefits multiplied could weigh against it ... He was true to his creed, honest in its prosecution, sincere in his beliefs and in his efforts to uplift the conditions of his fellow men. He was a fanatic, let it be admitted, but a fanatic who suffered and labored for his cause. He was stigmatized as a demagogue, and many of the attributes of the demagogue adhered to him. But he was not a demagogue, for he sought nothing for himself ... His great shortcoming was singleness of vision. He fixed his eyes upon one height and was unable to see surrounding peaks.

So he was going to see the man who had come between him and every object he had striven for ... And he did not know why. He followed impulse, as he was prone to follow impulse. Restraints were not for him; he was a thinker, he believed, and after his fashion he *was* a thinker. ... But his mind was equipped with no stabilizer.

The impulse to see Bonbright was conceived in hatred and born in bitterness. It was such an impulse as might, in its turn, breed children capable of causing a calloused world to pause an instant on its way and gasp with horror.

He brushed aside the boy who asked his business with Mr. Foote, and flung open Bonbright's door. On the threshold he stood speechless, tense with hatred, eyes that

smoldered with jealousy, with rage, burning in hollows dug by weariness and labor and privation. He closed the door behind him slowly.

Page 188

Bonbright looked up and nodded. Dulac did not reply, but stared, crouching a little, his lips drawn a trifle back so that a glint of white showed between.

“You wanted to see me?” said Bonbright.

“Yes,” said Dulac. The word was spoken so low, so tensely, that it hardly reached Bonbright’s ears. That was all. He said no more, but stood, haggard and menacing.

Bonbright eyed him, saw his drawn face, saw the hatred in his eyes. Neither spoke, but eye held eye. Bonbright’s hand moved toward a button on his desk, but did not touch it. Somehow he was not surprised, not startled, not afraid—yet he knew there was danger. A word, a movement, might unleash the passions that seethed within Dulac. ...

Dulac stepped one step toward Bonbright, and paused. The movement was catlike, graceful. It had not been willed by Dulac. He had been drawn that step as iron is drawn to magnet. His eyes did not leave Bonbright’s. Bonbright’s eyes did not leave Dulac’s.

It seemed minutes before Dulac made another forward movement, slowly, not lifting his foot, but sliding it along the rug to its new position. ... Then immovability. ... Then another feline approach. Step after step, with that tense pause between—and silence!

It seemed to Bonbright that Dulac had been in the room for hours, had taken hours to cross it to his desk. Now only the desk separated them, and Dulac bent forward, rested his clenched fists on the desk, and held Bonbright’s eyes with the fire of his own. ... His body moved now, bending from the waist. Not jerkily, not pausing, but slowly, slowly, as if he were being forced downward by a giant hand. ... His face approached Bonbright’s face. And still no word, no sound.

Now his right hand moved, lifted. He supported his weight on his left arm. The right moved toward Bonbright, opening as it moved. There was something inexorable about its movement, something that seemed to say it did not move by Dulac’s will, but that it had been ordained so to move since the beginning of time. ... It approached and opened, fingers bent clawlike.

Bonbright remained motionless. It seemed to him that all the conflict of the ages had centered itself in this man and himself; as if they were the chosen champions, and the struggle had been left to them ... He was ready. He did not seek to avoid it, because it seemed inevitable. There could never be peace between him and Dulac, and, strangely enough, the thought was present in his brain that the thing was symbolical. He was the champion of his class, Dulac the champion of *his* class—between which there could never be peace and agreement so long as the classes existed. He wondered if himself and Dulac had been appointed to abolish each other ... In those vibrating seconds Bonbright saw and comprehended much.

The hand still approached.

Bonbright saw a change in the fire of Dulac's eyes, a sudden upleaping blaze, and braced himself for the surge of resistance, the shock of combat.

Page 189

The door opened unheeded by either, and Hilda stood in the opening.

“I’ve found her ...” she said.

Dulac uttered a gulping gasp and closed his eyes, that had been unwinking, closed his eyes a moment, and with their closing the tenseness went out of him and he sagged downward so that his body rested on the desk. Bonbright shoved himself back and leaped to his feet.

“Hilda ...” he said, and his voice was tired; the voice of a man who has undergone the ultimate strain.

“I’ve found her. She’s ill—terribly ill. You must go to her.”

Dulac raised himself and looked at her.

“You’ve found—*her*?” he said.

“We must go to her,” said Bonbright. He was not speaking to Hilda, but to Dulac. It seemed natural, inevitable, that Dulac should go with him. Dulac was *in* this, a part of it. Ruth and Dulac and he were the three actors in this thing, and it was their lives that pivoted about it.

They went down to the car silently, Dulac breathing deeply, like a man who had labored to weariness. In silence they drove to Mrs. Moody’s boarding house, and in silence they climbed the stairs to Ruth’s little room. Mrs. Moody hovered about behind them, and the mercenary sheltered her body behind the kitchen door, her head through the narrow opening, looking as if she were ready to pop it back at the least startling movement.

The three entered softly. Ruth seemed to be sleeping, for her eyes were closed and she was very still. Bonbright stood at one side of her bed, Dulac stood across from him, but they were unconscious of each other. Both were looking downward upon Ruth. She opened her eyes, saw Bonbright standing over her; shut them again and moved her head impatiently. Again she opened her eyes, and looked from Bonbright to Dulac. Her lips parted, her eyes widened ... She pointed a trembling finger at Dulac.

“Not you ...” she whispered. “Not you ... *Him*.” She moved her finger until it indicated Bonbright.

“I don’t—believe you’re—really there ... either of you,” she said, “but I—like to have—-*you* here. ... You’re my husband. ... I *love* my husband,” she said, and nodded her head.

“*Bonbright*!” whispered Hilda.

He did not need the admonition, but was on his knees beside her, drawing her to him. He could not speak. Ruth sighed as she felt his touch. “You’re *real*,” she whispered. “Is he real, too?”

“We’re all real, dear,” said Hilda.

“Ask *him*—please to go away, then,” Ruth said, pointing to Dulac. “I don’t want to—hurt him ... but he knows I—don’t want him. ...”

“Ruth!” Dulac’s utterance was a groan.

“*You* know—don’t you, Hilda? ... I told you—a long time ago ... I never loved—*him* at all. Isn’t that—queer? ... I thought I did—but--I didn’t know ... It was something else ... You won’t feel too bad ... will you?”

Page 190

Ruth looked up at Dulac. “I think you—better—go,” she said, gently. He looked at Ruth, looked at Bonbright. Then he turned and, stumbling a little as he went, fumbling, to open the door, he obeyed. They listened in silence to the slow descent of his footsteps; to the opening and closing of the door, as Dulac passed out into the street.

“Poor—man!” said Ruth.

“Bonbright,” said Hilda, “do you believe me now?”

He nodded. Hilda moved toward the door. “If you want her—cure her ... Nobody else can. You’ve got the only medicine.” And she left them alone.

“I—loved you all the time, but ... I didn’t know ... I was going ... to tell you ... and then *he* died. Hilda knows. You’ll ... believe me, won’t you?”

“Yes,” was all he could say.

“And you ... want me back? You ... want me to be your ... wife?”

“Yes.”

She sighed happily. “I’ll get ... well, then ... It wasn’t worth the —the *bother* before.”

Neither of them spoke for a time; then she said: “I saw about it ... in the papers. It was ... splendid.” She used proudly the word Hilda had found for her. “I was ... proud.”

Then: “You haven’t ... said anything. Isn’t there ... something you ... ought to say?”

He bent over closer and whispered it in her ear, not once, but many times. She shut her eyes, but her lips smiled and her fragile arms drew his head even closer, her white hand stroked his cheek.

“If it’s all ... *Real*,” she said, “why don’t you ... *Kiss* me?”

Words were not for him. Here was a moment when those symbols for thoughts which we have agreed upon and called words, could not express what must be expressed. As there are tones too high or too low to be sounded on any instrument, so too there are thoughts too tender to be expressed by words.

“Do you really ... *Want* me?” She wanted to be told and told again and again. “I’ll be a ... nice wife,” she said. “I promise ... I think we’ll be ... very happy.”

“Yes,” he said.

“I’ll never ... run away any more ... will I?”

“No.”

“You’ll—keep me *close*?”

“Yes.”

“Always?”

“Always.”

“And you won’t ... remember *anything*?”

“Nothing you don’t want me to.”

“Tell me again ... Put your ... lips close to my ear ... like that ... now tell me ...

“I think I’ll ... sleep a little now ... You won’t run away—while my eyes are shut?”

“Never,” he said.

“Let me put my head ... on your arm ... like that.” She closed her eyes, and then opened them to smile up at him. “This is ... so nice,” she said.

When she opened her eyes again Bonbright was still there. He had not moved ... Her smile blossomed for him again, and it was something like her old, famous smile, but sweeter, more tender.

Page 191

“I didn’t ... dream a bit of it,” she said to herself.

Hilda came in. “We’re going to take her to our house, Bonbright, till she gets well. That’s best, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“You’ll come, won’t you, Ruth—now?”

“If my ... husband comes, too,” she said.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Ruth’s strength returned miraculously, for it had not been her body that was ill, but her soul, and her soul was well now and at peace. Once she had thought that just to be at peace would be perfect bliss. She knew better now, for she was at peace, and happiness was hers, besides. ... It was pitiful how she clung to Bonbright, how she held him back when he would be leaving in the morning, and how she watched the door for his return.

Bonbright knew peace, too. Sometimes it seemed that the conflict was over for him and that he had sailed into a sure and quiet haven where no storm could reach him again. All that he had lacked was his; independence was his and the possibility of developing his own individualism. The ghosts of the ancestors were laid; Bonbright Foote, Incorporated, was no longer a mold that sought to grasp him and turn him into something he was not and did not wish to be. The plan was proving itself, demonstrating its right to be. Even Malcolm Lightener was silenced, for the thing marched. It possessed vitals. Nor had it upset business, as Lightener once predicted. After the first tumult and flurry labor had settled back into its old ways. The man who worked for Bonbright Foote was envied, and that man and his family prospered and knew a better, bigger life. The old antagonism of his employees had vanished and he had become a figure to call out their enthusiasm. He believed every man of them was his friend, and, more than that, he believed he had found the solution to the great problem. He believed he had found a way of bringing together capital and labor so that they would lie down together like the millennial lion and lamb ... All these things made for peace. But in addition he had Ruth’s love, and that brought back his old boyishness, gave him something he had never had before, even in his youth—a love of life, a love of living, a gladness that awoke with him and accompanied him through his days.

When Ruth was able to sit up they began to lay out their future and to plan plans. Already Bonbright was building a home, and the delight they had from studying architect’s drawings and changing the position of baths and doors and closets and porches was unbelievable. Then came the furnishing of it, and at last the moving into it.

“I’m almost glad it all happened,” Ruth said.

“Yes,” said Bonbright.

“We’d have been just ordinarily happy if we’d started like other folks ... But to have gone through that—and come into all this!...”

“Let’s not remember it,” he said. Then: “Ruth, you never make any suggestions—about the men. You know lots more about them than I do. You were born among them. But you just listen to me when I talk to you, and never offer a word.”

Page 192

“I—I’ve been afraid to,” she said.

“Afraid?”

“Yes ... Don’t you remember? It might look as if ...”

He silenced her, knowing what was her thought. “I’ll never think anything about you that isn’t so,” he said.

“Then I’ll suggest—when I think of anything. But I couldn’t have suggested any of it. I couldn’t have dreamed it or hoped it. Nothing I could have asked for them would have been as—as splendid as this.”

“You believe in it?”

“More than that. I’ve been into their homes. They were glad to see me. It was wonderful ... Enough to eat, cleanliness, mothers at home with their babies instead of out washing, no boarders ... And no worries. That was best. They showed me their bank accounts, or how they were buying homes, and how quickly they were paying for them ... And I was proud when I thought it was my husband that did it.”

“Lightener says it looks all right now, but it won’t last. He says it’s impractical.”

“He doesn’t know. How could he know as well as you do? Aren’t you the greatest man in the world?” She said it half laughingly, but in her heart she meant it.

She loved to talk business with him; to hear about the new mills and how they were turning out engines. She discussed his project of enlarging further, perhaps of manufacturing automobiles himself, and urged him on. “It will give work to more men, and bring more men under the plan,” she said. That was her way of looking at it.

Hilda came often, and laughed at them, but she loved them.

“Just kids,” she jeered, but she envied them and told them so. And then, because she deserved it, there came a man into her own life, and he loved her and she loved him. Whereupon Bonbright and Ruth returned her jeers with interest.

More than a year went by, a year of perfection. Then came a cloud on the horizon. Even five dollars a day and the plan did not seem to content labor, and Bonbright became aware of it. Dulac was active again, or, rather, he had always been active. Discontent manifested itself. ... It grew, and had to be repressed. In spite of the plan—in spite of everything, a strike threatened, became imminent.

Ruth was thunderstruck, Bonbright bewildered. His panacea was not a panacea, then. He studied the plan to better it, and did make minor improvements, but in its elements it

was just, fair. Bonbright could not understand, but Malcolm Lightener understood and the professor of sociology understood.

“I can’t understand it,” Bonbright said to them.

“Huh!” grunted Lightener. “It’s just this: You’re capital, and they’re labor. That’s it in a nutshell.”

“But it’s fair.”

“To be sure it’s fair—as fair as a thing can be. But the fact remains. Capital and labor can’t get together as long as they remain capital and labor.”

Page 193

The professor nodded. “You’ve said the thing that is, Mr. Lightener. But it’s deeper than that. It’s the inevitable surge upward of humanity. You rich men try to become richer. That is natural. You are reaching up. Labor has a long way to climb to reach you, but it wants to reach you. Perhaps it doesn’t know it, but it does. As long as a height remains to be climbed to, man will try to climb ... Class exists. The employer class and the employed. So long as one man can boss another; so long as one man can say to another, ’Do this or do that,’ there will be conflict. Everybody, whether he knows it or not, wants to be his own boss, and by as much as he is bossed he is galled ... It can never be otherwise...”

“You knew from the beginning I would fail,” said Bonbright.

“You haven’t failed, my boy. You’ve done a fine thing; but you haven’t solved a problem that has no solution ... You are upset by it now, but after a while you’ll see it and the disappointment will go. But you haven’t failed ... I don’t believe you will ever understand all you have accomplished.”

But Bonbright was unhappy, and he carried his unhappiness to his wife. “It’s all been futile,” he said.

She was wiser than he. “No,” she said, hotly, “it’s been wonderful ... Nothing was ever more wonderful. I’ve told you how I’ve visited them and seen the new happiness—seen women happy who had never been happy before; seen comfort where there had been nothing but misery ... It’s anything but futile, dear. You’ve done your best—and it was a splendid best ... If it doesn’t do all you hoped, that’s no sign of failure. I’m satisfied, dear.”

“They want something I can’t give them.”

“Nobody can give it to them ... It’s the way things are. I think I understand what the professor said. It’s true. You’ve given all you can and done all you can. ... You’d have to be God and create a new world ... Don’t you see?”

“I see ...” he said. “I see ...”

“And you won’t be unhappy about it?”

He smiled. “I’m like the men, I guess. I want more than the world has to give me ... I don’t blame them. They’re right.”

“Yes,” she said, “they’re right.”

It was not many weeks after this that Bonbright sat, frightened and anxious, in the library—waiting. A nurse appeared in the door and motioned. She smiled, and a weight passed from his heart.

Bonbright followed into Ruth's room, pausing timidly at the door.

"Come in, come in, young man. I have the pleasure to announce the safe arrival of Bonbright Foote VIII."

Bonbright looked at Ruth, who smiled up at him and shook her head.

"Not Bonbright Foote VIII, doctor," said Bonbright, as he moved toward his wife and son. "Plain Bonbright Foote. There are no numerals in this family. Everyone who is born into it stands by himself ... I'll have no ancestors hanging around my boy's neck ..."

Page 194

“I know it,” Ruth whispered in his ear, “but I was a—a teeny bit— afraid. He’s *ours*—but he’s more than that. He’s *his own* ... as God wants every man to be.”

THE END