The Brute

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Table of Contents

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Illustrations

Illustration:
„It‘s a lie,“ he gasped hoarsely, then sank back in horror

Chapter I

Every evening, almost, Donald Rogers and his wife Edith sat in a plain little living-room in their apartment in Harlem, and worked until ten or eleven o'clock. By that time they were both ready to go to bed. It was not very exciting. Edith darned stockings or sewed; Donald toiled at his desk, writing letters—going over reports. Sometimes, very rarely, they went to the theater. They had done the same thing for nearly eight years, and to Edith, at least, it seemed a very long time.

The room in which they sat reflected in its furnishings much of the life these two led. It seemed to suggest, in every line, an unceasing conflict between poverty and ambition—not, indeed, the poverty of the really poor, of those in actual want, but the poverty of the well born, of those whose desires are forever infinitely beyond their means.

This was evidenced by many curious contrasts. The furniture, for instance, was for the most part of that cheap and gloomy variety known as mission oak, yet the designs were good, as though its purchasers had striven toward some ideal which they had not the means to realize. The rug on the floor, an imitation oriental, was still of excellent coloring; the pictures showed taste in their selection—such taste, indeed, as is possible under the limitations imposed by a slender purse—among them might have been discovered a charming little water-color and some reproductions of etchings by Whistler.

The curtains were imitation lace, the ornaments on the mantel imitation bronze, the cushions in the Morris chair imitation Spanish leather. The keynote of the whole room was imitation—everything in it, almost, was the result of refinement

and excellent taste on the one hand, hampered by lack of money on the other. The effect was somewhat that given by twenty dollar sets of ermine furs, or ropes of pearls at bargain-counter prices. Edith, caring more about such matters than her husband, realized this note of imitation keenly, but found it more satisfactory to have even the shadow of what she really desired than to drop back to another level of existence, and content herself with ingrain carpets, shiny yellow furniture, and the sort of pictures made of mother of pearl, which are given away with tea-store coupons. In her present environment, she chafed—in the other, she would have been suffocated.

On this particular night in March, they were at home as usual. Donald had composed himself at his desk, hunched over, his head resting upon his left hand, staring at the papers before him. The only sound in the room was the ticking of the trading-stamp clock on the mantel, and the clanking of the steam pipes. For a long time Donald stared, and wrote nothing. Suddenly he turned to his wife.

"For Heaven's sake, Edith," he exclaimed impatiently, "what's the matter with those pipes?"

Edith glanced at him, but did not move. She came back slowly from her land of dreams.

"The janitor has probably just turned on the steam. It's been off for the past week on account of the warm weather."

Donald rose, and went nervously over to the radiator under the window.

"I can't write with this infernal noise going on," he grumbled, as he turned to his desk. "Will it be too cold for you?"

"Oh, no. I'm used to it." Mrs. Rogers' tone was patient, resigned.

Donald resumed his writing, and sat for a few moments in silence, but the tone of his wife's remark had not been lost upon him. He turned toward her presently, with an anxious look, searching her face keenly.

"What's the matter, Edith?" he inquired kindly. "Don't you feel well?"

"Not particularly." Mrs. Rogers' voice was discouraging.

"Anything wrong?"

"No."

"You haven't seemed yourself for the past week. You don't seem to take any interest in things."

"What things?" inquired Edith, with sudden asperity. She took a sufficient interest in the things that seemed worth while to her, she well enough knew, but they were not those which made up her present surroundings.

Donald seemed hurt at her tone. He regarded her with an injured expression.

"Why," he ventured hesitatingly, "all the things that make up our life—our home."

The suggestion was not happy. It was, indeed, those very things that Edith had been mentally reviewing in her inner consciousness throughout the evening, and her conclusions had not been in their favor.

"The steam pipes, I suppose," she returned scornfully, "and the price of eggs, and whether we are going to be able to pay our bills next month or not."

"Don't be so unkind, Edith," said her husband, with an expression of pain. Her remark had hurt him, and, although she realized it, she somehow refused to admit to herself that she regretted it.

"It's true, isn't it?" she asked.

"Surely you realize that I am doing the best I can," he replied slowly."I can't do any more."

"Well, suppose I do. Does that make it any easier?"

She felt angry and annoyed, first with Donald because he seemed unable to realize how barren her life with him was, and then with herself because she had allowed herself to become involved in this uselessdiscussion. Donald, she knew, would always be the same. It was hopeless to expect him to change, or to try, by argument, to make him do so.

"Are you angry because I couldn't afford to get you that new hat for Easter?" he asked, as he began to refill his pipe.

This falling back upon man's universal belief that a woman's happiness or unhappiness depends solely upon her clothes annoyed her still further.

"Don't talk like a fool, Donald," she exclaimed, throwing down her sewing angrily. "I'm tired, that's all. For eight years I've darned stockings, collected trading stamps, done my own housework, and tried to imagine that the hats I've trimmed myself looked as though they came straight from Paris. When a woman has done that for eight years, she has a right to be tired."

"But, Edith, it will not always be that way. You know how I am working for the future."

Mrs. Rogers picked up her sewing and resumed her air of patient resignation. "The future is a long way off. When it comes, if it ever does, I shall probably be so old that I won't care what sort of hats I wear."

"Haven't I had to endure it all, as well as you? Don't you suppose it hurts me not to be able to give you everything you wish?"

"It's different with a man." She smiled a trifle bitterly, as she spoke."You have your business, your friends, your ambitions. In ten years I shall be an old woman; you will be just ready to enjoy yourself."

Donald rose from the desk and began to walk about the room nervously. He was too sincerely fond of Edith to want to quarrel with her, and he knew, as well as she did, the truth of what she had just said. After all, he thought, perhaps the woman does have the worst of the matrimonial bargain, in circumstances, at least, such as those with which he and Edith were struggling.

"There's nothing I would care about enjoying, Edith, without you. Surely you know that."

"I know. It's very good of you to feel that way. It's lack of money, I suppose, after all, that makes everything so hard."

"I can't do the impossible, Edith. You know what my income is, and what I have been scraping and saving for all these years."

"To put every cent you had in the world into that glass factory in West Virginia. I know—very well." It was clear, from the tone of Mrs. Rogers' voice, that she felt little sympathy for this part of her husband's plans, at any rate.

"Yes, I have. I know you have opposed it, but I am convinced that it is a great proposition. In five years, or possibly less, I expect to get big profits from it. Isn't it worth waiting and saving for?"

"I don't know whether it is or not." Mrs. Rogers' tone was not encouraging. "Five years is a long time. I'm not sure but I'd rather have a little bit more human

pleasure and enjoyment as I go along. For years—ever since Bobbie was born—I've had to spend the summer here in this wretched, hot place. It hasn't done me any good. It hasn't done him any good. I'd rather you would put a little less into the glass business and a little more into your wife's and child's health and happiness."

Mr. Rogers stopped in his pacing up and down the room. It was clear that his wife's remarks had touched a sensitive spot.

"Edith," he exclaimed, "you cannot mean what you say. Everything I have done has been for you and for him. Bobbie seems to me to be well enough. Think of the hundreds of thousands of children that have to spend the summer in the city. God knows I'd give my life for him, or for you, too, if you needed it; it's what I am doing. I can't do any more."

"I know it," said Edith, with a sigh. "I suppose I'm very unreasonable, but somehow my life has seemed so empty, all these years."

"Haven't you everything you need?"

"Everything I need? Do you think three meals a day and a place to sleep is everything a woman needs?"

"Many women have less."

"And many have more. A woman's needs depend upon her desires, her temperament. What may be a necessity to one, another would have no use for. Some women, down in Tenth Avenue, might think this Paradise." She looked about the room scornfully. "And a lot more, up in Fifth Avenue, would think it—well—the other place. That's the difference."

Donald looked at her curiously, and noted her flushed face, her heaving breast. These things evidently were very near her heart. "What are your needs, Edith?" he asked kindly.

"How can you ask me such a question?" Edith failed to appreciate his kind intention. She was fairly launched upon her argument, and the tumult of discontent which had been gathering in her breast burst forth with bitter intensity. "Did you ever suppose for a moment that I was a woman who could be satisfied with the merest commonplaces of existence? Don't you see that I need life—real, broadening, joyous, human life, with all its hopes, its fears, its longings, its successes, its failures? Do you think I find those things here?" She swept the room with an all-embracing gesture, and stood confronting him with flushed cheeks, her eyes flashing rebelliously.

Her evidence of feeling both startled and hurt him. He had supposed that all her years of patient waiting had covered a mind serenely satisfied with the present through a belief in the future. He looked at her for a few moments in surprise. "I am very sorry, Edith," he began haltingly."I, too, feel the need of those things, but I do not allow the lack of them to spoil my life. I have borne my trials and done my duty as best I could, and I expect you to do the same. If we have not money, and all the pleasures and luxuries it brings, we at least have health and our daily bread, and above all, our little boy. We ought to be very thankful."

"Do you suppose for a moment that I do not appreciate Bobbie? He is the only thing that keeps me here."

The troubled look on Donald's face grew deeper as he answered her, and with it came an expression of alarm. He had never doubted Edith's love for him, and her words were a great shock.

"The only thing that keeps you here!" he cried. "Is your love for me of no importance to you?"

Edith surveyed the plain, poorly furnished little room with ill-concealed dislike. "This sort of thing," she said bitterly, "doesn't offer much for love to feed upon."

"Edith! You surely do not realize what you are saying. To hear you talk, anyone might suppose we were on the point of going to the poorhouse."

"It couldn't be worse. I'm tired of it, and I can't help saying so. I suppose you will think me very ungrateful, but I can't help it. We never have any pleasures, any happiness, any real enjoyment. It's nothing but mere existence."

"I don't agree with you. I am not doing so badly. We are both of us young. In a few years I hope to be comparatively well off, and then things will be very different. I am working and striving for you every hour of the day. Do you think I would do it, if I did not feel that you love me—that you believed in me?"

He went over to her, and took her hand in his. "What has upset you so, to-night, dear? Is there anything you particularly want—anything that I could do for you? Tell me—if there is, you know I will do everything in my power to gratify you."

"No—nothing that you could do." She seemed unconscious of the pain she was giving him.

"I thought perhaps it was about this summer. You told me that your mother and sister were anxious to take a cottage at the seashore, and that they wanted you to go with them—is that it?"

"No," she replied. "It isn't important. You said you couldn't afford it."

Donald left her abruptly and, walking over to the desk, began to fumble nervously with the papers on it. It hurt him to the depths of his nature to be obliged to refuse Edith this request; indeed, what she had asked he had already himself thought of, and been forced to conclude that, much as he wanted to give her and Bobbie this pleasure, he could not do it. He turned to her with a nervous twitching of the mouth, which had of late become characteristic.

"Every year, Edith," he said, "we have this discussion. Your mother and sister have no responsibilities. They can give up their rooms at the boarding house and go to the country without adding a dollar to their expenses. You cannot do that. It will cost a hundred dollars a month, at least, for your expenses and Bobbie's, to say nothing of the extra expense of my taking my meals at restaurants. I can't afford it this year, Edith. I wish I could, but I can't."

"Why can't you?" Her tone was aggrieved—almost defiant. "Is business so bad? I thought things had been so much better this month."

"It's the glass plant, Edith. We are having a lot of trouble. It takes every cent I can scrape together to meet expenses. We are a new concern. Our goods are not known. Competition is severe.

"We are trying to build up a new business. I can't weaken on it now. Surely you can stand one more summer in the city—if I can. Perhaps, next year—"

"Next year!" she cried. "It's always next year. It's been that way now for eight years, and about the only outing I've had has been a trip to Coney Island on the boat. I'm sick of it. It's drudgery. A hired girl has more freedom that I have—and more money, too, for that matter."

"Edith!"

"Oh, I know what you are going to say. I made my bed, and I ought to be willing to lie in it. I knew you were a poor man when I married you. Well, suppose I did. I didn't mind poverty then—the enthusiasm of youth made it all seem a pleasure, like camping out, and living on canned beans and corn bread. It's fine, for a time, but after a while, when the novelty has worn off, you get sort of tired of it. There comes a time in every married woman's life when she sits down and looks at things from both sides, and wonders whether, after all, it's really worth while."

"I don't see why you should complain, if I don't," said Donald wearily."I'm sorry we haven't more money, on your account and on my own, as well. There are many things I should like to do."

"Oh, you're a man." Edith flung herself across the room and began turning over the sheets of music upon the piano. "If you have a couple of new suits of clothes a year and can smoke the kind of cigars you like, you don't bother your head if some other man has a dozen suits and keeps a valet. It's different with a woman. Home-made dresses, dollar corsets, riding in surface cars, seem mighty hard, when you see other women in their autos, their Russian sables, their Paris gowns—women who spend more money on their dogs every month than I have to spend on Bobbie. It's a thousand times harder for a woman to be poor than it is for a man. Most men don't know it, but that doesn't alter the fact—it's true, just the same."

She suddenly sat down at the piano, and after striking a few discords, began to play the "Jewel Song" from "Faust" in a rapid tempo.

Donald followed her with his eyes. "It seems to me," he said gravely,"that when a man wants to do so much for his wife and realizes that he can't it's the hardest of all—much harder than doing without things yourself."

Edith did not speak for several moments.

"I don't wonder Marguerite was tempted by the jewels, and all that," she remarked, presently, then concluded her playing with a series of crashing chords, and rose from her seat with a harsh laugh.

"Edith, I wish you wouldn't say such things."

"Why shouldn't I? Perhaps they are true. How do you know that I am not being tempted, too? I suppose, if the devil were to come along and offer me a million or two, I'd run away with him without stopping to pack my trunk." She resumed her chair, and picked up her sewing again. "Go on with your writing, Donald. I'm sorry this discussion came up. It hasn't done a bit of good. I suppose you think me heartless and unkind. I can't help it. I'm not the first woman who has found married life a harder road than she had anticipated."

She bent over her sewing with a sense of anger and annoyance with herself for having entered into such a purposeless discussion. Donald sat down at his desk and again took up his work. Only the ticking of the clock and the scratching of his pen broke the heavy silence. Life had once more resumed its monotonous procession.

After a long time, Edith put away her sewing, and retired to her bedroom. What sort of a life was this, she thought to herself, where one was forced to go to bed at ten o'clock because there was nothing further to keep one awake? She got into bed and read a magazine for an hour. Then she fell asleep. Donald was still writing.

Chapter II

When Donald Rogers left his apartment in One Hundred and Tenth Street the next morning, he had an unaccountable feeling that something out of the ordinary, something of a nature unforeseen and menacing, would occur to him before the day was over. Being of a somewhat matter-of-fact turn of mind, however, he laughed at his fears, and attributed them to a slight attack of the great American disease, brought on by over-much smoking. Perhaps, had he been a Frenchman, and a magpie or a hare had suddenly crossed his path, he might have been tempted to take off his hat to the one, or to bow politely to the other; as it was, he put forebodings out of his mind, as unworthy a practical man of affairs. The uncomfortable feeling persisted, however, in spite of his optimistic efforts to escape from it in the depths of his morning paper, all during the long ride down-town in the subway, and was forgotten only in the complexities of his morning's mail.

The unfortunate discussion with his wife, Edith, the night before, which was the real cause of his depression, he had religiously put out of his mind, attributing her discontent to some purely temporary irritability which would soon be forgotten.

They had neither of them referred to the matter at breakfast; Donald had been in his usual hurry, Edith occupied with Bobbie, who had a habit of awakening somewhat querulous and difficult to please. Her manner had been serene, if a trifle distant and reserved. Donald felt that already the storm had passed, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

He spent the forenoon busily occupied in his office. It was not much of an office, as such things go in New York, being merely a small private room with a larger and lighter one adjoining it, but it sufficed for all the needs of his business, which was that of a consulting mechanical engineer.

The inner room, which was the smaller of the two, served to receive his clients, of which there were not many; the outer contained the draughting tables and his assistant. Yet, small and plain as these rooms were, they reflected to a surprising extent the character of the man. There were no attempts at decoration; no concessions to any sense of the artistic; everything was plain, solid, durable, honest, like the man himself. Only the photographs of Edith, his wife, and Bobbie, his little boy, in a silver frame upon the flat-topped oak desk, bespoke the sentiment which was so deep and vital a part of Donald Rogers' nature.

Existence had not dealt over kindly with this descendant of the dour land of Wallace and Bruce, but he met it with high courage, and head up, as befitted one of his race. Born in a small town along the upper reaches of the Hudson, he had known the love of a father only long enough to clutch his fingers in the first futile efforts to face the world upon two feet, instead of on all fours; the mother, however, had survived longer, and it was to her that Donald owed the sturdy lessons in the eternal rightness of things that underlay and governed all his actions.

He was sixteen when she was laid beside her long-expectant husband, and Donald, her only child, went out into the world with a very small patrimony and a

very great grief. Yet this sweet-faced woman, locked in her long leaden sleep, was not dead; her faith, her courage, her high ideals, lived and breathed in her son, and no act of his life but showed in some way, however slight, their purifying effect.

Donald Rogers' father had been a steam engineer without a college education; his son determined to follow in his footsteps with one, and, with this purpose strong within him, gathered together the small store of worldly goods with which the fates had endowed him and went to New York and the engineering course at Columbia. It took him five years to complete the course, partly because his early education had been somewhat incomplete, partly owing to the necessity under which he labored, of earning sufficient money, as he went along, to piece out the fragments of his small inheritance and maintain himself. This he did by doing draughting work at night; it was hard on the eyes, but the experience helped him in his profession. At twenty-two he was graduated with honors; these, with his diploma, constituted his stock in trade; his weapons with which to win fame and fortune.

Five years of employment in subordinate positions had not only given him practical experience, but had taught him the futility of expecting the aforementioned fame and fortune while working on a salary; his courage, his savings and some staunch business friends all favored the idea of launching out for himself. The results had been encouraging; he now, after eight years, had a substantial, if small, practice, and an unshaken belief in himself and his future.

It was about the time he first opened his office as consulting engineer that he had met Edith Pope, and they were married within a year. She was a girl of unusual beauty, and through both inheritance and training quite his opposite. Perhaps it was because of this that she had attracted him.

Her father had been a real-estate dealer, and through his ability and industry had made during his somewhat short business career a large income. His wife, on the other hand, had shown such ability and industry in spending it that, when he died, which he did about the time that Edith was just entering her 'teens, he left only enough to provide a meager living for herself, her mother and her sister Alice, two years her junior. Mrs. Pope had never been able to accustom herself to the blow; she lived in a constant atmosphere of past glories and was never tired of recounting to her daughters all the comforts she had enjoyed when her "dear J. B.," as she mournfully designated her deceased better half, was alive. Never a day passed, but Edith and her sister were warned against the evils and dangers of marrying a man without money; to some extent it might have appeared that Mrs. Pope hoped to regain, through the matrimonial successes of her daughters, those luxuries of existence which she fondly believed were, to her, absolute necessities.

Whether or not her children paid any serious attention to her advice it would be difficult to say; perhaps the best answer to the question lay in the fact that, when Edith met Donald in the boarding-house on Tenth Street, which was for the time being their mutual home, she straightway fell head over heels in love with him, and married him before the year was out, in spite of her mother's strenuous objections. That was eight years ago, and, if Edith Rogers was not entirely reconciled to living in a Harlem flat and doing her own housework, she at least found a large measure of compensation in her little boy, Bobbie, who was now six,

and a darling, as even his grandmother was forced grudgingly to admit. Her assent was grudging because Mrs. Pope had never forgiven her son-in-law for depriving her of her daughter; one matrimonial asset thus rudely snatched away forced her to concentrate all her hopes upon Alice, and that young lady, at the age of rising twenty-six, had begun to show signs of extreme restiveness, possibly due to an inward conviction that even a Harlem flat and a four-by-six kitchenette possesses some advantages not to be found in boarding-houses of the less-expensive variety, and that a real live man with a living income is better than an old maid's dreams of a possible, but hitherto undisclosed, millionaire. Emerson Hall, a friend of Donald's, whom she had met a few months before, assisted her greatly in arriving at these not unusual conclusions.

It was long after one o'clock when Donald Rogers, absorbed in a problem of power transmission, bethought himself of luncheon. One was his usual hour; he dropped his calculations, seized his hat, and in a moment was threading his way through the never ending throngs of lower Broadway, on his way to a little chop house in John Street, long famous for its English mutton chops and cream ale.

As he came abreast of the Singer Building, he felt someone grasp his arm from behind and heard a cheery voice, with a familiar ring about it, calling to him. He turned and looked into the handsome, smiling face of a tall bronzed man, whose costume indicated clearly that he hailed from the West.

"Billy West!" he exclaimed, gripping the new-comer's hand joyfully."Where on earth did you drop from? I thought you were in Colorado."

"I was, until four days ago. Thought I'd come East for awhile and look the old town over. How's everything?" His glance was full of smiling inquiry. "Making lots of money?"

"Not so much that I have to sit up nights thinking how to spend it,"replied Rogers, a trifle bitterly. "Had your lunch?"

"No. Didn't want to eat alone. I've been away so long I hardly know a soul in this blessed burg."

Rogers took his arm. "Come along with me," he said. "I'm just on my way."

West nodded. "Got to see my lawyers some time to-day, but later will do just as well." In five minutes they were seated in the chop house, ordering luncheon.

"How are you getting along out there among the miners?" laughed Donald, as he dismissed the waiter with their order. "Hope you like it better than doing laboratory work down in Jersey. Ought to be wonderful opportunities for a man, out there." He paused for a moment, thoughtful."You know I always used to say, when we were in college, that I meant to go West some day. I've never got there, though. New York has become a habit, I'm afraid. Can't seem to break away from it."

West looked at his friend with a faintly quizzical smile, and hesitated for a moment, as though he almost feared to tell the other what had come into his mind. Then he leaned across the table, and his face suddenly became grave. "Don," he said earnestly, "the luck I've had out there has been so wonderful, so almost unbelievable, that, even though it happened nearly two years ago, I still can hardly realize that it's true."

"Strike a gold mine?" inquired Rogers, with a laugh.

"That's exactly what I did do, and believe me, Don, it's some mine. We capitalized it last year at a million, of which yours truly, owns half, and it paid over five per cent. from the start. I haven't got used to figuring up my income yet, but just at present I think it's running pretty close to thirty thousand a year, and more coming." He leaned back in his chair with a satisfied smile. "I'm vice-president of the concern. The Lone Star mine, it's called, up on the Little Ash river; but I haven't anything much to do with the management—leave all that to the Boston crowd that put in the money. They're a fine, conservative lot of fellows, with plenty of experience, and I know my interests are perfectly safe in their hands. So you see, I'm a sort of a gentleman of leisure just at present, with plenty of money to spend, and nobody in particular to spend it on, so I thought I'd take a run down to little old New York and put in a year or so getting acquainted with some of my old friends. I was on my way to my lawyers, as I said, when I met you, and, after attending to a little matter of business, I was coming right up to your office to see you. I looked up your address in the telephone book."

Donald, who by this time had succeeded in digesting this remarkable piece of news, reached across the table and took his friend's hand."Billy," he said, with a look which left no doubt as to the sincerity of his feelings, "congratulations from the bottom of my heart."

"Thanks, old man. I knew you would be glad to know about my good luck."He attacked the chop, which the waiter set before him with a flourish."And now tell me about yourself. How's your wife, and the boy—it was a boy, wasn't it? The happy event occurred just before I went West, and I'm not exactly sure." He flashed on Rogers one of those brilliant smiles which had always made him loved by both sexes, and particularly the one in petticoats.

"Edith is very well, and the boy is fine. I don't wonder you did not remember. They will be delighted to see you. Why not come up to dinner to-night. We can't offer you a feast, but you won't mind taking pot luck."

"Well, I should say not. I was hoping you would ask me. You can't imagine how lost I feel in this town. I suppose it would be different if I had any family, but you know I haven't even a second cousin I can call my own. I've often thought of you and Edith. You know that she might have been Mrs. West, once, years ago, if you hadn't stepped in and taken her away from me. I'd have been jealous of anyone but you, Don, but I guess the best man won." He laughed with a hearty frankness, and took up his mug of ale. "Here's to the youngster. May he live long and prosper."

Donald drained his glass. "I suppose you will be busy for a couple of hours," he said, "with your legal matters. Why not come up to my office when you get through—I'm in the Columbia Building, you know—and we'll go up-town together?"

"I'll do it. We can stop at my hotel on the way, and give me a chance to clean up a bit. I only got in this morning on the sleeper, you know, and I feel a bit grubby."

Some half-hour later they were making their way slowly toward Broadway."What a great town it is, after all!" remarked West, as they turned the corner at John Street. "Every time a fellow goes away for a few years they seem to build it all over again before he gets back." He turned to look at the towering mass of the Singer

Building. "That's a new one on me. Wouldn't it make some of my friends back in Colorado have cricks in their backs?"

"It is a wonderful city," replied Rogers grimly. "I don't think I should ever care about living anywhere else, but the man who wins out in it has got to deliver the goods. Big as it is, there is no room in it for failures." He waved his hand to West as the latter turned into Wall Street. "See you around four-thirty. So long."

"I'll be there. Wait for me if I'm a little late," was the reply, as the two separated.

Donald went back to his plain little office and his power-transmission problem with a curious feeling of futility. Thirteen years of hard work had given him but little more than the right to fight that never ceasing battle with the grim city which could excuse anything but failure. West—pleasure-loving Billy West—who from his freshman days had looked upon the world as little more than an amazing joke, had by one stroke of fortune suddenly found all the pleasures, all the luxuries that life contained, at his feet. He did not envy West this good fortune, he was too staunch a friend for that, but he thought of Edith, and their little up-town flat, and as her tired face rose before him he suffered the pangs of that greatest of all forms of poverty, the inability to do for those we love.

Chapter III

During the year that preceded her marriage to Donald Rogers, Edith had seen a great deal of Billy West, and had liked him more than anyone except herself had realized. His was a personality, indeed, to compel the admiration of women. Tall, good-looking, of a reckless and laughter-loving type, he naturally appealed to that peculiar chord in the feminine make-up which responds so readily to the Cavalier in the opposite sex, while paying scant attention to the sturdy adherence to duty characteristic of his Roundhead adversary. For this reason, it is probable that, at one period of Donald's courtship, she would have listened more kindly to the love-making of his friend, had the latter, indeed, seen fit to make any. That he did not was due to no Quixotic sense of friendship for Donald, but to a very real and honest belief on his part that marriage on the slender pay of an assistant chemist was not for one of his type, an opinion in which he was entirely correct. Therefore he had hidden his love, which was in truth a real and lasting one, beneath his careless laughter, and had gone to Colorado when the occasion offered, neither heart whole nor fancy free, but just as determined to make much money with the utmost quickness as though he and Edith Pope had never laid eyes upon each other. After all, he and Edith were very much alike. They belonged to that class which demands of life its luxuries almost before its necessities, and it is a curious fact that they nearly always get them.

After eight years of married life, Edith Rogers, busy with her child, her household cares and the various complexities of domesticity, had forgotten her husband's friend as completely as though he had never come into her life at all. He, on the contrary, had thought of her continually, for his life in the West had been too keenly devoted to business to leave either time or opportunity for

dalliance with the opposite sex. Hence the memory of his first and last love had not been effaced by the passage of time, but remained in his heart as a sweet and pleasing memory, gathering increased strength from the years as they rolled swiftly by. It should not be inferred from this, however, that William West had the slightest thought of ever renewing his courtship of Edith, now that she had become Donald Rogers' wife. His love for her was like a pleasant recollection, a package of old letters, a book read and closed forever. For all that, he was conscious of a queer feeling in the region of his heart as he followed Donald into the tiny living-room of the Rogers' apartment in Harlem.

Mrs. Rogers had not been apprised of her husband's intention to bring a guest home for dinner, least of all so unexpected a one as Billy West. The reason for this was that the Rogers' apartment boasted no telephone. The servant problem they had solved by the simple expedient of not keeping any. Hence it was that West's first glimpse of the Edith of his dreams was of a tired little woman, flushed from her efforts over the gas range, and in no sweet temper with her husband for having taken her unawares and at such a disadvantage. It is a fact worthy of record, however, that West found her, in this homely garb, more humanly delightful and attractive than would have been the case had she spent hours of preparation at her toilette table. He had been living for five years among men who found women more attractive as helpmates than as ornaments, and she appealed to him accordingly. As for Donald, no thought crossed his mind that these two were, or ever had been, anything more to each other than the best of friends.

"Billy!" Mrs. Rogers had gasped as she came into the room to greet her husband on his arrival, and had thus, by using the old familiar title, established a footing between them that somehow refused to return to the more formal one of "Mrs. Rogers" and "Mr. West." After all it was of no great importance—Billy and Edith they had always been to each other, and Billy and Edith they remained. Donald, if he noticed it at all, was glad of the fact that his wife and his old friend liked each other so well. The meeting became a little reunion, in the pleasure of which Mrs. Rogers soon forgot her plain, cheap house-gown and her flushed face, and entered into the spirit of the occasion with an unwonted gayety. She was a beautiful woman, in spite of her twenty-eight years; perhaps it would be more correct to say because of them, for while at twenty she had been exceedingly pretty, it was little more than a youthful promise of what she had now become.

Her grandmother had been a Southern woman, and a noted beauty in those much talked of days "before the war," and whether this lady's beauty had, as time passed, taken on added glory, like most other things of that hallowed period, certain it is that Edith Rogers had received from some source a priceless inheritance as far as the perfection of her figure or the beauty of her coloring was concerned. Perhaps it was some forgotten strain of Irish blood that was responsible for her deep violet eyes and her dark chestnut hair, although her dusky complexion belied it.

West observed the change which the years had made in her, at once, and complimented her on it. "I have never seen you look so well," he said, as he grasped her hand. "You were a rosebud when I went away, now you are an American beauty." It pleased her mightily, for she felt that he meant it, and, like most married women, she heard few compliments from her husband. Mrs. Pope,

her mother, never lost an opportunity to tell her that with her looks she could have married any man she pleased, but she paid no attention to remarks of this nature, knowing as she did that her mother was only trying to hit, indirectly, at Donald, whom she affected not to like.

She knew from West's voice that he was very glad to see her, and after all these years, when he grasped her hand, and pressed it in his strong, firm grip, she felt the old familiar shock, the sensation of gladness for she knew not what, that almost took her breath away. It had always been that way with him. He was very different from Donald in many ways, for, while Donald was serious and earnest and very conscientious, West was always merry and gay and careless, never seeming to worry about money, although his income, at the time of her marriage, had been smaller even than Donald's.

There was something about him that always attracted women. She felt this whenever she was with him, yet it did not come from any appreciation of his character, or his mind, for she knew very little about either. There was some sort of psychic magnetism about the man, some vibrating sense of physical vitality, which she felt whenever she was near him. His mere presence made her strangely silent and in a way afraid, yet, whatever it was that she feared, it at the same time attracted her, and made her sorry when it had passed. She had never felt that way with Donald, although always she had liked to be with him, for somehow she felt more comfortable and sure, and could talk things over better, and plan out the future. She had not thought much about the future when she was with West—there did not seem to be any need for a future—the present had been all she had desired, but that she had desired very much. All this had passed, years ago, but still it came back to her, in a measure, when she thus first met him again.

He looked at her, in that curiously intimate way he had, and even his smile made her happy. She felt his glance sweep over her face, her whole body, and almost embrace her in its pleasant radiance—it thrilled her, yet she almost resented the way in which it left her helpless and confused. In a moment he had looked beyond her, at Donald, and was making some laughing inquiry about their boy—and then she felt sorry and wanted him to look at her again.

Mrs. Pope had taught her daughters many things, but cooking was not one of them. Edith had been forced, like many another married woman, to learn it in the school of hard practical experience, and, to her credit be it said, she had learned it surprisingly well. She excused herself after the first greetings had been said, added an extra dish to the partially prepared meal, and hastened to her room to change her dress. Of West's new fortunes she as yet knew nothing; it was to the man that she wanted to appeal, to the old friend, before whom her natural woman's vanity made her wish to appear at her best. When she served the dinner half an hour later, it was in a light-green pongee that seemed to West a triumph of the dressmaker's art. As a matter of fact she had made the dress herself, but it would have taken a far worse costume to have spoiled the lines of her superb figure, or dulled the sparkling mobility of her face.

Donald, with a father's pride in his boy, dug out Bobbie from the recesses of his mother's room, and brought him to West to be admired. He was a manly little fellow, with a large share of his mother's good looks, and West took him upon his

knee, wondering inwardly if he would ever have a son of his own to inherit his newly acquired fortune.

To the boy he told stories about the Indians that made the youngster open his eyes very wide indeed, and Uncle Billy, as West admonished him to call him, became at once a very important personage in his childish eyes.

It was when dinner had progressed to the stage of the salad that Donald mentioned the matter of West's sudden rise to fortune. "Billy had made a ten-strike in the West," he remarked to his wife. "Discovered a gold mine."

"Really!" Edith laughed. "Is there any gold in it? Almost all the gold mines I ever heard of were lacking in that important particular."

"This one wasn't." Donald looked at West and laughed. "Billy tells me it's made him worth half a million."

Mrs. Rogers gasped, then turned to her guest. "You are not in earnest?"she inquired wonderingly. "Half a million?"

"About that," said West, trying to look as if he were speaking of the price of a new hat, or something equally unimportant.

"But you—you don't seem a bit excited about it, or anything." Mrs. Rogers' own eyes were big with interest. "I should think you would be simply overcome. I know I should. Half a million!" She glanced unconsciously about the poorly furnished little room and sighed. Donald noticed it; her thoughts, for the moment, had been his own.

"I was excited enough when I found it," remarked West with a chuckle."It came like a snowstorm in August. Last thing in the world I had expected—at least just then."

"I suppose you just stood up and shouted," said his hostess.

"No, I didn't. I lit my pipe. I didn't want the rest of the bunch to know about it."

"Tell us the whole story." She was as interested as a child. Half a million dollars sounded like such a vast amount of money. All her life she had imagined what she would do if she were only rich. She had often thought it all out, in her day dreams—how she would give her mother so much for the trip to Europe that she was always talking about, and her sister so much more for the diamond necklace she wanted, and have an automobile and a place at the seashore and many other things. She had an exalted opinion of wealth and its possibilities; if she had known any wealthy people she would probably have found them very much like everyone else, complaining about the price of beef, and the difficulty of keeping one's servants and paying one's bills. She believed that it was not what one has, but what one has not, that counts. The sound of West's voice interrupted her thoughts.

"There isn't much to tell. I was on my vacation at the time, and there were about a dozen of us, camping up on the Little Ash river. There hadn't been any gold found in that section, before that, but I was always looking out for it—you see I had studied the formation up that way the summer before, and I was certain the rock was there. The boys used to make a good deal of fun of me, poking about with my geologist's hammer, instead of fishing or the like. It was the last day of our stay, I remember, and we had already begun to get our things together, in readiness to break camp in the morning. I had strolled up the river a few hundred yards, feeling a little disappointed at going back to Denver without even a piece of

iron pyrites, when I noticed a sort of whitish streak in the rocky bank just a little above where it rose from the edge of the river. It was mostly covered with underbrush and thick bushes, and I wonder that I saw it at all. I climbed down and took a good look, and then I just sat down on a rock and got out my pipe and had a good smoke. I felt somehow as though a new life had begun for me, and I wanted time to think things out. After a while I broke off a few samples of the quartz—it was a beautiful outcropping, with a pay streak in it as thick as your two fingers—and I stowed them away in my pocket and strolled back to camp as though nothing had happened. One of the boys said, as I came up, 'Find your gold mine yet?' and laughed. 'Yes,' I said, 'and it's worth a million.' They all laughed, for they thought I was joking, but I felt my bits of quartz in my pocket and said nothing. We got back to town the next afternoon and I had made my assays before I turned in that night."

"And then you knew?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes. I staked out my claim very quietly. Of course I gave up my position the next day. After I had had the claim registered, I went to see a man in Denver that I had come to know pretty well—he was the representative of a wealthy crowd in Boston who dealt extensively in mining properties, and I told him what I had. I won't bother you with the details. We formed a company, and they gave me half of the stock and made me vice-president, and then we started in to work the claim. In six months we had got in our stamping mills and were taking out ore. The rock got better, as we went into the hill, and we began to pay dividends almost from the start. There isn't any of our stock for sale now. I don't have much of anything to do with the management. It's in good hands, and last month, when I saw that everything was working smoothly, I made up my mind to come East, and look up some of my old friends." He glanced at Donald as he said this, and then at Edith, and she felt somehow, that he wanted her to feel that it was she that he meant.

She began to see, that very evening, something of what it meant to have so much money that it was not necessary to think about how one spent it. When West suggested, after dinner, that they all go to the theater, she said at once that it was too late—that they would never be able to get tickets at that hour. It was then close to eight o'clock, but West laughed, and said he would see to the tickets, so she put on her hat and they went.

When Donald and she went to the theater, which was not very often, they used to think about it for days ahead and were delighted if they were able to get good seats in the balcony at less than the prices charged downstairs.

Their evening was a delightful one. They whirled down-town to the theater in a taxicab, and went to supper afterwards at one of the best-known restaurants, where Edith wondered how the countless array of young and very beautiful women managed to get such gorgeous gowns and such magnificent jewelry. She and Donald did not often patronize such places.

They came home in a whirl of excitement, and Edith lay awake a long time after she had gone to bed, wondering if after all her mother had not been right in urging her to marry for money. She looked at Donald, who lay at her side, and thought long, long thoughts. She was not conscious of any disloyalty to him—she liked Donald very much—he seemed almost like a dear friend. Presently she began to try to analyze her love for him, her marriage, and her after life. She respected and

admired his mind, his character, but was there not, after all, something else in life—something deeper and more vital in the marriage relationship, something that she had missed? Why was it that Donald's presence, his touch, his look even, gave her no such glow of happiness as she had suddenly found with this man who had been a stranger to her for so many years? It was wrong, she knew, but clearly there was something lacking. Bobbie, waking fretfully, brought her to a sudden sense of the realities of life. She got up and placed an extra cover over him, and when she had once more succeeded in putting him to sleep her questions seemed for the time being answered.

Illustration:
Edith lay awake a long time after she had gone to bed

Chapter IV

West spent the next few days in getting comfortably located in New York, laying in a supply of new clothes, and purchasing an automobile. His life in Colorado had been unusually simple, since, with his time almost entirely given over to business affairs, he had had neither inclination nor opportunity for amusement. Now, however, he felt himself on a holiday. His bank account was bulging with unspent income, and he frankly admitted to himself that he had come to New York to spend it. Edith, who seemed almost continually in his mind, provided the necessary outlet, and he pictured the two of them making many delightful excursions into the country about New York in the big touring car which he had selected.

During his visits to tailors, bootmakers, haberdashers, and the like, he found time to send her a huge box of violets on two different occasions, and, with a vague idea of salving his conscience, hunted up Donald one day and took him to luncheon.

It was nearly a week after his first visit to the Rogers' apartment that he suddenly made up his mind to call, and, as luck would have it, Donald was not at home on that particular evening, having gone to a meeting of one of the engineering societies of which he was a member. The absence of a telephone brought West before the Rogers' door without any previous knowledge of his friend's absence. Edith, who was sitting alone, reading a magazine, and, to tell the truth, thinking of West himself and wondering what had become of him, received her caller with unfeigned gladness and insisted upon his remaining until Donald's return, which, she assured him, would not be late. Between spending the evening alone at his hotel, and here with the woman he had half-begun to believe was dearer to him, in spite of the lapse of years, than anyone else in the world, there was no choice. West came in and sat down, delighted at the opportunity which fate had thus generously accorded him.

They talked along conventional lines for a time, West entertaining her with an account of his experiences during the past week, and dilating upon the merits of

his new automobile, which he insisted she must try at once. Edith was delighted at the prospect—he told her that he was taking lessons in driving, and would soon be able to manage it with the best of them.

After a time, the topic having been exhausted, a silence came upon them, one of those portentous intervals that form a prelude to the expression of the unspoken thought, the unbidden wish.

Edith was more than ever conscious of some powerful attraction in this man; he seemed to represent vast possibilities—possibilities for future happiness—of what nature she did not dare even to ask herself. She felt, whenever she was with him, a strange confidence in the outcome of things; although what things she did not know. "I should be so glad to go," she had said, in reply to his suggestion regarding the proposed automobile trips. "I am alone so much!" There had been a touch of sadness in her voice that did not escape him. He looked at her keenly."Are you happy, Edith?" he asked with directness which startled her.

"Why—yes—of course I am. I hope you do not think that I was complaining. I only meant that I am a good deal alone during the day, and—and—" She hesitated. He knew quite well that she was not happy—or, at least, that she found her life far more empty than she had ever dreamed it would be when she married.

"—And you will take pity on a lonely bachelor," he completed her sentence for her. "As a matter of fact, I haven't anyone else to go about with, you know."

"And so you fall back on me. You're not very complimentary, Billy. I'll have to find someone to help you spend your money." She laughed, watching him narrowly as she spoke. After her eight years of married life, the subtle flattery of this man's attentions seemed doubly sweet, and, woman-like, she wanted to hold on to them, and enjoy them, as long as she could.

"I don't think I'd care about any young girl," he remarked gravely. "You know I always liked you better than anyone else, Edith, and I'm glad to say I still do."

"In spite of my gray hairs," she laughed. She had none, as a matter of fact, being especially youthful in appearance for a woman of nearly thirty, but she longed for the compliment she felt sure her remark would elicit.

"In spite of everything," he declared, "I have never forgiven Donald for cutting in and marrying you while I was away trying to make a fortune to lay at your feet." He spoke banteringly, with a laugh, but something in his voice told her that he was far more in earnest than his manner indicated. "Now that I have made it, I am determined that you shall have some pleasure out of it."

"That's very sweet of you, Billy," she said, with a touch of gravity in her manner. "I cannot tell you how much I appreciate it."

"Nonsense. Think what old friends we are. If you will take pity on my loneliness, and all that, I shall feel that I am the one who should be grateful." He rose from his chair and came over to where she sat, near the desk. "Do you know, Edith," he said suddenly, "that in all the time I have been away I don't suppose a single day went by that I did not think of you?"

"Don't tell me that, Billy. If you thought of me once in six months you did well." Her nervous laugh, as she attempted to meet his gaze, soundedunconvincing. She almost began to believe that he had thought of her every day.

"Do you remember that picture you once gave me—the one in the big Leghorn hat?"

"Why, yes," she answered slowly.

"I've had it on my dresser always, wherever I've been—it was the last thing I looked at when I went to bed at night. So, you see, I did think of you every day—honestly."

She felt her color coming—something in his manner, as he stood there gazing down at her, alarmed her. She felt that he still loved her, and that it would be only a question of time until he should tell her so. She was by no means prepared for any such rupture in their friendly relations, for rupture she knew it would certainly be, should he speak. She rose hastily and went toward the piano.

"Shall I play for you?" she asked. In the past it had been his invariable habit to ask her to do so.

"Will you?" His voice showed his appreciation of the fact that she had remembered.

"What would you like?"

"Oh, anything—it's been so long since I've heard any good music!" He joined her at the piano. "How about that beautiful thing you used to sing sometimes—Massenet's 'Elegy,' wasn't it? Don't you remember I always said I'd rather hear you sing that than listen to a grand opera?"

"Oh—I couldn't. I haven't sung for years."

"What a pity! I shouldn't think Donald would let you give it up."

"Donald doesn't care much for music." She felt as she spoke that she had in some way criticized her husband and hastened to make amends. "He's too busy—that's the reason. Donald is working very hard, and has to do a lot of work at home—nights. If I sang, it would bother him." She began to play the piece with considerable feeling and skill, and West, who was intensely fond of music, leaned over the piano and watched her happily. To have this woman all to himself seemed to him the only thing that fortune had denied him. The love which had lain so quiet all these years surged up within him with unsuspected force. His arms longed to draw her to him, to clasp her to his heart. He looked at her expressive, delicate face, her round, smooth neck, her dark, heavy hair, and wondered how Donald could bring himself to think that she could possiblybe happy in the position of a mere household drudge. His reflections did Donald scant justice; the latter, poor fellow, was trying with all his strength to lift both Edith and himself out of their present environment, but Donald was a silent man, who endured all things patiently, and he expected his wife to do the same.

West's intentions, if, indeed, he admitted to himself that he had any at this time, were directed toward two ends—his own amusement and Edith's. Perhaps amusement is not the exact word—it was more than that to him, for he could have amused himself with many women. He was really very fond of Edith, more so, perhaps, than he himself fully realized, and in giving her pleasure he gave himself pleasure as well. The idea of making love to her, of coming in any way between herself and Donald, had never entered his mind. After all, we so rarely erect barriers against certain experiences in life until after they have occurred, by which time barriers are no longer of any avail.

When Edith stopped playing, West begged her to go on, and presently, running into the accompaniment of "Oh, Promise Me," she began to sing in a clear, sweet voice which brought back to him the evenings, long before, when she had sung

this song to him. Unconsciously the years passed from them—he joined in the chorus of the song with his uncultivated, yet not unmusical, baritone, and once more they seemed back in the boarding-house parlor, she the young girl with life all before her, and he the happy-go-lucky Billy West, making and spending his small salary with joyous indifference as to the future.

He stayed until nearly half-past ten, hoping that Donald would return, but the latter evidently had been kept longer than he expected. Edith did not press him to remain—somehow, in spite of her old friendship for West, it seemed a bit queer, this sensation of being here alone in her apartment with a man other than her husband. She did not propose to conceal the fact of his having been there from Donald, but it seemed to her easier to tell Donald that Billy had called during his absence than to have him come in and find them together even as innocently engaged as they were. She knew that this feeling on her part was absurd, that Donald would not have the least idea of jealousy or suspicion—he was too clean minded a man for that. Her scruples arose from a deeper cause. She had begun to think about West in a way that caused her to feel guilty of disloyalty to her husband when no disloyalty had occurred—to desire to avoid the appearance of evil where no evil existed. All that she had done had been to liken her life with Donald, to what it might have been had she married West. It is a curious fact that the best of women are willing at times to compare the husband at his worst, with the lover at his casual best, and judge both accordingly.

West rode back to his hotel in a maze of doubts. He was genuinely fond of Donald—he liked him better than any man he knew, and this, probably, because he was in all things so nearly the other's opposite. He wondered whether Donald would object in any way to the attentions he proposed showing Edith—whether he would become jealous, and feel that his wife's place was at home, rather than dashing about in a five-thousand-dollar automobile with another man. Perhaps it would be but natural that he should, although not by nature a jealous man, and West realized the confidence that he placed in both his wife and himself. What West did not realize was the effect which his money and the pleasures and luxuries it could command would have upon this woman whose married life had been one long lesson in economy. He had no conception of the contrast in Edith's life between a quiet existence in a Harlem flat and the land of dreams to which his money was the open sesame, the golden key, unlocking the barriers between poverty on the one hand and all that the heart could desire on the other. He did not, could not, realize the upheaval which would necessarily take place in her life, the dissatisfaction which must inevitably ensue, if she were once drawn into a whirl of pleasures and excitements to which her existence for so many years had been totally foreign. If she and Donald lunched or dined together at an expensive restaurant it was an event, commemorating some anniversary—such as their wedding or a birthday. West, on the contrary, regarded dropping into any of the hotels or cafÃ©s for luncheon or dinner as a most ordinary performance—he was forced to do it himself, and his only desire was for company. As for going to the theater, he knew that the best seats were always obtainable at the hotels, or on the sidewalk—at a small advance in price, it is true. But what difference did that make to a man who had a hundred dollars a day to spend and no reason whatever for not spending it?

Even before West's coming, the subtle poison of dissatisfaction had begun to eat its way into Edith's heart. Money had always appeared to her a vital necessity in life—her mother had taken care of that—but in the flush of youthful enthusiasm she had believed that, with Donald at her side, she could endure comparative poverty with a light heart, until he had made his fortune, as so many another man had done before him. She had not thought, however, that the time would be so long. West came into her life at a moment when she was fertile soil for the seeds of discontent which he so unconsciously was planting in her nature.

She greeted her husband with indifferent coldness upon his return, about half-past eleven, and told him of West's call. Donald was unfeignedly sorry that he had missed his friend, but showed no least trace of annoyance on learning that West and Edith had spent the evening together. "I hope he will come often," he said. "We have both been a bit lonely of late. It will do you good, dear, to have new interests in life. I am only sorry that I cannot do more for you myself." He drew her to him, and kissed her tenderly, but, somehow, under his caress she shivered and grew cold. "Billy is a splendid fellow, and I don't doubt you will be doing him a real kindness to help him amuse himself a bit until he has got settled in town. It makes a great difference to a man, to be away from New York for five years."

West had suggested to Edith that they take a trial trip in the new automobile the following Friday, but of this Edith said nothing at the time. It was not that she wished to conceal the fact, but it seemed to her pointed, and as though drawing especial attention to an unimportant matter, to speak of it at this time. So she said nothing. After all, she had nothing to conceal or be ashamed of. It is true that, in her more introspective moments, she saw a dim shadow of danger ahead; but she put it resolutely aside, and contented herself with a sophistry which has led many another along devious paths. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Chapter V

It was early in March that West came to New York, and from then on Edith Rogers lived what was to her a new life. She had persuaded Donald to let her have a nurse for Bobbie, a young girl who came in every morning, took the child out in the park, amused him during the day, and helped with the housework. This left her comparatively free to spend a large part of her time with West. Their automobile trips became a matter of almost daily occurrence.

Thrown thus so much together, these two closed their eyes to the danger which they both knew was impending; they walked gayly upon the edge of a yawning chasm and refused to admit that one false step would send them both crashing down into an abyss of chaos and destruction. In a few weeks, from talking first of themselves, then of each other, during long days when Donald labored patiently in his office down-town, it was but a question of time when "you" and "me" became "we," and Edith would have missed Billy West from her life more than she would have missed Donald, because he had become more a part of it. Like a ship at anchor, with all sails set and filled by a strong and ever increasing gale, it was

inevitably certain that before long either the anchor must give, or the white sails of her reputation be blown to rags and tatters—bitter state, indeed, for a wife and mother!

One of the things about West which appealed to her most was his ever ready sympathy. Donald, made of sterner stuff, realized that sympathy, overdone, weakens one's powers of resistance, and exaggerates one's burdens. He expected his wife to bear what life accorded to her in the way of hardship as patiently as he himself did. West, on the contrary, was always sympathetic. Edith's cares, her worries, her troubles, he at once made his own, and seemed only content if he could in some way relieve them. That he had the means to do so, and could not, made it all the harder for him. He would have given her anything he possessed, yet knew she could accept only the veriest trifles. Flowers, theater tickets, automobile rides, served to intensify, rather than lessen, her longings for the things she must perforce do without. Expensive restaurants implied expensive costumes, hats, jewels, which she did not have and could not get, and she often wondered that her companion did not feel ashamed of her in her home-made clothes.

By some system of more-than-rigid economy known only to herself she had managed to procure a few of the things she felt she most needed: a long automobile coat—reduced because shop-worn—a motor hat and veil, and an evening gown which had once been part of the theatrical outfit of a well-known star, and which she had picked up, second-hand, at a little shop on Sixth Avenue. It was very magnificent; she felt almost ashamed to wear it so often, but she knew that it showed off her charms to the greatest advantage, having been designed, primarily, with that end in view. Had she ever stopped to ask herself why she wanted to exhibit these charms to West she would probably have been unable to answer her own question, but she had long ago ceased to catechize herself—sufficient it was that Billy was pleased that she looked well, and that Donald did not blame her. She was floating happily along from day to day, not daring to ask herself what the outcome of it all would be.

She was seldom alone with West—alone, that is, in the sense of being to themselves. She had not dared, after that first night, to have him at the apartment—they had met at the doorstep, and their hours together were spent over restaurant tables, or in theater seats, or the automobile. She had a terrible fear that some time or other West would reach out his arms to her and she knew that, if he did, she would go to him without a question. He had assisted her in avoiding such acontretemps, for he, too, knew his power, and was fighting to hold what he had, rather than lose it in a vague and mysterious future, at the character of which he could only guess. On one or two occasions, when they had come in from automobiling, and West was waiting until Donald should arrive from the office, preparatory to their all going to dinner together, she had purposely brought Bobbie into the room. Once when they had so come in, Bobbie was out with his nurse, and she had wondered if Billy would take advantage of the fact. Much as she feared it, she was conscious of a fierce hope that he would. These two were like firebrands—he longed in every fiber to take her into his arms and kiss her, and she knew it. She equally hungered for his embraces, and he knew that this was so; in both their minds this maddening thought had become a reality—a thousand times. She had acted it to herself over and over, as he had done, and

had felt, in her imagination, every thrill of delight which this physical contact would give her, yet something, some leash of conscience as yet not worn to the breaking point, held them apart.

On this particular occasion he sat far from her, and held on to his half-smoked cigar as though it had been his salvation. She busied herself turning idly the leaves of a magazine. He knew, if he threw that cigar away, he would go over to her and take her in his arms, and kiss her, and he dared not to do it—for fear of what might come thereafter.

In April, he had been obliged to go away for three weeks, in connection with some business affairs in the West, and the separation had come almost as a relief to both of them. They had endured as far as human flesh and blood could endure. West told her of the matters which made it necessary for him to go, but she felt that they were not so important as he represented, and knew in her heart that he was going away because he wanted to give both himself and her an opportunity to readjust themselves, to think matters over calmly, without the presence of each other to affect their judgment.

The time of his absence seemed interminably long. Edith found that most of the long series of introspective analyses to which she subjected herself terminated in a mad desire to have him back again in New York. His absence had shown her how absolutely she had been depending upon him, how his going had taken from her everything that made her life joyous and happy, leaving only the dull background of duty and work, two things that she had come to regard merely as unfortunate necessities of existence.

During his absence she spent a great deal more time with Bobbie than she had been in the habit of doing of late, and found to her surprise that the child depended upon her and thought of her less than he had done before. His nurse was a kind-hearted young girl, who had come to love the little boy deeply and mothered him in all sorts of ways. He had got out of the habit of seeing his mother all day as he had done in the past and, with the easy forgetfulness of childhood, clamored for Nellie, as the girl was called, and their daily walks in the park, the games she had thought out to amuse him, the easy comradeship that made her his playfellow rather than a superior and distant grown-up. Edith resented this, at first, but soon ceased her attempts to change matters and busied herself in making dresses for the coming summer.

She saw West again on a drizzly afternoon in May. His frequent letters had told her of his life while away and of the day of his return. He had called rather unexpectedly about three o'clock, and they had gone for a walk in the park. He seemed strangely silent, at first, and neither of them spoke much for a few moments; they walked along side by side, inwardly trying to bridge the gap which the past few weeks had made in their lives. Presently he spoke.

"I cannot tell you how glad I am to be back again. I used to like the West, but I do not think I could ever live there again."

She said what was nearest her heart. "I am glad, too—very glad," then grew confused and silent.

"I brought you a little souvenir," he said, taking a small package from his pocket, and handing it to her. She opened the box it contained and drew out a

magnificent gold chain purse. "I had it made from some of the gold from our mine," he continued hesitatingly; "I thought you might like it."

"Oh, Billy!" she cried, and looked up at him with darkening eyes. "How lovely of you to think of me! It is beautiful—beautiful." She gloated over its exquisite workmanship with all the joy of suddenly possessing something which had always seemed very far away.

"I hoped you would like it," he said.

"Oh—I do—more than I can tell you. I never expected to have one, though I have longed for it all my life." She smiled, dangling the purse delightedly from its gold chain. "I only wish I had more to put in it,"she concluded thoughtlessly.

"So do I—Edith—so do I." His tone betrayed the intensity of his feelings. "I wish I could do more for you—but I haven't the right—I haven't the right." His voice trailed off helplessly. "I only wish I had."

She said nothing to this. It was perilous ground and they both knew it."How is Donald?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, he's very well. Busy as ever. Won't you come in and see us this evening?"

"No—not this evening. I have a man with me from Denver that I must be with. He is going on to Boston at midnight. One of our directors," he added by way of explanation. "But we must take a ride in the machine to-morrow. I suppose it will be quite rusty for want of use."

"I suppose so. I've missed our trips."

He looked at her closely. "Yes, I can see that," he said, "you do not look so well—you are pale and tired. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh, nothing much. Sewing, mostly." She did not tell him that her principal occupation had been waiting for him to return.

"You need the fresh air. Suppose we take a run down to Garden City and have luncheon there. I'll look in and see Donald in the morning and say hello. Does he know I am back?"

"No—I don't think so. I didn't mention it."

He said nothing to this at first and did not even look at her. "I wonder if Donald minds my—our—our going about so much together," he ventured, at last. "Do you think he does?"

"I don't think so," she replied. "Why should he? I think he is rather glad that I have had so much pleasure." She hesitated a moment, then went on. "He has never said anything. You know how fond he is of you."

"Yes—I know it." He spoke as though the thought brought up unpleasant ideas. "Isn't life a terrible tragedy?" he said, as though to himself."The things we want most, it seems, we can never, never have, without hurting someone else to get them."

"Donald says that is sure proof that we ought not to have them," she said in a low voice.

"And do you think so, too?" he asked eagerly.

"I—I do not know."

He hesitated a moment, then went on impetuously. "Is duty after all everything in the world? Is there not a duty to ourselves as well as to others? May not one duty conflict with another, and make it hard to know which one we ought to follow? Must two people make themselves utterly wretched, to give happiness to a

third? Isn't it somehow sort of unequal—paying too great a price for a thing that is not worth it?"

She did not answer him, nor did he expect her to do so. He was in reality only thinking aloud—expressing the thoughts which had been uppermost in his mind for the past three weeks, and, woman-like, she took refuge in silence, for she knew that were she to answer him truthfully she would agree with him.

"If two people love each other enough, doesn't it make up for anything else in the world? We can't control our feelings. We can't help it, if love comes to us and takes from us everything in our lives, and leaves nothing behind but itself. There must be some purpose in it all. If there is nothing left to us but love, why should we have to give that up as well, and go on and on in wretched misery to the end? I can't do it—and yet, I know that I must."

She trembled as she heard his words—so unlike the care-free man she had come to know. He had changed very much, in these past few weeks. The lines of suffering in his face were new to it, and only a great emotion could have set them there. He loved her with a strong, compelling love, and he was wrestling with the vital problems of duty and right. She, on her part, loved him because of what pleasure he had given her, and was wrestling with no problems whatever. Her only thought at the moment was a great desire to have him put his arms about her and crush her to him. This, however, he did not know, for he had idealized her and invested her with all manner of high qualities and virtues which she by no means possessed. She had begun to feel just a trifle annoyed by his constant self-control. Somehow it seemed to belittle her own powers of attraction. She feared, at times, that he might, casting prudence, duty—honor to the winds, overwhelm her in a wild and rapturous outburst of love, but the fact that he had not done so, up to now, annoyed her a little, and almost made her desire the more that he would. She liked to feel that West was a firebrand, that she herself was keeping him at a distance—she did not enjoy the thought that he was controlling himself in spite of her. He pedestaled her as a paragon of virtue, a creature of restraint, which he, a devastating male, had caused to love him. She was in reality far more frail than he, and the more he held aloof, the more she burned for his caresses. Passion had made her shameless.

She walked along without replying for a long time, and he, misconstruing her silence, thought he had offended her, by what he had said, and began to speak of lighter things. He told her of his trip to Denver, of his friends and acquaintances there, and she pretended to a deep interest, but all the while she was longing to hear him burst forth with, "I love you, I love you." After all, there was much of logic in her position, for she knew perfectly well that the time would eventually come when he would say those words to her, unless, indeed, he were to go away from her, and avoid yielding to temptation by fleeing from it, and of this there seemed not the slightest prospect. She knew she had a compelling hold on him—he might for a time prevent himself from telling her his feelings, but she could hold him near her as long as she pleased.

The rain made the afternoon unpleasant for walking. They turned into the Casino and had a cup of tea, and chatted indifferently of subjects in which neither of them was interested. West was in a hurry to get away—he seemed less sure of himself than usual, and ill at ease. At close to five o'clock they returned to the

apartment and he left her, with the understanding that he would stop for her in the machine at eleven the next day.

Chapter VI

Edith came back from her walk very much out of sorts. It seemed to her as though Billy understood her so much better than Donald ever had, or, as far as she could see, ever would understand her, and yet their love, for such she admitted it to herself to be, was leading to nothing. The gloomy entrance of the Roxborough seemed to grate upon her nerves, and her feeling of dissatisfaction persisted throughout the evening. Donald had some work to do after dinner, and sat at his desk in silence for a long time, writing steadily. She, on her part, got out her sewing, and prepared to spend the evening darning Bobbie's stockings. She hated it—she had always disliked to sew, but in a way it seemed a sort of penance, a duty, whereby she paid for the pleasures of the day.

Donald was more than usually quiet over his letters. Presently he sealed up the last one and, rising, began to walk uneasily up and down the room. She waited for him to speak, guiltily wondering if he suspected anything. Presently he turned to her.

"Edith," he said, "have you heard from Billy West?"

For a moment she hesitated. To what was this question leading? What had prompted it? Then she dropped her sewing into her lap and faced him."Yes," she said slowly. "He was here this afternoon."

"Then he is back?" He glanced at her suddenly, but without suspicion."Queer he didn't let me know."

"Oh, he just ran in for a moment to say he'd returned. He intended to look you up in the morning. He was very busy—he told me—some man from Boston to entertain—one of the directors of his company, I believe."

Donald seemed for a moment engrossed in his thoughts. She observed a worried look cross his face, but could not determine its cause.

"I'm glad he's back," he said. "I've got a matter I want to talk over with him."

"What is it?" His seriousness for a moment frightened her.

"It's something I've been considering for a long time. I hardly like to speak of it to him, and yet I don't know anyone else to whom I can turn. It's about that glass plant of ours, in West Virginia. We're awfully short of capital, and I have an idea that there is trouble ahead. The money market is getting tighter and tighter. The outlook for business is bad. We are likely to need a little money, before long, to tide us over. I'm thinking of suggesting to Billy that if he wants to invest a few thousands on first-class security—bonds, he might very easily do much worse than put it into our concern."

She took up her sewing again with a sigh of relief. So it was nothing but a matter of business, after all, with which she was not greatly concerned. Yet, before she replied, a curious pang of conscience smote her. Billy would do this, she knew; do it for her sake, if not, indeed, for Donald's, and for a brief space she felt

ashamed to think that Donald would owe the assistance he needed to the fact that Billy West loved her. The thought was fleeting—elusive—and in a moment was swallowed up in the greater knowledge of their love; yet, for that moment, she had ranged herself beside her husband, resenting the suggestion for his sake, finding in it something that humiliated and hurt her.

"If it is a good investment," she presently exclaimed, "I don't see why he should not put some money into it."

"Of course it's a good investment. I shouldn't have my own in it, if it weren't. We need only a small amount—nothing to West. He can't begin to spend his income." He looked moodily about the room. "I'm not envious, but I wish I had a tenth of it. There are so many things I'd like to do for you, dear, if I only could. I'm glad that he has been able to make the past few months more pleasant for you. Billy is one of the best fellows I've ever met—generous and unselfish to a fault. I'm very fond of him; I haven't a friend I think more of."

Again the pang of conscience smote Edith. The enormity of the deception which she and West had been practicing upon Donald appalled her, and he seemed so unsuspecting, so guileless. His next words, however, drove the thought from her mind.

"I wish he'd marry. He really needs someone to look after him. I wonder that your sister Alice doesn't get along with him better. What's the trouble, anyway? She hardly ever sees him. Why don't you do more to bring them together?"

Edith instinctively resented the suggestion. Billy West was hers, by right of conquest. The thought of turning him over to anyone, even to her sister, annoyed her. "Alice thinks too much of someone else," she replied primly.

"You mean Hall?"

"Yes. They've been as good as engaged for months. Mother objects, of course, but I think Alice loves him."

Donald smiled. "In that case, we'll have to find someone else for Billy. Emerson Hall is a splendid fellow, and I'd be glad to see Alice marry him." He came over to Edith and patted her shoulder affectionately. "I never expected to play the rÃ´le of a matchmaker, but I'd be mighty glad to see Billy fall in love with some nice girl, who would appreciate him, and help him to make something of his life. Just sitting around New York, spending thirty or forty thousand a year, isn't good for any man. With his money he ought to travel, see the world, take up some hobby, have children—that's about the most human thing a man can do. With all that money at his command he could do so much for them."

"Yes," she assented, not daring to look at him.

"What I'm afraid of is that he'll fall in love with some woman who'll ruin his life—somebody that won't have an idea above clothes, and automobiles, and physical enjoyment. There are so many like that, here in New York, and, if he should happen to care for one of them, it would spoil his whole future. Billy is really quite simple in his tastes. He'd love a big country place, and horses, and dogs, and all that. This gay New York life attracts him now, because he's been away from it for so long, but in another six months he'll be sick of it. I'm going to have a talk with him."

Edith said nothing. What, indeed, was there for her to say? Donald's words cut deep. For a brief space she almost hated herself. Was West's love for her going to

spoil his whole life? She shivered at the thought. Then the picture of the man, his smiling face, his attractive and alluring personality, rose before her, and drove away the doubts which had for the moment chilled her heart. She rose and put away her sewing."Perhaps you had better let Billy West manage his own love-affairs,"she remarked quietly.

Donald, busily engaged in refilling his pipe, failed to see the trace of resentment which accompanied her words. "Oh, I don't mean to interfere,"he said. "I'm not a fool. But Billy and I have been friends for a long time, and I don't think he'd mind a little advice from me."

"You are going to ask him about this—this money, to-morrow?" Edith inquired presently.

"Perhaps. I may sound him out, at least. We sha'n't need the money for some weeks—may not need it at all, in fact, but I want to be prepared."

He did talk the matter over with West the next day, and the latter fell in with the plan at once. He felt a deep sense of shame at the injury he was doing his friend, and was anxious to make amends in any way that he could. It occurred to him, also, that perhaps in this way he might, indirectly at least, help Edith. Deep down in his soul he despised himself, felt himself a traitor, in thought at least, if not yet in deed, to this man who loved and trusted him. For a moment he almost made up his mind to tell Edith at once that he could not see her again, that they must part forever. The intention was an honest one, at the time. Even he did not admit, that one smile from her—one touch of her hand—would consign it to the paving operations in hell which is the destiny of so large a proportion of all good intentions.

He refused Donald's invitation to luncheon, explaining that he meant to take Edith out for a drive in the car. Donald even thanked him for this."You are a brick, Billy," he said, gripping his hand at parting. "Since you've been back, Edith has been like another woman. I believe she's gained ten pounds, and all her nervousness is gone. Being out in the air so much, I suppose. But we can't let her monopolize you. Why don't you get married, Billy?"

The suddenness of the question threw West for the moment off his guard. "Married!" he exclaimed. "Why—I—what do you mean?" He looked at his friend narrowly.

"It's plain enough, isn't it? Here you are, a young and good-looking chap with plenty of money. What more natural than to marry, and have a home, and children? It's the only way to be really happy. All this"—he waved his hand toward the vista of roofs and pinnacles which stretched endlessly northward—"doesn't really get you anywhere. You know that, as well as I."

"I—I guess you're right. I'd be glad enough to get away from it all—with a woman I loved. I'd never want to see New York again. But—I—" he hesitated, faltered—"I guess I won't marry yet awhile, Don—not yet awhile."

"Better think it over, old man," he heard Donald call out to him, as he turned away.

All the way up-town he hated himself, hated the circumstances which had placed him in this horrible situation, with love on the one side, duty on the other, tearing at his heart. He felt so depressed that he stopped on the way and drank

two highballs. They served to drive away the fog of doubts which had begun to envelop him.

By the time he reached the Roxborough, his spirits had commenced to revive. The presence of Edith, her happy, smiling face, her unconcealed joy at seeing him, completed the change. After all, he was only taking for a spin in the country the woman he loved, the woman he had always loved. There was nothing wrong in that. He had not been false to Donald by any overt act. God had put this love into his heart, and he had only responded as his nature made him respond. The futility of blaming the whole affair upon God did not at the moment occur to him. It was a convenient way of shifting the responsibility, and one that has been much utilized since the days of Adam.

Edith, on her part, felt that the time had come for an understanding of some sort between West and herself. It would be unfair to all concerned, she decided, to allow matters to drift as they had been drifting. If West should tell her that he loved her, it would give her a reason for not seeing him, an excuse for driving him away. Until he did speak, she could do nothing. She was by no means certain that, should he declare himself, she would forthwith proceed to put him out of her life. That question she left for the emotions of the moment to decide. But she believed that, until the moment arrived, she was quite helpless, for either good or ill. To break with West, her husband's friend and her own, now, without apparent reason, would be to assume that he loved her, and loved her wrongfully—she was not certain that this was true, not sufficiently certain, at least, to deny herself the joy of finding out.

For all these reasons she decided to do her best to force West to declare himself. Then she would have a crisis to face—a reality, not a mere supposition. And whatever course she then decided upon, whether love, or duty, it would at least be definite and final, and the present state of affairs was neither.

By this complex system of reasoning Edith Rogers justified herself in her intention to force from West a declaration of his love, and justified herself so completely that, when she joined him at the entrance to the apartment, she had almost convinced herself that she was about to commit a most laudable and praiseworthy act.

Chapter VII

It is a curious, but undeniable, fact that there is something in the effect of rapid motion upon the senses that generates love. Possibly it is the poetry of movement which attunes the mind to thoughts of a less practical nature. The dance, the swift motion of an ocean liner, the whirl of a motor car, are they not responsible for a multitude of sins; else why the ballroom flirtations, the love-affairs on shipboard, the eloping heiress and the chauffeur? Certain it is that there was something in the drive to Garden City at Edith's side that morning, which engendered in West a more passive attitude, a more willing yielding to their growing love for each other, than he had felt while walking with her in the park the day before. She, on her

part, dismissed all unpleasant thoughts from her mind, and reveled in the joy of the moment. The day was brilliant, though somewhat cold. The heavy fur-lined coat she wore had been purchased a short time before by West, for her especial use; she appreciated the motive which had prompted him to do this—he thought so continually of her comfort, her happiness.

She turned and glanced at him, and noted with pleasure, even with a secret glow of happiness, the strong, handsome lines of his face, ruddy in the sharp wind, the strength of his arms, the poise of his shoulders. Through the coat which enveloped her she could feel the subtle warmth of his body—she nestled closer to him, and basked in a delightful realization of his strength, his mastery over the on-rushing car, his steady, unfailing nerves, which alone stood between her and death. It seemed so fine to know that her life rested in his hands, that a momentary weakness, a trifling slip on his part might hurl them both to destruction against some tree, or rock, or ever present telegraph pole. She began to wonder, after all, how she had ever lived these years without love, real, dominating love, such as she believed this to be, to illumine and glorify her life. Everything, indeed, with Donald seemed so sordid. There was the everlasting talk of money, the continual effort to make ends meet, the constant fear lest she spend a little more than his income would justify. All this had passed from her, to-day. She moved along in a cloud of wonderful, waking dreams, and life seemed once more a joyous, sentient thing. She even forgot Bobbie, and it almost seemed as though, if she could spend all the rest of her life by West's side, anything else would be of but minor importance.

West interrupted her day-dreams. "Are you warm enough, dear?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, yes, quite," she gasped against the wind and wondered if he realized how in using that term of endearment he had caused a glow of happiness to flood her until her faced burned. It was something he had never done before, yet it did not seem strange to her. Their personalities seemed vibrant, attuned to each other and to some great harmony of love which was a part of the rushing wind, the brilliant sunshine, the blue sky. She felt that he was going to say something to her—something that she dreaded, yet waited for as a bride for her bridegroom. Somehow all thought of disloyalty to Donald had vanished. It was not that she put it aside, or trampled upon it—in this glorified atmosphere of love it simply no longer existed.

Presently he turned to her, as they were slowly mounting a long stretch of hill. "I wish we could go on and on, and never stop, for all the rest of our lives," he said, looking at her hungrily. She met his gaze with a glad smile and they told each other with their eyes what had been growing in their hearts for all these months. The road stretched before them, gray and lonely. West put his left arm about her with a caressing motion that seemed to embrace within it not only herself, but all her hopes and fears, her troubles and her joys. She did not passively yield herself to his embraces, she leaped to him, her brain on fire, her soul in her eyes. When their lips met, she hardly knew it, all the music of the heavenly choirs seemed singing in her ears, and in that moment of supreme happiness neither future nor past for her existed. In an instant he had turned from her and, with his hands on the steering wheel, swept the road ahead with cautious eyes. The whole thing

seemed like a dream—a fantasy of the imagination, yet she knew it was the realest thing in her life at the moment, the one great experience that eclipsed all lesser experiences as though they had never been at all.

They did not say much for a long time, for each seemed to feel the irrevocability of the thing that had befallen them. It was not as though West had kissed her, as a man might kiss a flirtatiously inclined woman. She knew that to him, at least, that kiss had meant a seal of love; what it had meant to her she had not yet in her own mind decided.

After what seemed to her hours, he spoke again. "I am thinking of going away, Edith," he said, and his voice seemed to come to her from a long way off, and wake her from happy dreams.

"Going away?" she asked, with a new timidity. "Where?"

"To Europe, to Cairo, to the East."

"Why?"

"Because I cannot stay here any longer."

"Why not?" she found herself asking. "Why not?"

"Because I love you, dear, and because, if I stay here, I am afraid of what might happen. I want to go away, to get out into the great, wide places of the world, where air, and sunshine, and love are free and God-given. I hate New York and all it means. I cannot stay in it any longer—as things are."

"Then I shall not see you—any more?" she asked in a voice from which she was unable to keep a quivering sense of loss, of pain.

"Not unless you will go with me," he said suddenly, turning and looking into her face.

"Go with you—go with you?" She repeated the words mechanically, as though the thought suggested by them had not yet found a place in her mind. "How could I?"

"Why not?" His voice became suddenly intense, trembling with feeling. "I love you, and I want you, always, close by my side. I cannot think of going on, all the years of my life, without you. I know how wrong, how disloyal it all must seem to you, but I cannot help it. I love you—I love you—what more is there for me to say? If you wish it, I will go away from you at once—to-day, and never see you again, if it breaks my heart. Shall I?"

She gave a faint cry. The thought hurt her, in its unexpected cruelty."How can you ask me that?"

The car was running very slowly now, along a stretch of road bordered by high trees, faintly green in their early spring garb. He let the machine come to a standstill beside the road and took her fiercely into his arms. "Edith, I cannot go without you—my God—I cannot. Come with me, dearest, come, and forget all the troubles and cares of your life here." He pressed her to him with quivering muscles and kissed her."Will you? Will you?" he demanded, and his voice seemed to her a command, rather than a question.

She yielded to his embrace gladly, with a joyous sense of freedom."Yes—yes!" she cried, and lay still in his arms.

Presently they heard, far behind them, the sound of another car ascending the hill. West put her from him, started the machine, and they rushed along against the southeast wind, their hearts big with their new-formed plan.

Then a long silence came upon them. Perhaps they were both thinking of the pain which their love must cause to Donald, the inevitable consequences which must flow from it. It was a natural reaction from the exaltation of the moment before. Edith, too, was thinking of Bobbie, and already in her inmost soul had begun to resent the demands of this newemotion, which required her to tear out of her heart all that now lay within it, that there might be room for her love for West alone. Yet so strange are the ways of love, that, while resenting the result, she did not resent the love which caused it—to her Billy West was, for the time being at least, the sum of all earthly existence.

It was after one o'clock when they reached the hotel at Garden City, and in a few moments they had secured a table and were ordering luncheon. West suggested a cocktail, which seemed very grateful after the long ride. Edith did not feel hungry, but ate mechanically, hardly knowing what was set before her. She looked timidly at him, and felt her cheeks redden with a sudden flush. Somehow he seemed so big, so masterful, so different from Donald, and she knew that whenever he desired, from now on, to take her in his strong arms, she would not resist him, but would be glad. She seemed to feel toward him an intense physical attraction, something that she had never felt toward her husband, an unreasoning instinct, that made her long to be near him, to hear his voice, to put her hand in his, and forget everything else in the blessed knowledge that this man of her desire possessed her completely and utterly.

These thoughts came to her as an undercurrent, far below the ripple of conversation with which the meal passed. Only once did they look over the precipice upon the edge of which they walked so lightly. She ventured, half-afraid, to ask him when he thought of leaving New York. His answer showed that he, too, had been thinking deeply of the matter which lay nearest their hearts.

"I must go to Denver first," he said. "All my property is there, you know, and I shall have to arrange about it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I shall sell out my stock in the mine, and resign my position as vice-president. It may take a week or two to do that. After I have converted the stock into money, it will be necessary to put it into some good security, bonds probably, which will require no attention. That will leave me free to go abroad, and stay as long as I please, without having to bother about business affairs. We can go to Egypt, to Persia, to India, to Japan, and when we come back—" He hesitated, halted.

"When we come back! Can we ever come back, dear?" she asked timidly.

"Of course we can. Your husband will know that we love each other; and surely he will make it possible for us to be married. After all, you have never been happy with him. He should be glad to see you happy with someone else."

The matter-of-fact way in which he spoke of their future jarred upon her. It was one thing to dream of running away to some imagined country of palms and eternal summer, in an ecstasy of love, but the details, the sordid necessities of the thing, seemed hard and cruel, even when viewed through the rosy spectacles of love. To think of coming back to New York and the chilly isolation of the social outcast did not appeal to her—it was like awakening from the dream to realities anything but pleasant. He must have seen her distaste, or felt it, for he changed

the subject abruptly, merely remarking that he had decided to go to Denver that night.

"To-night?" she asked—"Why to-night? You have only just come from there."

"The sooner I go, the better. Matters are in such shape now that I can sell out my interests quickly. I found that out, while I was there. If I wait, it may be more difficult. The company is thinking of taking over some new properties, and that will require considerable money. I had better go at once."

She trembled at the thought of what it all meant, but said no word to discourage him. Somehow the very success which had crowned her dreams now seemed to make them less beautiful—less to be desired. Why couldn't they just go on loving each other, without all this—this upsetting of things? She suddenly found herself blushing at the realization of just what it was that her thoughts actually meant.

The run back to town was cheerless and cold, and singularly symbolic of her state of mind. The brightness of the morning had faded before the bank of ashen-colored clouds that whirled up from the southeast with a suggestion of winter in their formless masses. West drove the car at top speed, as though he, too, felt the approach of something chilling, an aftermath to their dreams. It was nearly five when they reached the ferry in Long Island City, and the lights in the stores and along the streets had already begun to sparkle through the gathering mists of evening.

"We should have come back earlier," said Edith, a bit worried. "Bobbie will wonder what has become of me." She had left the child in Alice's care, the nurse being out, and knew that the latter would be anxious to get back to the boarding-house and dinner. There was her own evening meal to prepare as well. At once all the realities of life arose to reach out to her, and draw her back to her old routine.

"We can easily make it by half-past five," said West, as they turned from Thirty-fourth Street into Madison Avenue. "What time will Donald be home?"

"A little after five, I suppose. We shall probably find him at home when we get there."

They drove up to the house just as Donald was ascending the steps. Edith felt an overpowering sense of guilt as he helped her from the machine; she said good-by to West rather hastily, as she stood beside her husband on the sidewalk. Nothing was said about the proposed trip to Denver; Donald asked them about their day's outing, hoped they had had a pleasant time; further than that there was no conversation. As the motor rolled off, West looked back and nodded, and in a moment Edith found herself ascending the elevator with her husband, wondering if, after all, the experience of the day had not been a strange dream.

It seemed queer, unreal, to come down to the commonplace things of life. Potatoes had to be peeled, a steak cooked, all the details of the preparation of their simple dinner. Bobbie was cross and hungry, and hung about her skirts as she moved to and fro in the kitchen. Alice had hurried away, with a rather nasty remark concerning her long stay. More than ever she realized that life—her life—was so full of things that meant nothing to her, so barren of those that really counted. She placed the dinner upon the table with a heart full of bitterness, but she showed nothing of it to Donald.

He was full of his new venture in the glass business. A friend by the name of Forbes had come to him that afternoon with some patents for making glass tiling; there was a fortune in it, he rattled on, and she listened, only half-comprehending what it was all about. She had always tried to take an interest in her husband's business affairs, but, to-night, her heart was too full of other things—things that alternately lifted her up into realms of hitherto unknown happiness, and then dropped her into the black depths of despair. After all, it would soon be over, she reflected, and then, frightened by her thoughts, put them from her, and choked down her dinner with a strange sense of desolation. Billy was gone—Billy, who had filled her days and nights with a new joy of living. Gone—gone! Suppose something were to happen to him! The thought that she might never see him again frightened her.

Chapter VIII

One evening, about two weeks after West had left New York for Denver, Alice Pope, Edith's sister, came down to the Roxborough for the purpose of spending the evening.

The two girls were very much alike in temperament and training and had always been great friends, confiding to each other most of the affairs of their rather uneventful existence. Alice was two years younger than Edith, and while not so handsome a woman, was the stronger nature of the two; as was evidenced by her somewhat more firmly molded chin, her lips, less full than Edith's, and her gray eyes, which, set somewhat more closely together, gave to her face an expression of shrewdness and determination only relieved by her good-natured and rather large mouth.

She was not a frequent visitor at the Rogers' apartment, at least in the evening, as she and Donald did not get along very well—they were good enough friends, but neither found the other very congenial. Alice thought Donald hard and unsympathetic, a feeling which arose largely from the tales of woe with which Edith so frequently regaled her. Donald, feeling this attitude of criticism, and too proud to attempt to controvert it, remained silent, which but convinced Alice the more of his lack of warmth and geniality. Thus the two preserved a sort of armed neutrality, the effect of which was to keep them forever at arm's length.

Edith was in a state of extreme nervousness, and even the pretense of looking at a magazine hardly served to conceal the fact from Donald—he would inevitably have noticed it, had he not been busily occupied at his desk.

The cause of her nervousness reposed safely within the bosom of her dress. It was a letter from West which had come for her, three days before, and its contents had caused her the gravest concern. She felt glad that Alice was coming—glad that Donald had decided to go out for a stroll. She had been inwardly debating the advisability of taking her sister into her confidence, when the door-bell rang.

It was about eight o'clock, and Donald was just going out to post his letters.

"Hello, Sis!" said Alice, as she came in, then she nodded to Donald.

"Good-evening, Alice," Edith replied. "Where's mother? I thought she was coming with you."

"She'll be along presently." The girl took off her long pony-skin coat and threw it carelessly upon the couch. "She stopped at Mrs. Harrison's for a few minutes to return a book she had borrowed." She shivered slightly. "Pretty cold, isn't it? Never knew such a late spring."

Edith turned to Donald, who was putting on his coat. "Get some quinine capsules, Donald—two grain. Bobbie's cold is worse to-night."

"Have you had the doctor?" inquired her husband.

"Oh, no, it isn't as bad as that. Just a little fever."

"Very well. I'll be back presently." He took up his hat and went out.

Edith, instead of joining her sister, began to walk aimlessly about the room. She had with difficulty concealed her agitation from Donald, and, now that he had gone, she still could not decide whether or not it would be wisdom on her part to confide in her sister. She felt the necessity of confiding in someone.

Alice presently observed the nervousness, and commented upon it in her usual frank way. "For heaven's sake, Edith," she remarked, "sit down. Don't walk about like that. You make me nervous. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Oh, nothing!" Edith threw herself dispiritedly into a chair, and, with an expression which bespoke an utter weariness of spirit, gazed moodily at her hands, roughened and red from the washing of dishes.

"Nothing?" said Alice, looking at her closely. "You look as though you had lost your last friend."

"Perhaps I have." The answer was significant, although to Alice it meant nothing.

"What do you mean by that?" she inquired. "I think you might try to be a little more agreeable. It wouldn't hurt you any. If you are going to sit here and hand out chunks of gloom all the evening, I think I'll go home." It was characteristic of Alice to be determinedly cheerful on all occasions, a trait born not so much of any inherent optimism as of a dislike for being made uncomfortable.

Edith looked at her hesitatingly. "Don't mind me, Alice," she presently observed, in an apologetic voice, "I'm worried."

"Do you suppose I can't see that? You've been acting like an Ibsen play for the past three days. Why don't you get it off your mind?" She hitched her chair about, and faced her sister with a curious look. "I'm safe enough. You ought to know that by this time. Come—out with it. What's wrong? Let's have the awful details."

"It isn't anything to joke about," remarked Edith, not entirely relishing her sister's tone.

"I'm not joking—not a bit of it. If you are in any trouble, Sis, you know you can count on me. I may be able to help you out; two heads are better than one, you know."

With a sudden glance, Edith decided to take her sister into her confidence. Her question, quick and unexpected, aroused Alice to new interest. "Do you like Billy West?" she asked.

"Billy West? Of course I do. What's he got to do with it?"

"Everything!"

Alice hitched her chair still closer, and looked at her sister in surprise. "You don't mean to say—?" she began, then concluded her remark with a significant whistle.

"Alice," said her sister, "you've known Billy for a long time. You know he is one of Donald's best friends—"

"I always thought so. He must like one of you pretty well, judging by the amount of time he spends here."

"You didn't know, perhaps, that he was very much in love with me, years ago, before he went to Colorado."

"I always suspected it. Pity you didn't marry him. He made about half a million out there, didn't he, in that gold mine?"

"I don't know just what he made. That has nothing to do with it. Ever since he came back to New York to live, three months ago, I've seen a great deal of him—"

"I should say you had. If I hadn't thought him such a good friend of Donald's I'd have been suspicious long ago. I've envied you often enough, your auto rides, and luncheons at the Knickerbocker, and dinners, and theater parties. He doesn't mind spending his money—that's one thing sure, but I never thought—" She paused and looked at her sister with renewed interest. "Is he in love with you now?"

"Yes." Edith spoke slowly—almost as though to herself. The thought was apparently not distasteful to her.

"You don't say so! The plot thickens. So that's why he's been here morning, noon and night. Does Donald know?"

"Donald! Of course not."

"Has Billy said anything?"

"Said anything? To whom?"

"To you, of course. Has he told you that he still loves you?"

"Yes."

"That wasn't exactly fair of him." Alice was a good deal of a Puritan at heart, and not at all lacking in frankness. "He ought not to have done it. I'm not so strong for Donald, goodness knows, but it strikes me as being pretty rough on him, just the same. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, and I told Billy so."

"What did he say?"

"He said he had tried his best to keep from telling me, all these months. He went away, once, in April, you remember, and stayed nearly a month, to try to forget, but it didn't do any good. He says he loves me more every day, and at last he had to tell me of it—he couldn't keep from it any longer."

"Well, what good has it done? He has sense enough to see that it's perfectly hopeless, hasn't he?"

"No, that's the worst of it."

Alice sat back in her chair in alarm. "Good heavens, Edith," she gasped,"you must be losing your mind."

"Why?"

"It isn't possible you are thinking of—" She paused and left her sentence incomplete, gazing intently at her sister. "Do you care for him?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think I do. You know what my life has been here. You know what it is going to be, for years. I suppose you will think me very disloyal and wicked, but, when a woman's whole existence is made up, year after year, of wishing for all the things that make life worth while, and never, never being able to afford them, her love for her husband seems somehow to become dried up, and unimportant."

"Hm-m—I suppose it does. I've never yet got to the point, myself, where I can really enjoy making over my last season's clothes. I try to think they look as good as new, but they never do. I'm afraid I haven't enough imagination. But all that doesn't make any difference now. You're married to Donald, and you've got to make the best of it. What a pity you didn't choose Billy! Half a million—hm-m—it sounds like heaven to me. I wonder if he wouldn't like me as a second choice," she rattled on."We certainly ought to try to keep that money in the family, somehow."

"Alice, don't talk such nonsense. It isn't Billy's money I'm thinking of."

"If you can persuade yourself that that's true," said her sister grimly,"you really must be in love with him. But what's the use of talking about it? It's absurd."

Edith stood up and walked nervously over to the desk, where she began idly fumbling with the papers upon it. Presently she turned to her sister who was regarding her with an inquiring look.

"He—he wants me to leave Donald," she cried, in a half-frightened way.

"No! What a nerve!" Alice seemed to regard the whole affair as a huge joke.

"He says that I am wearing myself out," continued her sister, "that I am wasting all the youth, and sweetness and joy of life, grinding on here in this hopeless situation. He says that, if Donald really loved me, he would see that, too."

"It sounds like the latest best seller. The hero always says that to the neglected wife, doesn't he?"

"If you are going to make fun of me," remarked Edith with a show of anger, "I think we had better drop the subject."

Alice got up and went over to her sister. "Oh, come now, Edith," she said kindly, "don't get so grouchy. I don't see anything so tragic in all this. Suppose Billy does love you—what does he propose to do about it—run away with you?"

"Yes." Her sister's quiet tones had a ring of earnestness to them, of finality almost, that was alarming.

"The idea! Billy West of all people! I can't believe it. I suppose you indignantly refused."

"No, I didn't. He told me how lonely he was; how bad it all made him feel; how it seemed so disloyal to Donald, but he—he couldn't help it. He said I was everything in the world to him—that he had never loved any other woman, and never would—
"

"Oh, I can imagine what he said," interrupted Alice. "That's easy. The question is, what did you say?"

Edith looked at her in a frightened way, seemingly for a moment unwilling to meet her glance. "Alice," she said, slowly and very softly,"I—I told him I would go."

"Edith, you really can't mean it."

"Yes," said Mrs. Rogers, nodding her head slowly. "Yes. That was over two weeks ago. We had gone down to Garden City in the auto, and had luncheon there. It was a wonderful day—so clear, and bright and beautiful. I had had a row with

Donald, the night before. It was about going away this summer. When I met Billy the next day, everything seemed so different. He was telling me about a wonderful trip he was planning, to India, and the East. We talked it over like two children, and then all of a sudden he said he wouldn't—he couldn't go, unless I went, too—"

"It sounds fine." Alice's voice was not approving. "But what about Bobbie?"

Her sister passed her hand over her forehead and shivered slightly, glancing as she did so at the door of the adjoining bedroom. "Can't you see that is why I cannot do it?" she cried with bitterness.

"Oh—you aren't going to, then!" exclaimed Alice in a tone of relief. "I thought you said you had agreed to go."

"I did. I must have been mad. I didn't think of Bobbie, or of Donald, or anything, except that Billy and I loved each other, and were going away together, to be happier than I had ever dreamed of being in all my life. It all seemed so wonderful—almost like being born over again and living a new existence in a new and happier world. Then when I got home—" She hesitated, and a look of pain crossed her face.

"You weakened on the proposition, of course. That's the effect of habit. It's a wonderful thing how it keeps us in the straight and narrow path. I once heard a divorced woman say that it took her over a year to get out of the habit of being married to her first husband. What did Billy say when you told him you had changed your mind? I'll bet he was furious."

Again Mrs. Rogers seemed unable to meet her sister's keen gaze. "I haven't told him," she exclaimed, her voice little more than a whisper.

"Good heavens! Why not?"

"Because he had gone away. He went to Denver that same night. Didn't you know?"

"Now that you mention it, I believe I did hear you say that he was out of town. I thought it strange I hadn't seen anything of him, lately. What did he go to Denver for? I must say, it seems rather inconsiderate of him, under the circumstances."

"He went to Denver, Alice, because his property is there. He intends to sell out his interest in the mine, and close up his affairs so that we can go away together, don't you see? He said he was going to dispose of everything he had, and put all the money in bonds, so that he would be free to go away, and stay away the rest of his life, if he felt like it."

"Well, I must say," cried her sister, "he seems to be in earnest, at any rate, even if you are not."

"Alice, Billy West loves me as truly and deeply as any woman was ever loved."

"Then it seems to me that you are treating his love pretty shabbily. Why don't you tell him the truth?"

"It wasn't until after he had gone away that I began to realize what a terrific mistake it would all be—that I would probably ruin his life as well as my own. I ought to have written him at once, and told him I couldn't do what I had agreed."

"Why didn't you?"

"I don't know. I suppose I was weak. I hadn't the courage. Every day I put it off till the next."

"Well, it isn't too late yet, is it? If I were you, I would sit right down and write him a letter."

Edith flung herself despairingly into a chair. "I don't know whether it is too late or not," she wailed. "That's what is worrying me so. I haven't slept for three nights—ever since I got his last letter."

Alice went over to her sister's chair, and put her arm about her shoulder. "Look here, Edith," she said, her tone showing plainly her anxiety—"what's all this about, anyway? You seem to be terribly upset. I can't make head or tail of the matter. What's worrying you so?"

"Three days ago," said Edith, with quivering lips, "I got a letter from him. He'd been writing me every day up to then. That letter told me that he had appendicitis, and had gone to a hospital in Denver to be operated on. It was written last Thursday—that's six days ago. Since then, I haven't heard a single word."

Alice appeared greatly relieved. "Is that all?" she cried. "I shouldn't worry about it, if I were you. When anyone is lying flat on his back in a hospital, he doesn't feel much like writing letters. Appendicitis isn't very dangerous. I've known any number of people that have had it."

"I know, but I can't help worrying. I don't know what to do."

"I should think the first thing you would do would be to sit down and write him that letter."

"I don't dare to."

"I don't see why not."

"Suppose something has happened to him. How can I know who might get the letter? I don't dare to write the things I've got to say to him."

Alice considered a moment. "No, I don't suppose you'd better. I didn't think of that. Can't you find out, some way, how he is?"

"I don't know a soul in Denver."

Her sister paused for a moment, thinking deeply. "What is to-day, Edith?" she suddenly inquired—"The twentieth?"

"Yes, I believe so. Why?"

"Then Emerson Hall got to Denver last night. He wrote me from St. Louis that he was going there this week, and would arrive the night of the nineteenth. He expects to be there several weeks. I might ask him."

"Will you?" Mrs. Rogers looked at her eagerly. "I must find out somehow. It seems terrible, not to write to him, now that he is so sick. I—I care a lot for him, Alice, even if I have decided not to run away with him. Do you think Mr. Hall will do it for you?"

"Who, Emerson? Of course he will. He'd do anything for me. And, besides, I think he knows Billy slightly. They're both Columbia men, you know."

"Send him a wire. Ask him to go to the hospital at once and find out how Billy is. I've got to know."

"All right," said Alice, as she made her way to the desk. "Got a blank?"

"I think there are some here." Edith accompanied her sister to the desk. "Here's one." She handed Alice the blank.

"What shall I say?" asked Alice, as she seated herself at the desk.

"Just ask him to go to the City Hospital and inquire for William West. I'll get the elevator boy to take it." She stepped out into the hall and pressed the electric button. "How much is it for ten words—do you know?" she asked as she re-entered the room.

"Haven't the least idea," said her sister as she handed her the message she had written.

Edith glanced at it, took a dollar bill from her purse, and gave it and the message to the elevator boy who had answered her ring. "You'll probably get the answer in the morning, Alice." She turned to her sister as she closed the door. "You'll bring it right down to me, won't you?"

"Of course."

"And not a word to Donald—that goes without saying. I wouldn't have him know for anything."

"All right. Billy is probably all right by this time, anyhow. As soon as you know that he is, I advise you to sit down and write him a nice, sensible letter—tell him you have reconsidered, and all that. You certainly owe it to him."

"I will, Alice. I ought to have done it long ago. There's the bell," she added, wearily. "It's probably mother."

Chapter IX

It was on a cold raw morning, that William West arrived in Denver, and, as he made his way slowly from the sleeper to the waiting 'bus, he shivered under his heavy overcoat. He was not glad to be back. Denver and all its associations had faded into the pale background of past memories—his face was set toward the future, a future that promised all that joy of living, of loving and of being loved in return, which he so eagerly desired.

It cut him bitterly to think of his treachery to Donald, a treachery in no way lessened by the fact that love was its motive, yet he argued to his conscience that the future happiness of both Edith and himself was at stake and demanded of him even the sacrifice of his friendship.

He did not go to his accustomed rooms at the Prairie, for he intended to make his stay in the city as short and uneventful as possible. There was but one purpose in his mind—to dispose of his holdings in the mine, resign his office as vice-president of the company and invest his entire fortune in safe and desirable bonds, upon the interest of which he would be able to carry out his future plans with no greater attention to business affairs than that involved in clipping off his quarterly or half-yearly coupons. Therefore he held aloof from his old friends, his former associations. If he should let the men at the club know of his presence in the city, they would not only take up a great deal of his time, but would inevitably inquire into his plans in a way that might easily prove embarrassing. He therefore betook himself to a quiet hotel, not usually patronized by the traveling public, and, after a smoking-hot breakfast, proceeded to the offices of the company.

West had anticipated that his associates in the Lone Star Mining Company would be the most probable purchasers of his holdings and for this reason had determined to offer them the first opportunity to buy. His interview with Atkinson, the president, was entirely satisfactory. While expressing deep regret at West's desire to withdraw from active participation in the business, the astute Boston

man grasped at once the opportunity to acquire at, or near, par, a block of stock which would be worth double its present value in the course of a few years. He at once closed with West's offer, taking an option on his holdings for ten days, during which time he expected to arrange for the necessary capital to carry out the purchase. A meeting of the board was called to act upon West's resignation, and, when the latter left the office for luncheon, he had, as far as was possible, for the moment, completed the business that had brought him to Denver.

The following ten days were a nightmare. There was nothing to do, but write to Edith, it seemed, and to read her daily letters over and over, drawing from them new inspiration for his plans with each rereading. Slowly the ten days passed. Atkinson reported entire success in his plans for the syndicate he was forming to take over West's holdings; within a week the latter expected to be flying eastward, leaving the matter of reinvesting his money until he should reach New York.

His anxiety to return as quickly as possible was accentuated by traces of a change of heart which he fancied he detected in some of Edith's later letters. She had spoken of her fears for the success of theirplans—her duty to her husband, her boy. "Poor little girl," thought West, "she needs me with her, to keep up her courage in these most trying hours of her life."

The night of the ninth day he went to bed early, with a dull, insistent pain in his right side which he attributed to a cold, a result of the raw, unseasonable weather. In the morning the pain had increased; he had passed a restless, broken night, and arose feeling dizzy and half-sick. He determined to consult a doctor, but not until he had completed his business.

At ten o'clock he met Atkinson and his associates, and within an hour the stock had been delivered, and the certified check for close to half a million dollars deposited in the bank. A great sense of relief filled his mind—he was free, to seek happiness wherever in the broad expanse of the world he might find it. Yet beneath all his joy—his exultation, there throbbed a double sense of pain, the dull gnawing of conscience at his heart, and the sharp, insistent throbbing that, knife-like, shot through his right side. Clearly this latter was not a matter to be trifled with. He turned into the first doctor's office that met his eye, and joined the other unfortunates waiting in the anteroom.

The doctor would see him presently, the low-voiced maid informed him. He sat bolt upright in an uncomfortable chair and gripped his hands together fiercely as the sharp pangs of pain tore at his vitals. Would these people never be through? he wondered. From within the doctor's office, shut off by glass doors, came the faint echoes of conversation; some unfortunate, no doubt, hearing the dread sentence of life or death, or perhaps only a nervous woman, being prescribed bread pills for a fancied indisposition. There were two men and a woman waiting ahead of him. They looked healthy enough; he wondered what they could have the matter with them that made their faces so grave.

For nearly an hour he was forced to wait in an agony of mind and body, until his turn came, and his thoughts were the thoughts of a man upon whom the hand of death has already laid its icy touch. He knew it was all nonsense—engendered of pain-racked nerves, yet his conscience smote him, and would not be stilled. The pain in his side spelled disaster, and he could not shake off the thought. He had never believed in the direct intervention of Providence in the affairs of mankind,

yet here was he, at the moment when all his future, as he had planned it, lay smiling before him, stricken with an illness which, laugh at it as he would, he could not help fearing might mean an end to all his hopes.

He sat up and shook his head with a quick, nervous motion which had been characteristic of him since childhood. This was all the height of folly, he argued—the natural train of gloomy thoughts which resulted from his surroundings. Even the faint odor of carbolic acid, compounded with that of other unknown chemicals, was enough to make a man feel blue. He rose as the maid beckoned to him—the other consultations had happily been short.

Dr. Oliver was a man of few words. He had not time for more, for his practice was one of the largest in the city. He glanced at West's pain-drawn face, listened to his few words of explanation, felt his side with practiced hands, and delivered his opinion in a few terse words."Appendicitis," he said quickly, "and an aggravated case. You must undergo an operation at once."

Somehow or other West felt a sudden sense of relief at these words. After all, an operation for appendicitis was not such a serious matter. He knew any number of people who had been through it. "I am stopping at a hotel," he observed. "I do not live in Denver. I suppose I shall be obliged to go to a hospital at once."

"By all means." The doctor turned to his desk telephone and called a number. "I will arrange for an operation at the City Hospital, if you wish it."

"Thank you," replied West, "I do wish it."

The doctor held a short conversation over the telephone. "I presume you can go to the hospital at once?" he inquired.

West nodded.

"I will send for a carriage," the doctor went on, as he drew a thermometer from a leather case and placed it beneath West's tongue."Your case is an acute one, Mr. West, and we cannot afford to lose any time." He again spoke sharply over the telephone, then, bidding West bare his arm, gave him a quick hypodermic injection which diffused a blessed sense of relief through every nerve of his pain-racked body. He sank upon a couch, and awaited the coming of the carriage. His thoughts were no longer gloomy. He seemed to be floating in a sea of warmth, which caressed him pleasurably and filled him with a delicious feeling of well-being. Even the dull-figured flowers on the walls of the doctor's office seemed alive, and glowing with color. The coming of the carriage seemed unimportant; nothing, in fact, seemed to matter, now that the gnawing of that terrible pain had left him.

It was Wednesday afternoon when West arrived at the City Hospital, and within two hours thereafter the operation was over, and he slowly returned to a sense of the reality of life, with a feeling of deadly nausea, and the pain once more throbbing in his right side. Over him bent a clear-eyed nurse, sympathetic as to his comfort, offering him a glass of water. Presently a physician joined her. West looked at them without interest and from the jumbled impressions of the day once more passed into a dreamless sleep.

It was in the early morning that he first began to think of Edith. Her letters would be awaiting him at his hotel. He must send for them—he must write to her and tell her of all that had happened. He felt that she would be alarmed at not hearing from him, for, until the day before, he had not failed to post a letter to her each night, telling her of the events of the day.

In response to his repeated requests, the nurse sent a messenger boy for his mail, and, when the latter returned, she read him Edith's letter at his request. He could not read it himself—he lay flat on his back, in semi-darkness, and even the slight effort of moving his hands seemed to send innumerable sharp quivers of pain through every portion of his body.

The nurse read the letter haltingly, as one reads an unfamiliar handwriting; it was signed, like all the letters, with initials only, and told him of Edith's anxiety to see him, of her hopes and fears, and all the other foolish things that women write to men they love. To him it seemed a message from heaven, for he loved her very deeply, and her slightest word became a treasure to him, invested with a new significance; lifted from its commonplace surroundings; something to ponder over, and think about all through the long, weary day. He sent a reply, treating lightly of his illness, so as not to alarm her needlessly. The nurse carefully wrote it down for him at his dictation. He hesitated when it came to telling the woman the address—he did not wish to compromise Edith, to give her name to a stranger. There was no other way, however, and, after all, he believed that, within a month at the outside, they would be standing hand in hand at the taffrail of some great ocean liner, watching the towering skyline of New York as it disappeared in the hazy distance along with their troubles and cares. The mere fact that their secret was known, now, to a hospital nurse, could do no harm; in a few weeks all the world would know it, but they would be in each other's arms, and the opinion of the world would not matter very much.

The day seemed strangely long and he was glad when night came, and with it some respite from his pain. He felt tired, terribly tired, and his head throbbed with a burning fever. They gave him things to make him sleep, and water for his cracking lips. As the evening wore on even the thoughts of the morning's letter no longer interested him. He turned his face to the wall, and tried not to think of anything at all. After a while he slept, while the nurse and the doctor on his evening round spoke together softly, and in grave tones, with many anxious glances in his direction.

The next morning his fever was better, and the letter brought him from his hotel made the day seem for a time full of joy and brightness, but after a little while a great sense of weariness overcame him. Nothing seemed to matter much; whether he lived or died. He was conscious only of a desire to sleep—how long, even though forever, he did not care in the very least.

About noon he was roused by the approach of someone toward his bed, and opened his eyes to see Doctor Oliver standing beside him. The doctor looked very grave as he took his patient's hand, his fingers mechanically feeling the rapid, weak pulse. "Mr. West," said the doctor,"I think you should let your family know of your illness."

West tried to raise his hand, then fell back with a sigh of weariness."Am I as sick as all that?" he inquired faintly, as he gazed into the doctor's inscrutable eyes.

"You are a very sick man, Mr. West. I do not wish to needlessly alarm you, but it would be best to communicate with your people, and put your affairs in order, so that, whatever happens, you will be ready to meet it."

The sick man looked at the doctor with a long, intent look. His lips quivered, his hand tightened fearfully upon the one that held it. "You mean that I am going to

die?" he asked bravely. "Tell me the truth, doctor. I would rather know." The doctor nodded his head slowly, but made no other reply.

West was a long time in realizing the truth, yet it seemed as though he had always known it. He had never quite believed that all the happiness he looked forward to so gladly would ever really come true. It seemed almost too much to ask of fate. And now it was all ended. He must die, here alone, with not even Edith's presence to gladden his few remaining hours. For a long time he looked at the doctor with burning eyes, yet no words would come to say that which he felt. The doctor must have understood, for he, too, stood silent, his eyes fixed tenderly upon the dying man's face. At last he spoke.

"You should send for your people, Mr. West," he said.

"I have no people, doctor."

"Is there no one you would care to see?"

"No—no one that could come to me here." He thought of Edith—so far away—even if she could come to him, he knew there would not be time. He looked once more at the grave face which bent over his. "How long have I to live, doctor?" he asked.

"I am afraid the time is not very long, Mr. West. If you have any business affairs that you wish to attend to, I would advise you to do so at once."

Business affairs! What business affairs could interest him now? His fortune lay in the Central National Bank, and beyond some distant relatives in New Hampshire whom he had never seen, and who scarcely knew of his existence, there was no one on earth to whom he could leave it. No one? The thought flashed through his mind—what about Edith? She was nearer and dearer to him than all the relatives in the world—she must have this money; at least it would bring her comfort and the ability to make her life what she had always wished it to be. He raised his hand, and began to speak. "You must send Austin Williams here, doctor. He is a lawyer in the Pioneer Building. You can call him up on the telephone."He sank back, exhausted from the effort of speaking. Williams had done work for him in the past. It would be a small thing, to make his will. The doctor and the nurse would act as witnesses. He asked the former to hurry—there was no time to be lost—he felt his strength ebbing away even as he spoke.

The long silence that followed until the lawyer arrived was unbroken save by the labored breathing of the man in the bed. What thoughts passed through his pain-tortured brain—what agony of regret, of remorse, of self-accusation, he did not show by word or look. He lay with his eyes closed, the seal of death upon his forehead. At last the lawyer arrived, and in a few moments was apprised of the sad circumstances which had called him. He gripped West's hand with a silent pressure of sympathy, and listened to the broken words that told him of last wishes. His entire property was to be left to Edith Pope Rogers, wife of Donald Evan Rogers, of New York City. That was all. The lawyer called for pen and paper, and rapidly drew up the short, concise will. West's attorney in New York, Ogden Brennan by name, of the firm of Gruber, McMillan, Brennan & Shaw, was named as executor.

Within fifteen minutes the will had been drawn, signed and duly witnessed, and William West had completed his last earthly task. He bade Williams a steady farewell, and then turned toward the wall. "I'm so tired!" he moaned, then became

quiet. They thought he was sleeping, and did not disturb him. He was, but it was the sleep from which there is no awakening.

Chapter X

The bells in Old Trinity were chiming the hour of five and all New York began to turn its face homeward. The human tide flowed from offices to elevators, from elevators to corridors and thence in an ever growing stream toward the subway and elevated stations. The sun, like a round red Chinese lamp, was poised above the gathering mists of the Jersey shore, ready for its plunge behind the distant hills. Office boys and bank presidents, stenographers and captains of industry fought democratically for seats in the overcrowded trains, while over all sounded the shrill call of the newsboys as they disposed of the afternoon papers. Down-town New York had completed another day—the tides now moved on to Jersey, Harlem, Brooklyn, or the great center of life that throbs unceasingly about Times Square.

Against this ever increasing torrent of humanity Mr. Ogden Brennan of the firm of Gruber, McMillan, Brennan & Shaw, Attorneys-at-Law, struggled irritably, as he forced his way from a down-town subway train, and hurried to the firm's extensive suite of offices in Wall Street, near Broadway.

He gave a quick glance about as he entered, and, making rapidly for his private office, called sharply to young Garvan, one of his assistants, to ask Mr. Shaw to join him at once. Mr. Brennan was tall and gaunt-looking, and peremptory alike in his physical and mental processes, and, when he entered his office, as he did on this occasion, in a more than usually energetic fashion, everybody, down to William the office boy, was galvanized into an unwonted activity.

Mr. Shaw, the junior member of the firm, with a dinner on at his club, had already donned his overcoat and was giving some parting instructions to his stenographer as young Garvan entered and delivered the message. He took up his hat with a sigh—he was of a more placid and phlegmatic temperament than his partner—and, picking up his afternoon paper, folded it carefully, selected his walking stick from the stand near the door, and proceeded in a leisurely manner to Mr. Brennan's private office.

The firm of Gruber, McMillan, Brennan & Shaw was a large one, and its principal practice lay in the handling of the affairs of corporations and estates. Criminal practice knew it not, but it was said of Mr. Shaw that he could draw a better contract, or handle a difficult merger, more successfully than any other lawyer in New York, which was saying much. Mr. Brennan dealt with estates and wills—the latter were his hobby. He claimed that none drawn by himself had ever been broken.

As Mr. Shaw entered his partner's private office, with a bland look of inquiry upon his well-bred countenance, he observed Mr. Brennan throw down upon his desk, with an exclamation of annoyance, a thin legal document, comprising but

two pages, written, as he noted, in longhand, instead of the usual typewritten characters. Mr. Brennan looked up with a frown.

"Sam," he said hurriedly, "you know that young Billy West? He's dead."

Mr. Shaw put on his eyeglasses, and regarded Mr. Brennan curiously. "I don't seem to remember him," he replied. "Who was he?"

"Son of old Josiah West, the patent attorney. He made a fortune in mining operations in Colorado. His father used to be a client of mine, twenty years ago. Don't you recollect the suits he brought against the paper trust?"

"Before my time, I think," replied Mr. Shaw.

"Well, it's not important now. I've been wanting to see you about the matter all day, but that case of the Webster estate has kept me on the jump. Young West died in Denver last Friday. I've just received a copy of his will from an attorney out there by the name of Williams." Mr. Brennan referred to the papers impatiently, adjusting his glasses with a jerk. "Austin Williams. He writes a long letter, telling me of West's death in the City Hospital there, following an operation for appendicitis. Very sudden affair. West was interested in a mine out there, but had sold out his holdings and put the proceeds in bank. About half a million, I believe. I'm executor of his estate." He looked at Mr. Shaw with a frown.

"What of it, Ogden? Simple enough affair, I should think. No contesting claims, I hope, or anything of that sort."

"None, so far as I can see. It's the terms of the will that I can't quite understand, and they impress me unpleasantly."

"What are they?" Mr. Shaw regarded his partner wearily. He wondered why Brennan troubled to explain to him all these apparently unimportant details, just when he was in an especial hurry to get up-town and change in time for dinner. "Is there anything in the matter that requires action to-night?" he inquired. "I have a rather important engagement, and—"

"Sam," interrupted his partner, "I won't keep you long. My object in telling you of this matter is to find out if by any chance you know a man in town named Donald Rogers. The name, somehow, sounded familiar to me, and I thought possibly you might be able to tell me something about him. You know everybody, almost."

"Rogers," repeated Mr. Shaw to himself, slowly; "Donald Rogers. Isn't he a mechanical engineer? There was a chap by that name who had something to do with the Sunbury Cement case. Expert witness, if I remember rightly. Seemed a very decent sort of a fellow, and knew his business. We won the case on his testimony. What's he got to do with it?" The junior partner took a chair, and laid his cane, newspaper and gloves carefully upon the desk. "Go ahead," he said quietly. "Let's have the details."

Mr. Brennan took off his glasses and nervously put them on again. "This will that West made, upon his deathbed—" he picked up the document from the desk and regarded it distastefully—"leaves his entire estate to a woman." He paused and glanced at his partner as though to note the effect of his statement.

Mr. Shaw turned restlessly in his chair. He evidently saw nothing strange in this. "Well, why not?" he asked. "I don't see anything about that to cause anyone any alarm. It had to be either a woman or a man, I suppose, if he left no children."

"The strange part about the affair, Sam, is this: Young West was not married. He left this money to the wife of another man with whom he was madly in love. So far as I can learn, she was equally in love with him. They were planning an elopement, or something of the sort, when he was stricken with this illness. He insisted upon leaving her everything."

"You don't say so! Who is she?" asked Mr. Shaw, for the first time manifesting an interest in his partner's story.

Mr. Brennan took up the will, and, opening it, read aloud, "Edith Pope Rogers, wife of Donald Evan Rogers, of New York City."

Mr. Shaw arose. He took up from the desk a telephone directory and consulted it with interest. "Donald Evan Rogers," he presently read,"mechanical engineer, Columbia Building." He put down the book and glanced at his partner. "That's the man. I remember him well now. Bright young fellow, and very hardworking. I took quite a fancy to him. Rather a queer state of things, I must say." He whistled softly to himself.

"Decidedly so. I have no choice in the matter, of course, but I fancy this document is likely to cause considerable trouble in the Rogers'household."

Mr. Shaw wrinkled his brow in a frown. "You don't suppose for a moment he'd let his wife take this money—unless, of course," he added reflectively, "she intends to leave him."

Mr. Brennan threw the will upon the table with a snort. "That's the whole trouble, Sam. The woman had been writing young West every day. Williams has sent me all her letters to him, along with his other papers. I've glanced through some of them. She had evidently made up her mind to leave her husband at once, as soon as West got back from Denver."

"I don't see that there is anything for you to do but to go ahead with the matter as the law requires. You are not supposed to know anything about West's relations with this man's wife. Possibly her husband doesn't know, either. It is none of your affair."

"I know it, but doesn't it occur to you, Sam, that this is likely to explode a bombshell in this young fellow's home?"

"Did West know Rogers well?" inquired Mr. Shaw.

"I don't know."

"Why don't you call on them this evening and find out? Possibly the husband may see nothing queer in this money being left to his wife. West may have been a friend of his. The woman will say nothing, you may be sure of that."

"It's the only thing to do, I know, but I can't say that I look forward to the interview with much pleasure. I thought at first of asking Mrs. Rogers to come here, and telling her the whole story; but, if I do, she will of course ask me to keep quiet about the matter, and that will put me in the position of aiding and abetting her in deceiving her husband. I want him to be present, when I see her."

"Then I would suggest that you go to their house to-night. You will most probably find the husband at home." He took up the city directory and searched its columns carefully. "Here you are," he exclaimed at length."Roxborough Apartments, One Hundred and Tenth Street. Drop in on them this evening, why don't you?"

"I suppose I had better," observed Mr. Brennan slowly, "though I must say it is a damnably disagreeable task. The case presents some extremely unpleasant problems."

Mr. Shaw picked up his stick, his gloves, and his newspaper, and began slowly to button up his coat. "Decidedly so," he observed. "I can't say I like it. This woman has been on the point of eloping with another man, who leaves her a large fortune. She might of course refuse to accept it, or at least dispose of it in some way, but I fail to see how she can do so, without arousing her husband's suspicions. If, on the other hand, she can convince him that West left her the money from pure friendship, and goodness of heart, she places herself in the position of accepting the money of her lover to spend upon her husband—her children—if she has any. Pretty rough on the husband, I must say. No self-respecting man could permit such a thing. The worst of it is that we have got to be a party to it. What sort of a woman can she be, I wonder?"

"That is just the thing we must determine. Understand, this woman knows nothing of the will as yet. I confess I feel considerable curiosity as to what her course of action will be when she learns of it. It's a mighty difficult position for any woman to be in, there's no denying that. She may, of course, refuse to accept it at all."

"She couldn't very well. It's hers by law."

"Of course, I understand that. But she could dispose of it in some way, possibly."

"Not without its looking very queer to her husband." Mr. Shaw moved toward the office door. "I guess I wouldn't worry about the matter, Ogden, if I were you. Let them fight it out themselves. After all, it's their funeral, not ours, you know. If there is anything I can do in the matter, let me know. Good-night. I've got to hurry." He passed out, the expression on his face indicating a sort of morose satisfaction. Perhaps he was congratulating himself upon the fact that he was not married.

Mr. Brennan put the will into his pocket, called in his stenographer, and spent half an hour in clearing his desk for the night. He tried to dismiss the matter of the will from his mind as he rode up-town in the subway, but it persisted with annoying regularity, and prevented his usual enjoyment of his evening paper. He was a man whose gaunt and forbidding exterior masked a nature innately kind, and he deeply regretted the circumstances that forced him to play the part in the affairs of the Rogers' family which now confronted him. The more he thought of the matter, the more difficult it became to evolve any course of action that would obviate the apparently inevitable crash. The law required that he, as executor of West's estate, should turn over all the property to Mrs. Rogers, and that duty he could in no way evade. His conscience told him that to do so in such a way as to hoodwink or deceive her husband would be wrong, and yet he hesitated to put the matter in a light that would result in a complete disruption of the Rogers' domestic affairs. It spoiled his enjoyment of his dinner, which, being a bachelor, he ate at his club, and it clung to him like a cloak of gloom all the way up to the Roxborough. It was close to half-past eight when he entered the vestibule of the apartment house, and, after inquiring whether Mrs. Rogers was in, sent up his card by the elevator boy.

Chapter XI

Mrs. Pope did not often spend an evening at her son-in-law's. She lived some distance down-town, at a boarding-house kept by an old acquaintance of hers, on Fifty-ninth Street, and she had an aversion to the trip to Harlem. She often told the girls that New York stopped at Fifty-ninth Street and that she could never endure living beyond it.

Her object, on this particular occasion, was to induce Donald, if possible, to change his mind with reference to the seashore cottage which she was so anxious to take for the summer.

She came in puffing audibly, accompanied by Alice. Her usual dissatisfied expression was in evidence. Mrs. Pope was chronically dissatisfied with everything—her income, her life, her increasing flesh, her daughter's marriage, and the weather.

"Edith," she announced, as she entered the room, "the elevator service in this place gets worse every day. I've been waiting downstairs for a car for over five minutes, and the boy had the impertinence to tell me he had been out running errands for one of the tenants. You ought to complain about it."

"I'm sorry, mother," said Edith, as she helped in the removal of Mrs. Pope's coat.

"Why don't they have a hall boy?" demanded her mother, glaring at Edith as though it were her daughter's particular fault that this service was lacking.

"I suppose it's on account of the expense."

"Humph! That's one of the joys of living in such cheap apartments. When I lived at the Bolingbroke Arms—"

"Please, mother, don't tell us about it again," exclaimed Alice impatiently. The story of her mother's former grandeur was an oft told tale in the family.

"Alice, you are impertinent." Her mother's tone was deeply aggrieved."Before your dear father died, we had everything heart could wish. It is not strange that I find myself unable to get accustomed to Harlem flats." She turned to Edith, who had taken up her sewing. "Edith, where's your husband?"

"He went out to post some letters, mother. He'll be back presently."

Mrs. Pope glared about the room with an impatient snort. "Huh!" she exclaimed. "I don't wish to make unkind remarks about Donald behind his back, but, when I consented to your marriage, I certainly never expected to see you come to this. I've just come from the Harrisons'. They have taken an apartment in the St. George. You ought to see it, Edith. Persian rugs all over the place, real-lace curtains, Circassian-walnut furniture in the dining-room, cold-storage ice-box, vacuum cleaner free every week. It's perfect, and only two thousand a year. I couldn't help thinking that that was the kind of a home I hoped to see my daughter in, instead of a fifty-dollar-a-month tenement." She sank heavily into a chair, and emitted a windy sigh.

Alice threw down the magazine which she had been looking over and laughed. "Well, mother, you may see it yet, you know. I'm still in the running."

"Not unless you give up your ridiculous idea of marrying that young Emerson Hall, and pick out a man with some money. He need not be a millionaire, but he at least ought to be able to keep you in the style to which you have always been accustomed."

Alice laughed. "Don't forget, mother," she said with a mischievous look,"that he has been to our boarding-house. I guess he'll be able to match that, at least."

"Alice, I see no necessity of your reminding me of our present poverty. When your father, my poor, dear J. B., was alive, we lived just as well as the Harrisons'."

"I know it, mother. That's one reason why father left debts, instead of a bank account."

"Alice, how can you speak so of your poor father? He was the best husband I ever knew. He never refused me anything." She took out her handkerchief and applied it gently to her eyes. "I shall never get over his untimely end—never."

"Don't mind me, mother. Poor old dad was the best father in the world."Alice went over to her mother and patted her consolingly on the shoulder.

"He certainly was," continued Mrs. Pope. "I never had to ask him for a dollar. He anticipated my every wish. One of the last things he said was, 'Mary, see that the girls marry well.' I often think of it, Edith, when I look at you."

"Oh, well, mother," rejoined Edith, "I certainly wouldn't have wanted to marry any man just for his money."

"It's just as easy to fall in love with a rich man, my dear, as with a poor one. I always told you that. With your looks, you might have had anyone you pleased."

"How about me, mother?" asked Alice mischievously.

"You certainly ought to do better than that young Hall, as I've told you before. I doubt if he has five thousand a year."

"Four, mother, I understand."

"Then he is worse than impossible. Four thousand a year! Your father never spent less than fifteen and we had hard enough work to make ends meet as it was, but I always had my maid, and my carriage. I'm an old woman now, and it doesn't make any difference if I have to do without—though I can't say I've ever become used to it—but you are young; you ought to have pleasure, luxury, the good things of life. Look at Edith, poor child, stuck here in this awful place without a cent she can call her own. It ought to be a lesson to you."

"Sort of horrible example, I suppose," remarked Mrs. Rogers, with a trace of bitterness in her voice.

"Well, you're not happy, are you?" asked her mother, turning on her suddenly. "Why should you be? Donald may be a very faithful husband—at least I don't know anything to the contrary, but why he should expect a girl like you to bow down and worship him, just for permitting you to cook his meals, is more than I can see. If he only had a little more spirit, he would get out and make money, the way other men do, instead of being content to live on little better than a clerk's hire. I don't like to hurt your feelings, my dear, any more than I can help, but you know I've always thought him a pretty poor sort of a stick."

"I know you've never liked Donald, mother. Let's talk of something else."

"What we really came for, Edith, was to talk over our plans for the summer." Alice drew up her chair and looked significantly at her mother.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Pope. "I know that Donald hasn't given his consent, but I intend to talk to him about the matter myself." Mrs. Pope looked at her daughter as though she believed the matter as good as settled already. "Alice and I are paying thirty-five dollars a week where we are. If you and Bobbie could pay twenty-five that would make—let me see—" she paused, absorbed in the effort of mental calculation—"two hundred and sixty a month."

"Two hundred and forty, mother," corrected Alice.

"Oh, well—two hundred and forty, then. We could rent a bungalow, furnished, for a hundred a month; that would leave a hundred and forty for living expenses—we wouldn't need to keep a girl. Donald could come down for week ends."

"I'm afraid I can't do it, mother. Donald says he can't afford it. I told you what he said."

"Edith, for goodness' sake, have a little spirit. Your health demands a change. Your child's health demands it. And, besides, if you don't come, Alice and I shall be obliged to go to a hotel and live in a couple of stuffy rooms. We couldn't afford to take a cottage, just for the two of us."

"We can't spare the money, mother. I'm sorry, but I can't do anything more."

"What on earth does Donald do with his money, Edith? He certainly doesn't spend it on you."

"He is investing it in a glass factory, in West Virginia, I believe."

Mrs. Pope looked supremely disgusted. "Glass factory!" she snorted."Isn't that just like him. He thinks little enough of your happiness. Poor Edith! My poor child! You certainly are to be pitied."

"He hopes to make a great deal out of it, some day."

"Fiddlesticks! He might just as well throw it in the street. My poor dear J. B. always said that Government bonds were the only safe investment. Glass factory, indeed!" She seemed unable to contain her indignation.

The rattle of a key in the door warned her of Donald's approach. She composed her face in a smile, and rose to greet him as he entered. "My dear Donald," she exclaimed effusively, "I'm so glad to see you!"

"Good-evening, mother. You don't mind?" Donald replied pleasantly, holding up the cigar he was smoking.

"Oh, not in the least." Mrs. Pope resumed her chair with a self-satisfied air. "My poor dear J. B. always smoked the very best Havanas. I love the odor of a good Havana cigar."

Donald went over to the desk and seated himself in his accustomed chair."I'm afraid you won't like this one, then," he said, with a short laugh."Pure Connecticut, five straight. I can't afford the imported kind."

Mrs. Pope took no notice of his remarks on the subject of cigars. She looked from Alice to Edith, as though to gather courage, preened herself with a conscious effort, then plunged into the fray. "Donald," she began, "we were just speaking of our plans for the summer. I know you will be interested on Edith's account, and Bobbie's. The poor child doesn't look very well. Edith tells me he has a racking cough. Now let me tell you what we propose to do. Edith thinks it a perfectly splendid plan."

"Mother, you know what I told you," began Mrs. Rogers warningly.

"Never mind, child. I wish to place the matter before Donald in a businesslike way. I am an old woman, but I am willing to sacrifice myself for my children's sake."

"I couldn't think of letting you do anything of the sort on Edith's account," remarked Donald dryly.

"Edith is my child, Donald. I must think of her welfare. I propose to rent a cottage at the seashore—a little bungalow—"

"I know all about it, mother," interrupted Donald, with a look of weariness. "Edith has told me. We can't do it this summer."

"But, Donald, surely you realize what it would mean for her, and for your child?"

"Quite as well as you do. I'm sorry, but I can't do it. We have to make sacrifices now, for the sake of the future." He turned to his desk, and began to look over some papers which he drew from his pocket.

"But surely you realize—you can't mean—" stammered Mrs. Pope feebly, her face reddening angrily.

"I shouldn't say anything more about it, mother, if I were you,"remarked Edith.

Mrs. Pope sank back into her chair, with an air of deep resignation."Very well," she said, as though allowing the whole matter to pass from her hands into those of Divine Providence. "I've tried to do my duty. If anything happens to Bobbie, remember that, Donald." It was quite clear that whatever might happen she would regard as solely her son-in-law's fault.

"I shall," remarked Donald, going on with his reading.

There was an ominous silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock upon the mantel. It was interrupted by the sudden ringing of the door-bell. Donald rose and went over to the door. The others heard him talking with someone outside. Presently he turned, with a card in his hand. "The boy says there is a gentleman downstairs to see you, Edith,"he said to his wife.

Edith rose in surprise. "To see me?" she asked. "Who is it?"

Her husband looked at the card. "Mr. Ogden Brennan, the card says. Do you know him?"

"No, I never heard the name before." She came over to Donald and, taking the card, looked at it curiously. "Perhaps we had better ask him to come up."

"Send him up," said Donald to the boy at the door, as he closed it.

"I wonder who he can be?" Edith asked in mystified tone.

"Possibly a bill-collector," said Mrs. Pope sarcastically.

"Hardly, at this time of the night." Donald looked at his watch. "It's almost eight-thirty." He took a match from the desk, and carefully relighted his half-smoked cigar.

Mrs. Pope rose. "Alice, I think we had better be going," she remarked, with a frown.

"Nonsense, mother. Sit down. You've only just come. There is some beer on the ice." She paused, and Mrs. Pope relapsed into her chair with sudden promptness. "Very well, Edith, if you insist," she said resignedly.

"Let's make a welsh rabbit," suggested Alice, looking up from her magazine. As she spoke the door-bell rang. Her sister hurried over to the door and threw it open.

Mr. Brennan came in with a slight show of hesitation, looking about him curiously. The household of the persons who were to have the spending of West's fortune had a peculiar interest for him. What sort of persons were they? he had asked himself half a hundred times since he left his office. "This is Mrs. Rogers' apartment?" he inquired, as he came in.

"Yes," answered Edith, returning his glance of scrutiny with interest.

"I wish to see Mrs. Rogers."

"I am Mrs. Rogers."

"I am here on a matter of business, Mrs. Rogers." He glanced about the room, embracing the others in his comprehensive survey. "Of course, if you have guests, I could perhaps come at some other time."

"I hardly think it will be necessary," remarked Edith nervously. She had not the least idea what this dignified-looking old gentleman could want with her, but it was clearly evident that he was neither a book-agent nor a bill-collector. She was conscious of a growing presentiment of evil and, in her perplexity, she turned to her husband. "Mr. Brennan,"she said, "this is my husband."

The two men bowed. "I am glad to meet you, Mr. Brennan," said Donald, coming toward him. "You have business with my wife, I understand."

"Yes, Mr. Rogers. Business of great importance." Mr. Brennan's tone was significant—ominous.

Donald took the lawyer's coat and hat. "My mother and sister, Mr. Brennan," he observed. "Won't you take a seat?"

Brennan bowed, but declined the chair. "I shall keep you but a moment. My business is with your wife, Mr. Rogers, but I came at this hour, in the hope of finding you at home as well. The matter concerns you both. I am an attorney, of the firm of Gruber, McMillan, Brennan & Shaw, of Number 11 Wall Street."

"Yes?" replied Donald, looking in surprise at Edith. She with Alice, and the mother, who had risen from her chair, stood regarding the visitor with interest.

"I regret to say," continued Mr. Brennan, in an even tone, "that I have come upon a very sad errand."

The fears which had been torturing Edith all the evening suddenly took a more concrete form. "What!" she cried, clutching at her breast—"I—I don't understand."

"You were acquainted with Mr. William West, were you not, Mrs. Rogers?"He turned to her with a look of interrogation.

Edith stared at him in wide-eyed terror, her fingers convulsively clutching the lace at her throat. "Were!" she cried. "Were!" then relapsed into silence. Donald seemed surprised at her agitation; to him it meant nothing. He turned to Mr. Brennan. "Certainly. Billy West. He's one of my best friends."

"It is with the deepest regret that I am obliged to inform you of his death." Mr. Brennan's voice was not so even as it had been, and held a note of sorrow. He had been genuinely fond of West, and the latter's death was a great shock to him.

Edith shrank back with a cry, her hand over her eyes, as though trying to ward off this sudden blow. Her sister put her arm about her. "Edith!"she whispered, and spoke to her in a low voice. The others were too much surprised by the lawyer's announcement to give much attention to her agitation.

Donald was the first to speak. "Dead! Billy West dead! Impossible!" He gazed at Mr. Brennan with a stare of incredulity.

"Unfortunately not, Mr. Rogers. I only wish it were. Mr. West died suddenly last Friday in Denver, Colorado, following an operation for appendicitis."

In his sudden realization of his friend's death, Donald turned away, the tears very near the surface. "Poor old chap!" he muttered. "Poor old Billy!" He looked over at his wife. "Edith, isn't it terrible? Think of it, Billy West dead."

"Why do you come to tell us? How do you know?" asked Edith, staring at Mr. Brennan in a frightened way.

"I have been Mr. West's attorney for a number of years. I received word of his death this morning."

"Poor young man! I always liked him so much!" Mrs. Pope assumed an expression of deep solicitude. "He was very well off, was he not, Mr. Brennan?"

"Very," answered Brennan shortly, then turned to Donald. "You knew Mr. West very well, I take it?"

"Intimately. We had been bosom friends for years. He was in my class at college. I loved him like a brother. He had a heart of gold, Mr. Brennan. Of all the men I know, he was the squarest and best friend. You cannot realize what his death means to us. Edith, isn't it sad?"

Edith began to cry. "I—I can't realize it," she sobbed; "it seems so terrible."

Brennan drew a thin, folded document from his pocket, and regarded it critically through his eyeglasses. "He must have thought a great deal of you—and Mrs. Rogers," he observed, glancing at Donald.

"I am quite sure he did, Mr. Brennan, but why—?"

Brennan interrupted him with a wave of his hand. "I will explain," he said. "Before Mr. West died, he made a will. It was drawn up by an attorney in Denver who, acting on Mr. West's instructions, at once communicated with me. I am the executor of the estate."

"But, Mr. Brennan, how does the matter concern us?" Donald was becoming a trifle impatient under the continued strain of Mr. Brennan's significant manner.

"The best way to answer that, Mr. Rogers," said Brennan, adjusting his eyeglasses, and unfolding the document he held in his hand, "is to read the will."

With a sudden start, Edith dashed the tears from her eyes and turned toward the lawyer. She was conscious of a horrible fear—a feeling of dread lest this document, to which Mr. Brennan evidently attached such sinister importance, might contain something, she knew not what, which would apprise Donald of her relations with the dead man, and, like a voice from the grave blast her whole life. "Why is it necessary to read it?" she asked, her voice trembling with emotion.

Brennan turned and observed her gravely through his glasses. "Because, Mrs. Rogers," he replied, "this document concerns you most intimately. It isn't very long." Again he took up the will and prepared to read.

"I—I don't want to hear it," sobbed Edith.

"Edith, what is wrong with you? Why should Mr. Brennan not read the will if it contains matters which concern us?" Donald turned to the lawyer."You must pardon my wife, Mr. Brennan. This sad news has completely upset her. Go ahead." He went over to Edith and, taking her arm, led herto a chair. "You had better sit down, Edith, and let Mr. Brennan finish what he has to say. There is no occasion for all this excitement."

"But, Donald—listen—I—"

"Never mind now. We are detaining Mr. Brennan." His voice was impatient, and he looked at her curiously. "Go ahead, sir," he said, "and let us have the matter over with, whatever it is, as quickly as possible."

Brennan, clearing his throat with a nervous cough, took up the will and began to read.

"'I, William West, being of sound mind, do hereby make this my last will and testament. "'I give, devise and bequeath all my property, whether real or personal, and wherever situated, to Edith Pope Rogers, wife of Donald Evan Rogers, of New York City.'" He paused, and glanced about to note the effect of his words. Edith had slowly risen from her chair, and her face was a picture of horrified amazement. Donald, almost equally surprised, looked from the lawyer to her, apparently unable to speak. Alice and Mrs. Pope were dumfounded. The whole party stood in silence regarding Mr. Brennan as though they could scarcely grasp what they had heard.

Suddenly the tenseness of the moment was broken. Edith had come slowly toward Brennan, her hand outstretched, her face white with horror."No!—my God! No!" she cried, then tottered and would have fallen had her mother not stepped quickly forward and supported her. "I can't take it—I can't take it!" she cried, in spite of her mother's attempts to quiet her.

"The remainder of the will," continued Brennan coldly, as he folded up the document and placed it in his pocket, "refers only to my appointment as executor." He removed his glasses and looked at Donald.

"You mean that he has left everything to my wife?" gasped the latter, faintly.

"Everything."

"No! No!" cried Edith.

"Be quiet, my child," Mrs. Pope said soothingly, then turned to the lawyer. "How much did he leave, Mr. Brennan?" she asked.

"I cannot say exactly, madam. It will be impossible to tell until the estate is settled up. Probably not less than half a million."

Illustration:
Edith had slowly risen from her chair, and her face was a picture of horrified amazement

"Half a million!" Mrs. Pope collapsed limply into a chair. "Edith! Half a million! Think of it!" She sat gazing before her with a half-incredulous smile, as though the thought of so much money were difficult of digestion.

"Mr. Brennan, I can't understand it—I can't believe it." Donald's voice was trembling with excitement. "Why should he have left Mrs. Rogers all this money? Had he no relatives—no connections—who would have a better right to it?"

"None, I understand. In any event, the will would stand. Mr. West has shown his affection for your wife by leaving her his entire fortune. No court could break that will."

"What a man!" exclaimed Donald. "I knew he was very fond of us; we had been friends for years, but I never thought of anything like this." He went up to his wife and took her hand. "Edith," he said earnestly, "do you realize what it means? Poor old Billy has made you a rich woman."

"I cannot take this money," cried Edith, her face dull with despair. "I cannot—I cannot." She tore herself away from her husband and faced Brennan with the look of an animal at bay.

"Edith, my dear, are you losing your senses?" inquired Mrs. Pope.

"I cannot take it," repeated Mrs. Rogers, mechanically.

"Why not?" asked Donald. His question came like a blow.

She did not dare to tell him that—she clenched her hands until the blood came, looking at him in sudden confusion.

"Of course, it is a very large amount," he went on, "but if he wished it—"

"You are right, Donald." Mrs. Pope favored him with a smile which seemed almost genial, compared with those she usually bestowed upon him."Edith, my dear, it is your duty to respect the wishes of the dead. Don't you think so, Mr. Brennan?"

"The will allows me no latitude, madam. Whatever your daughter's feelings in the matter may be, it is my duty as executor to turn over to her Mr. West's estate in its entirety. What disposition she may see fit to make of it afterward is, of course, no affair of mine." He turned and picked up his hat and coat from the chair where Donald had placed them."It will be desirable, Mrs. Rogers, for you to come to my office at your early convenience for a business consultation. There are some papers I shall want you to sign. If possible, I should be glad to have you come to-morrow—say at twelve o'clock."

"I—I tell you I don't want this money," faltered Edith. "I—I have no right to it—"

"Mr. Brennan has just explained to you, Edith, that the money is yours by law. He is obliged to turn it over to you. I can understand, of course, that it is a great surprise to you, but surely, if it was hiswish, there is no reason for you to feel so strongly about it." She fell to sobbing softly and, clutching at his arm, put her head upon it."Donald—oh, Donald!" she moaned.

"I think, Mr. Brennan," said Donald, turning to the lawyer, "that you can depend upon Mrs. Rogers coming in to see you at twelve to-morrow. Good-night."

"Good-night," said the lawyer, as he bowed and left the room.

"Think of what this money will mean, Edith," exclaimed her mother, her face aglow with anticipation, "to you—to Bobbie—to all of us." Shelooked at Alice with a joyful smile. "I guess we can have that cottage after all."

"Don't! Don't!" cried Edith. "My God, you don't realize what you are saying."

She swayed suddenly forward, overcome by the terrible strain of the past half-hour, and fell heavily to the floor.

Chapter XII

At twelve o'clock the following day, Edith Rogers entered the offices of Messrs. Gruber, McMillan, Brennan & Shaw, at Number 11 Wall Street, and asked to see Mr. Brennan. She was at once ushered into the latter's private office, and found him awaiting her.

This visit to Mr. Brennan's office was to Edith an ordeal that she greatly dreaded, and one that it had required all of her courage to face. All the night before she had lain awake, thinking about it, and even with the coming of the day her fears had not to any great extent left her.

For one thing, however, she felt thankful. Donald had, at the last moment, decided not to accompany her. At first he had insisted upon doing so, partly because of her unfamiliarity with business affairs, more because of her nervous and unstrung condition, the result of the terrible shock which the news of West's death had given her. She had done her best to conceal her sufferings, or at least so to modify them that Donald might have no suspicion of their real cause, and in this she had been more successful than she had supposed possible. After the first shock which Mr. Brennan's words had given her, she was conscious of a reaction, resulting in a sort of numbness, in which her mind was filled less with thoughts of the man she had supposed she loved than with a ghastly fear lest the fact of this love might become known to her husband.

Had she been able to analyze, during all the eternities of that horrible night, the cause of this fear, she might have realized that her love for West had been no love at all, but only a sudden infatuation, born of her overweening vanity and love for the good things of life on the one hand, and her utter failure to appreciate her husband's rugged honesty of purpose on the other. The very fact that her horror at the thought that Donald might learn of her affair with West overshadowed all else in her mind, might have told her that she still valued her husband's love and that of her child, far above that of the man who had so suddenly been taken away from her.

Donald, who sat beside her most of the night, was too generous, too unsuspicious a nature, to attribute her tears to anything but a very natural grief at the loss of a dear friend. He felt the matter keenly himself, but, man-like, strove to hide his own sufferings in order that he might the more readily comfort her.

Mrs. Pope and Alice had remained until midnight. They would have stayed longer, but Edith would not permit it. "I'm all right, mother," she said, choking back her tears. "Go home and get your rest. I'll see you to-morrow."

So the mother departed, accompanied by Alice. Her whole attitude toward Edith seemed to have undergone a sudden transformation. The latter was now rich—the possessor of half a million dollars, and hence no longer to be criticised or blamed for having married a poor man. Even toward Donald her manner had changed. She addressed him as "my dearest boy,"and threw out vague hints concerning Edith's and Bobbie's health and the sea air which they so greatly needed. Donald paid little attention to her. He recognized her shallow-souled adoration of money and secretly despised it.

It was after they had gone, and Edith had lain sobbing upon the bed for a long time, that Donald brought up the subject of her visit to Mr. Brennan's office. "Perhaps I had better call him up in the morning and postpone it," he said. "Any other day will do. There is no hurry, and I'm afraid, dear, that you are hardly in a condition to discuss business matters."

"Oh—no—no. I'd better go and get it over with." She dried her eyes and sat up, looking at him, half-frightened. "I'll be all right in the morning. I'd better go."

"Very well, if you think best. Of course I shall go with you, and, really, the whole affair need not take long."

The thought that Donald was to be with her was terrifying. For a time she was afraid to speak. She did not know what Mr. Brennan might have learned about herself and West—what information might have come to him along with the dead man's papers and effects. Suppose Donald were to find out. She glanced at his careworn face, upon which the lines of suffering were set deep, and her heart smote her. He must never find out. After a time she spoke.

"I think, Donald, that perhaps I had better go alone."

"Why?" He seemed surprised.

"Oh—I can hardly say. Mr. Brennan might prefer it so. Don't you think it would look just a little—bad—for both of us to go—as though we were so anxious for poor—Billy's—money?" Her tears broke out afresh.

He regarded the idea as a foolish whim, born of her hysterical condition, but good-naturedly humored her. "I'm not at all anxious to go," he said. "Poor Billy—I don't want his money. I only suggested going with you because I thought you would rather not go alone. We can decide in the morning, however. You'd better lie down now, and try to get some sleep."

Edith began slowly to undress. As she did so, the letter from West, which she had been carrying about in her bosom all day, fell to the floor. Donald picked it up with a queer little smile and returned it to her. "Poor old Billy!" he murmured. "How strange, to think that we shall never see his handwriting again!"

The incident increased Edith's fears; the letter was filled with expressions of love, and Donald, unsuspecting, trusting her always, had not even asked to see it. She went into the kitchen on the plea of making a cup of tea, and burned the letter at the gas range, fearful every moment that he would come in and see what she was doing. There were many other similar letters, locked in a drawer of her bureau. She determined to destroy these as well, in the morning.

Later on, Donald slept, supposing that she was doing likewise, but she only made pretense, designed to hide her feelings. She sobbed softly to herself throughout the long hours till daybreak, but morning found her dry-eyed, ready to face whatever disaster the day might bring.

Mr. Brennan was standing behind his broad mahogany table-desk, his eyeglasses in one hand, the other grasping a package. Edith, in her agitation, did not observe the latter. She sank into a big leather-covered chair and looked at the lawyer expectantly.

He pushed some papers across the desk to her and requested her to sign them. She did so, without reading them, or knowing what they were. Theseformalities completed, he drew the package, which appeared to contain a large number of letters, toward him and began to tap it in gently emphatic fashion with his eyeglasses.

"There is a certain matter, Mrs. Rogers, about which I must speak to you," he began, after a long contemplation of the letters.

"Yes?" she answered, with a rising inflection. Something in his manner warned her that what he was about to say would concern her very deeply.

"When Mr. West died, his papers and other effects were forwarded to me, as executor of the estate. Among them I find these letters." He indicated the package on the desk before him.

"Yes!" she repeated, her heart sinking. A cold perspiration broke out all over her. She wiped her lips with the ineffective bit of lace which she held crushed in her hand.

Brennan reached over, took up the bundle of letters, and handed it to her. He knew from the handwriting, from the initials with which they were signed, from all the attendant circumstances, that she had written them. "As executor of the estate, Mrs. Rogers," he said slowly, "I feel that the best use I can make of these letters is to turn them over to you."

For a moment she hardly grasped his meaning. His grave manner of speaking had made her believe that some terrible fate overhung her—some mysterious requirement of the law which she did not realize, or understand. Now, since it appeared that the only disposition of the letters that Brennan intended to make was to hand them over to her, she could scarcely believe that she had understood him aright. "You—you mean that I am to—to take them?" she said haltingly.

"Yes. Take them, and, madam, if you will permit me to advise you, I strongly recommend that you lose no time in destroying them."

The color flew to her cheeks at his tone, implying as it did the guilty nature of the correspondence. It terrified her to think that this man had it in his power to destroy her utterly, merely by saying a few words to her husband. Yet he could not have any such intention, else why should he advise her to destroy the evidence of her folly, her guilt? She took the letters with trembling fingers and thrust them into her handbag. "I will destroy them at once," she said faintly, but very eagerly, hardly daring to look at him.

The further conversation between them was short. Mr. Brennan informed her that he would be happy to advance her any money she might need, pending the legal formalities attendant upon the administration of the estate. She thanked him with downcast eyes, but assured him that she would not require any. The thought of touching any of West's money horrified her. Her one concern had been to keep the knowledge of their mutual love from Donald—this, she felt, was now accomplished. To the money she did not at this time give so much as a single thought. On her way up-town she made a sincere effort to analyze her feelings. Why had West's death not affected her more deeply? Why had the most important feature of the whole affair been her desire to keep the truth from Donald? The answer came, clear and vivid. It was Bobbie. She feared the destruction of her home on his account. It was love for him that had caused her to repent of her promise to West to go away with him, even before the latter had much more than started on his way to Denver.

The thought pursued her all the way home. When she arrived, Bobbie had finished his luncheon and was just going out with Nellie. She went up to the boy and clasped him in her arms. "Dear little man!" she said as she kissed him, then noticed, in her sudden thought of him, how pale and thin he looked. "Run along now, dear. The more fresh air you get, the better."

After the child had gone, and she was alone, she took the letters Mr. Brennan had given her, drew from her bureau drawer those she had received from West,

and, without looking at any of them, proceeded to make a bonfire of them all in a tin basin in the kitchen. It seemed hard to destroy his letters. They had meant so much to her when she had received them. For a moment she was tempted to read them all through for the last time, but the fear that, should she do so, she might weaken in her intention to destroy them stopped her. Donald must never know—Donald must never know. These letters were the only proof in the whole world of her wrong-doing. She applied a match to the mass of paper with trembling fingers, and, with tears in her eyes, watched the flames mount and crackle, the sheets blacken and fall to soft gray dust.

In a short time the little funeral pyre—it seemed to her the funeral pyre of the past—with all her hopes and fears, her guilt and her love, had crumbled to a tiny pile of ashes. She threw them out of the window and watched them blow hither and thither in the eddying currents of wind. When she had closed the window, it seemed to her that she had also closed the door upon the past. Before her the future lay bright and smiling. She did not admit for a moment to herself that its brightness might be a reflection from Billy West's gold. The very thought would have made her shudder. Nevertheless, the knowledge that one has half a million dollars in the bank is apt to lend a brightness to the future, no matter how clouded the immediate present may be.

Chapter XIII

It took Edith Rogers many weeks to make up her mind to spend any of William West's money, and then she did it on account of Bobbie. Her mother had used every effort to convince her that she was acting like a fool in not launching out at once upon a career of wild extravagance, but the thought of her love for West, the folly she had contemplated, the latter's sudden and tragic death, all filled her with horror. The money lay idly in the bank, and she could not bring herself to touch it.

With the coming of the hot weather, however, she began to listen to her mother's arguments with a more willing ear. Bobbie was clearly not well. His cough, product of a March cold, still hung on in spite of all her efforts. His appetite was failing, his cheeks pale and wan. She felt the desirability of getting him away from the oven-like city at once, and one evening broached the subject to Donald.

"Don't you think, dear," she said, "that I ought to take Bobbie to the seashore?"

Donald looked up quickly. "I do, indeed," he said. "I've thought so for some time."

"Then why haven't you said anything about it?"

"I was waiting for you, dear. I know how you have felt about using this money that West left you, and I hesitated to suggest it on that account."

"Do you think I ought to use it?"

"I can see no reason why you should not. His wish was that you should have it. He wanted you to enjoy it, otherwise he would not have left it to you. I regretted the poor old chap' death quite as keenly as you did, but for all that I cannot see why you should feel so strongly about this money."

Edith knew very well that he could not see why she felt as she did, nor had she any intention of allowing him to do so. "Very well," she replied quietly. "I think I'll look for a cottage somewhere along the Sound to-morrow. That would be much nicer than staying at a hotel, and you could come down every week end. In fact, Donald, I don't see why you couldn't just as well give up business altogether, and spend the summer with us. In the fall we might go abroad."

He frowned at this. "I couldn't think of it, dear," he replied. "I've got my practise to keep up and the business in West Virginia to look after. I shouldn't care to live on you, you know." He smiled, and, coming over to her, patted her head affectionately. "It's very good of you, Edith, to want me with you, and I should enjoy it more than I can tell you, but I couldn't give up my work, my independence. You wouldn't respect me if I did."

She did not attempt to argue the question with him. Perhaps in her heart she felt that he was right. "Mother is coming up to-morrow morning," she said. "I think I'll try New London. I was there one summer for a month when father was alive, and I have never forgotten how lovely it was. Mother knows all about it. We'll run up there to-morrow and see what we can find."

Led by Mrs. Pope, the expedition in search of a cottage by the sea was an unqualified success. Edith had had in mind a small bungalow—a tiny house with a view of the water, but Mrs. Pope was burdened with no such plebeian ideas. To her money-loving mind a cottage such as befitted her daughter's newly acquired wealth consisted of a picturesque mansion of some eighteen or twenty rooms, with a private bathing beach, extensive grounds, garage, stables, and a retinue of servants.

She had some little difficulty in finding what she wanted. Edith remonstrated with her continually but she was not to be balked. She told the real-estate agent to whom they had gone on their arrival that her daughter was prepared to pay as high as five hundred dollars a month, for the proper accommodations, furnished, and she refused quite definitely to consider anything that did not front on the water.

There were but three places answering her description that were available. The first Edith thought perfect, but her mother dismissed it at once. "Quite too small, my dear," she remarked, with up-turned nose."And I never could endure a house with no conservatory."

The second place had a conservatory, it seemed, but Mrs. Pope found the plumbing antiquated, the number of bathrooms insufficient, and the furnishings not at all to her taste.

"We shall entertain a great deal," she informed the overpowered real-estate man, who was mentally trying to adapt Mrs. Pope's extravagant ideas to her anything but extravagant clothes. Edith wondered whom they were going to entertain, but forebore asking her mother at this time.

The third place withstood even Mrs. Pope's attempts at criticism, and Edith fell in love with it at once. It was not quite so large as they had wanted, her mother remarked, but it might do. Edith was very sure that it would do. The house, a long, low, shingled affair, with many timbered gables, was partly overgrown with ivy. Climbing roses, in full bloom, embowered the wide verandas. The gardens were filled with handsome shrubbery and well-kept flower beds. There was a

stable, a greenhouse, and a little boathouse and wharf. The lawns were immaculate, the furnishings within artistic and costly. The agent explained that Mr. Sheridan, the banker, who owned the house, had left unexpectedly for Europe the week before, and the place had just been placed on the market. Mr. Sheridan had intended to occupy it himself until the last moment, but his wife had been taken ill, and was obliged to go to one of the Continental baths to be cured. The price was two thousand dollars for the season, and would have been a great deal more had the place been put on the market a month earlier. Two parties had looked at it already, and it was not likely to remain unoccupied very long.

"We'll take it," said Mrs. Pope promptly. "We'll move in on Monday." She began to plan aloud the disposition of the various bedrooms.

Mr. Hull, the agent, on the way to town, suggested the necessity of executing a lease and making a deposit to bind the bargain. "My daughter will give you a check for the first month's rent in advance," said Mrs. Pope loftily. "You have your check-book with you, my dear, I hope?"

Edith had. Her mother had insisted upon her taking it when they left the house. The first check she made against the income which William West's half-million of capital was piling up to her credit at the bank was one for five hundred dollars to the order of Thomas Hull, agent. She signed it with trembling fingers.

Once the plunge was taken, however, the rest seemed easy. On the journey home Mrs. Pope mapped out a campaign of shopping that made her daughter's head whirl, but she had ceased to object. One thing she insisted upon, in addition to her mother's never-ending list of clothes, and that was a pony and cart for Bobbie. It had been the constant desire of his childish heart, ever since he had ridden in one the summer before at Brighton. Mrs. Pope approved the cart. She also suggested an automobile.

When Edith told Donald of the result of their trip that night his face became grave, but he said little. "It is your money, dear," he contented himself with observing, "but if I were you I would not allow my mother to influence me too much. She has foolishly extravagant ideas. There is no use in burdening yourself with a mansion and a house full of servants just because you can afford it. The air isn't any sweeter, the sun any brighter, because of them. I should have preferred a more modest establishment myself, but I suppose it's too late to change matters now. I hope you have a wonderful summer, and that Bobbie and yourself get as well and strong as I should like to see you. I can't be with you except on Saturdays and Sundays, but no doubt your mother and Alice will keep you company."

"Yes. They will be with me, of course. Mother says she is looking forward to the happiest summer of her life. She hopes, too, she says, to entertain a great deal."

"Entertain? Whom?"

"Why, all her old friends. And I'm going to have some of mine down, too, and Alice has already invited Mr. Hall to spend a week or two with us. He is coming east for his vacation."

Donald raised his eyebrows. "I don't mind the opinions of other people as a rule," he remarked, "but how do you propose to explain our sudden wealth?"

Edith had not thought of that aspect of the matter. "I shall tell them the truth," she answered, but the suggestion bothered her for many days thereafter. She by no means intended to tell her friends the truth. Such of them as had already

heard the news had congratulated her upon her good fortune, with a secret wonder that West had left the money to her instead of to Donald, but Mrs. Pope, with characteristic bluntness, had set this right. "Poor, dear Mr. West had always been in love with my Edith," she said. "He'd have married her, if it had not been for Donald. He hadn't anyone else to leave his money to, and, of course, he left it to Edith. He was a noble young man. We owe him a great deal."

Edith shuddered as she listened, but could say nothing. Once she ventured the remark that Mr. West had been Donald's lifelong friend, but her mother would have none of it. "Pooh!" she said. "It was you he cared for, my dear. Anyone with half an eye could see that. Didn't he spend all his time with you, right up to the time he died?" After that Edith ceased to remonstrate. She felt that in this direction she was treading on dangerous ground.

Once launched upon a career of spending, Edith soon came to acquire the habit, as any other habit may be acquired, if dutifully persisted in. A few weeks before she would have stood aghast at the mere thought of paying fifty dollars for a hat. Now she bought costly hand-made lingerie dresses with the calm assurance of one whose bank-account is increasing at the rate of a thousand dollars a week, and signed checks in an off-hand manner that seemed as natural to her as though she had never haggled over a bargain counter, or searched the columns of the daily papers for opportunities at marked-down sales.

She failed to satisfy her mother, however. That estimable lady seemed to think that Edith's wealth was measured only by the number of checks in her check-book, and criticised her daughter loudly for her petty economies. "Don't buy those cheap shoes, Edith," she would remark. "It's quite impossible to get anything fit to wear for less than ten dollars a pair." Or, "Ready-made corsets, my dear, are an abomination. I insist that you go at once and be measured for half a dozen pair that will really fit." Edith drew the line at such extravagances, and very nearly precipitated a row. "Let me alone, mother," she said. "I know what I want, and, after all, it is my money we are spending, not yours." My money! The irony of the thing did not occur to her. She bought Donald a new gold watch-chain, with match-box, cigar-cutter, knife, pencil and seals, all of gold, attached. When she presented it to him, she felt disappointed at his lack of enthusiasm, and wondered why he did not wear it. The reason was simple—as simple and homely as Donald himself. He detested jewelry, and contented himself with the leather fob initialed in gold which Edith had given him, years before, upon a birthday. He had loved this, because she had saved and denied herself to get it for him. The other, somehow, meant nothing to him.

Chapter XIV

Emerson Hall was a young civil engineer, who had pushed his way to the front in his chosen profession because he had both energy and ability. He had been graduated from Columbia some year or two later than Donald, and had at once left New York for Chicago, where he had entered the employ of a large contracting

company. Sheer hard work had forced him to the front, and he was now one of the concern's most trusted men.

Alice Rogers he had met, some time before, at a commencement hop, and he had straightway fallen in love with her. Being in New York but seldom, he had seen very little of her, but the impression she had made upon him persisted, and their courtship, carried on largely by means of an extensive correspondence, had progressed so favorably that Mrs. Pope felt obliged to place him under the ban of her displeasure. Alice, however, paid little attention to her mother's objections. She had a very clear idea of what she wanted in the world, and what she wanted she determined to get. Emerson Hall was one of the things she wanted, and she bent all her energies to the task of making that young man conclude that life without her to share it would be but a barren waste.

Pursuant to her intentions, Alice had written to Mr. Hall, inviting him to spend his vacation with them at New London. She had asked Edith's permission, and the latter had granted it gladly. The latter had never met Mr. Hall, but she felt as though she almost knew him, both because he had been an acquaintance of Donald's and because Alice talked about him so much. Then, too, she felt that she owed him some recompense for his services at the time of West's death. He had gone to the hospital, in answer to Alice's wire, only to find that West had died some three days before. This information he had wired to Alice the following day.

The two girls looked forward to his coming with delight. The extensive entertaining which Mrs. Pope had planned had failed to materialize. She found that, after dropping from her visiting-list the friends of her poverty, there remained but few among the elect whose acquaintance she might claim, and these, it seemed, were mostly away for the summer.

Hence the two girls were somewhat lonely in the big and stately house, and Edith found that the time between Monday morning, when Donald departed for the city, and Saturday afternoon, when he returned, hung heavily upon her hands.

She had no housekeeping details to occupy her—Mrs. Pope had insisted upon a competent housekeeper; her duties were confined to signing checks, her pleasures, to enjoying Bobbie's delight in his surroundings. His pony cart, the boat she had got for him, all his new experiences, made the child feel that he had suddenly entered heaven itself. His cough, his pale cheeks, his fretful nights were a thing of the past. He lived the life of a little savage and health flowed in upon him accordingly.

Mrs. Pope did not share her daughter's loneliness. The atmosphere in which she now lived and moved charmed her. With Alice and Edith at her side, a houseful of expensive and competent servants to gratify her slightest wish, with Donald on hand only over the week ends, she felt that her cup of blessedness was once more filled to the brim.

It was late Saturday afternoon. The Sound lay sparkling in the hot August sunshine. Mrs. Pope came into the handsomely appointed hall of their new home, and sank heavily into a padded-leather chair. After all, she felt, this was indeed life in its fullest sense. She fanned herself languidly with a lace fan, regarding her elaborate gown, meanwhile, with much satisfaction. She glanced up as Edith entered the room, looking very lovely in a costume of white lace.

"Has Alice come back from the station yet, mother?" inquired Edith.

"Not yet, my dear. I'm waiting for her now. I suppose I am expected to welcome this young Hall—though I can't say I want to. I wish Alice had not invited him. If she would take my advice, she would send him about his business. Four thousand a year! Pooh! a beggar!"

"Well, mother, now that we have asked him, we must make him welcome. How do you like my dress?" She came around in front of her mother's chair.

Mrs. Pope observed it critically through her gold lorgnon. "Oh, it will do, my dear," she replied. "I should have preferred the Irish point."

"But, mother, it was five hundred dollars."

"What of it? Why shouldn't you look as well as possible? Of course, Donald would never care, but there are others. I heard several people at the hotel say last night that you were the best-looking and the best-dressed woman there."

"I don't care what they said, mother," replied Edith, selecting a rose from a jar on the table, and putting it in her bosom. "I'd rather please Donald."

Mrs. Pope sniffed audibly. "Oh, very well, my dear," she observed. "Have your own way. It's some satisfaction, at least, to know that you can buy a dress when you feel like it, without having to account to your husband for it. My poor, dear J. B. always gave me a most liberal allowance. I never could dress on less than three thousand a year."

"Well, mother, you know you did manage to get along on much less, the last few years."

Mrs. Pope assumed a deeply hurt expression. "Edith," she exclaimed irritably, "it is most unkind of you to remind me of my temporary poverty. Before my poor, dear J. B. died—"

"Frightfully hot this evening, isn't it?" Edith interrupted.

The mother glared at her daughter in annoyance. "Where's Donald?" she suddenly asked.

"In his room, mother."

"Didn't he get here on the five-o'clock train?"

"Yes."

"Then why doesn't he come downstairs? I hope he bought the afternoon papers."

"They're in the library. Donald says the trip down was terribly hot and stuffy. He's changing his things."

Mrs. Pope snorted. "If he would spend the summer down here with you, as a husband ought, instead of staying in town, fooling with that engineering work of his, he wouldn't have that hot trip to make every Saturday."

"Nonsense, mother!" replied Edith. "Donald is perfectly right. I wouldn't want him to become an idler, living on his wife. He has too much spirit for that."

"Then if he must stay in town, why doesn't he get a decent place to live? I don't think it looks well for him to be staying at that cheap little flat, now that you have plenty of money to take your proper place in society."

"He likes the old place. He says he was happy there. He thought he might as well stay on till the lease expired."

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes. If you are satisfied, I see no reason why I should object." Mrs. Pope began to fan herself vigorously."I can get along very well without him."

Mrs. Rogers went to the door and looked down the long, shady drive.

"Alice seems to be gone a long time. I hope the machine hasn't broken down."

"The train is probably late. They generally are on this road. What room are you going to give Mr. Hall?"

"I thought I'd give him the one over the library," said Edith, as she resumed her chair. "It has a lovely view of the Sound. I know he'll be glad enough to see it again after being West over six months."

Mrs. Pope snorted indignantly. "I wish he had stayed there," she grumbled. "I cannot imagine what Alice sees in him to rave about."

"Donald tells me he's a very bright fellow. He knew him in college. She might do a great deal worse."

"Not much. Why can't she pick out a man of means, like poor Mr. West was? Think of what we owe that poor young man!"

"Don't, mother!" Edith cried. "Please!"

She rose and went to the fireplace, her face convulsed with emotion.

"Why is it, Edith, that you always seem annoyed whenever I speak of Mr. West? You don't show proper feeling. Think of all you owe him. I don't see how you can let a day pass without thanking him from the bottom of your heart for all the happiness he has given you."

"I appreciate it very much, mother." Edith's voice trembled—there was a trace of a sob in it.

"You certainly do not act like it," pursued her mother relentlessly."Every time I mention his name you change the subject."

Edith turned, her face flushing. "Can't you see," she cried, "how it hurts me? I don't want to be reminded of his death every minute of the day. God knows, I wish he were alive again!"

"There's no use in wishing that, my dear," remarked her mother. "God, in His wisdom, orders all things for the best." She glanced about the richly furnished room with a satisfied smile.

Edith was about to reply, when the afternoon stillness was broken by the sound of wheels upon the gravel road, accompanied by the honk of an automobile horn. She hurried to the door, and, as she did so, Alice appeared, accompanied by a heavily built young fellow in blue serge, carrying a suit-case. Mrs. Pope rose.

"Well, mother, we're here at last," cried Alice. "The train was fifteen minutes late." She turned to the man behind her. "Mother, you know Mr. Hall."

"My dear Mr. Hall, I'm so glad to see you!" said Mrs. Pope effusively, as she offered the newcomer her hand.

Mr. Hall shook hands. He was a genial, whole-souled sort of a fellow, and, as he turned to acknowledge his introduction to Edith, she felt an instinctive liking for him. He was telling Mrs. Pope how glad he felt to be East again, after six nights in a sleeping-car.

"Yes," he rattled on, in his breezy way, "I've come all the way from'Frisco. We're building some docks there. Ever been in 'Frisco, Mrs. Rogers?"

"No," replied Edith, "though I've always wanted to go."

"Great place. Nothing like it this side of the Rockies. Wide-open town, I can tell you."

"Do you like that kind of a town, Mr. Hall?" asked Mrs. Pope grimly.

"Do I? Well, rather. Chinatown's got anything I ever saw wiped right off the map. Great!"

"Indeed?" The amount of reproof that Mrs. Pope could put into that single word exceeds belief. "I should hardly suppose any respectable person would want to visit such places."

"I'm afraid I'm not respectable, Mrs. Pope. I'm only honest," laughed Hall, as he turned to Edith. "I looked for your husband on the train, Mrs. Rogers. Hoped I might be lucky enough to run across him."

"He came earlier. He's dressing now. I'm expecting him down at any moment."

"Dressing!" ejaculated Mr. Hall, with a wry face. "Whew! I'm afraid I'll disgrace the party. I didn't bring my evening togs. Somehow, I'd got the idea from your sister that you were roughing it down here. She wrote me you had taken a cottage—" He looked about the stately hall with a broad smile. "Some cottage!" he observed.

"Don't bother about not dressing, Mr. Hall. Mr. Rogers generally wears flannels, hot nights like this. Shall I show you to your room?"

"Let me do so, Edith," said Mrs. Pope, puffing forward importantly."And, really, I'm going up, anyway."

She swept up the staircase, with their guest meekly following in her rear.

"Dinner at seven," called Alice, after them.

"Well, Edith, how do you like him?" she asked, when they were alone.

"He's awfully breezy, isn't he? I imagine he's very sincere and straightforward."

"Emerson's as straight as they make them. No foolishness about him. We're engaged—almost, that is. Don't let on to mother."

"Engaged! Not really! When did he ask you?"

"Coming up from the station."

"He certainly didn't lose any time," observed Edith, laughing. "Did you accept him?"

"Of course not. Now he'll have to do it all over again. To-night, perhaps, down on the rocks. I shouldn't think of accepting a man in an automobile. It isn't romantic enough."

"Didn't he feel discouraged?"

"Not a bit. You couldn't discourage Emerson with a pile-driver. Anyway—I guess he understood." She smiled quietly to herself.

"I thought," Edith said, somewhat nervously, "that he seemed rather surprised at the way we are living here. I suppose he wonders where all the money is coming from."

"I suppose so. He did seem a bit overcome, when he saw the auto. Asked me if Donald had struck a gold mine."

"A gold mine! Alice! He doesn't know anything about the—will, does he?"Mrs. Rogers seemed troubled, her face had lost its animation, her eyes took on a hunted look.

"I don't think so," replied her sister, "but why shouldn't he?"

"I'd rather he didn't. It might look—well, sort of queer—and then, Donald might not want him to think—"

"To think what?" interrupted Alice sharply.

"Oh, nothing! I suppose he'll have to know, some time. Only it seems, somehow, to make Donald look sort of cheap—don't you see?"

"No, I don't," said Alice bluntly. "There is nothing to be ashamed of—at least, nothing that anybody knows anything about. You seem to be getting awfully considerate of Donald lately."

"Perhaps I'm only just beginning to find out what a splendid fellow he is."

"Well, if you are, I'm glad of it, but I shouldn't get up any more excitement about this money if I were you. It will look suspicious."

"Did Mr. Hall ever write you anything more about—about Mr. West after that telegram we sent him?"

"No, never. You remember the answer he sent the next day, telling us poor Billy was dead. He's never mentioned the matter since. You know he left Denver shortly after that."

"Yes, I remember. I wonder if he could know anything."

Alice looked disgusted. "Don't be absurd, Edith," she said. "How could he? How could anybody? For heaven's sake, don't get yourself all worked up about nothing. I'm the only person in the world, outside of yourself, that knows anything about your affair with Billy West, and I certainly am not going to say anything. I wouldn't have Emerson know for the world. He might change his mind about me."

"Alice!" exclaimed her sister. "That's an awful thing to say."

"Well, it's true, isn't it? I don't mind his knowing that Billy left you the money. I think he ought to know that. But when it comes to his knowing why he left it—I draw the line. Of course, he couldn't blame me, but if he thought that my sister was living on the money left her by her—well, I don't want to hurt your feelings, Edith, but he might not care so much about becoming one of the family."

Edith shrank away from her sister, her face quivering. "You say that to me—you, who advised me to take it!"

"Don't try to blame it on me, Edith. I advised you to keep your mouth shut, and not make things any worse than they were. I advise you to do the same thing now."

"So that you can go on enjoying the fruits of my wrong-doing." Mrs. Rogers looked at her sister scornfully—defiantly.

"For heaven's sake, don't get so melodramatic. The thing's past. Why not forget it?"

"Can you forget it? You are ashamed to let the man you love know about it, for fear he might not want to marry you—not want to marry you, on account of me."

"You take the thing too seriously, Edith. You never told me much about your affair with Billy West, and I never asked you. Every family has a skeleton in its closet. Most of them are lucky if they haven't several, but they don't make a practice of parading them before the public. What on earth do you want to talk about this thing for? It can't do any good now."

"Because I'm sick of living this lie. I've a great mind to tell Donald everything."

"You are getting just plain, ordinary dippy, Edith. You ought to take something for it. Do you know what he would do?"

"He couldn't do anything that would make matters worse than they are."

"He couldn't? You think he couldn't? Well, I'll tell you what he would do. He'd make you give up every cent of this money so quick it would make your hair stand on end."

"Alice! What do you mean?" Mrs. Rogers was horror-struck. This phase of the matter had evidently not occurred to her.

"I should think it was plain enough. He couldn't do anything else. If you didn't do as he wished, he would leave you. He might do it, anyway. He isn't the sort of a man who would stand for any foolishness, kind as he is. You know that. You'd lose either your husband or your money. Then where would you be?"

"Donald would never do a thing like that."

"Of course he would. Any man would, who had a grain of self-respect. Then you'd have the pleasure of giving up all this"—she waved her hand about the room—"and going back to that wretched hole in Harlem, and doing your own cooking, while Bobbie plays on the sand pile on the corner lot, and pretends he has a pony cart with a soap box. You would enjoy that, wouldn't you? Oh, of course you would!"

"Don't! Don't!" cried Edith, with a shudder. "I could never stand it—never!"

"Furthermore," pursued her sister, "Emerson would be bound to know. He's seen this place, and wouldn't understand what it all meant, if you gave it up. He probably would have no further use for me. I'm sorry for you, Edith, but you have got us all into this situation, and you haven't any right to upset it—at least, not now. Wait until Emerson and I are married, at any rate."

Edith was on the verge of tears. "I ought to have told him long ago,"she wailed. "In the very beginning. Now it's too late. If he knew the truth, he might never forgive me."

"I wouldn't take any chances, if I were you," observed Alice dryly.

"And Donald has been so fine, so strong, so splendid," sobbed her sister. "I never realized before all that he has been to me. I can't tell you how I admire him."

"Very likely. It's a great deal easier for a woman to realize her husband's good points when she has thirty thousand dollars a year than when she hasn't thirty cents."

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Mrs. Rogers, drying her eyes. "I guess I'll have to make the best of it."

"That's sensible, Edith. Nothing else to do. Now I think I'll go up and dress. What's on for this evening?"

"We might go to the hotel for an hour or so. There's a dance. After that you and Mr. Hall can take a walk along the beach. That will give him another chance," she added, with a meaning smile. "Mother isn't at all favorable."

"I know it. She thinks Emerson hasn't money enough. She's right, too; he hasn't. But I guess he will have, some day. I'm willing to take a chance, anyway. You know, Edith, I'm very fond of mother, but I don't intend to let her interfere between Emerson and myself. As a mother-in-law I can see her weak points. I've never said so before, but I believe she is responsible for nine-tenths of the trouble between Donald and yourself."

"What trouble?"

"Oh, your discontent and everything. You would never have thought of running away with Billy West if she hadn't sympathized with you all the time. When I get

married I'm going to live as far away as possible—somewhere where I shall see mother about once in six months. I don't propose to have her making any trouble in my domestic arrangements." She started toward the staircase. "I've barely time to dress. Hello, Donald!" she said, as she met her brother-in-law descending the stairs. "How's everything?"

Chapter XV

Donald Rogers looked worried, although he tried not to show it. He glanced about the hall eagerly.

"Where's Bobbie?" he inquired.

"Having his supper, dear. He was out driving when you came. They drove over to the lighthouse to try his new pony. You can't imagine how delighted he is with it. I'm trying to keep him out of doors as much as possible. He looks like another child already. The sea air is just what he needs."

"Great, isn't it?" Donald said. "I don't wonder he feels better. You are looking very charming yourself to-night, Edith. You're gaining weight."

"I've gained eight pounds since we've been here. I shouldn't have believed it possible, but I weighed myself the day we came just to see. I wish you would take a few weeks off, and have a good rest—you don't look yourself. What's the matter? Business?"

"Yes. Things aren't going very well."

She came up to him, and put her hand affectionately upon his arm.

"After all, Don," she said, looking at him fondly, "it doesn't make so much difference—now."

"Just as much as ever, dear," he said, taking her hand. "You know how I feel about this money. I'm glad, for your sake, and Bobbie's, but it isn't mine, and I can't forget it."

"Everything I have is yours, dear—everything! You know that."

"Thank you, Edith. I appreciate it even if I can't take advantage of it. I want to succeed on my own account—I can't stop work just because my wife happens to be a rich woman. You wouldn't respect me if I did that. I'll win out, all right. You believe that, don't you?" He looked at her eagerly.

"Of course I do," she replied, patting his hand. "I know you will. I only wish you would let me make it easier for you. It spoils all my happiness, not to be able to do so."

"I don't see what you could do, Edith, more than you are doing."

"How is business, Donald?"

He began to walk gloomily up and down. "The work at the office is all right," he said presently. "It's that confounded glass plant that worries me. We haven't enough working capital, and can't seem to borrow any. The worst of it is, there's a payment due on the property September first, five thousand dollars. You know the condition of the money-market, I suppose. The papers are full of it."

"You mean about the stock-market?" asked Edith timidly.

Donald threw himself into a chair. "Yes," he replied, "that and the Western Securities decision, and the failure of the Columbian Trust Company. Things look pretty bad. The banks are afraid to lend a dollar without gilt-edged security. Just my luck! Any other year things would have been different. You remember I was afraid of this, in the spring. I spoke to Billy West about it."

"Why shouldn't I lend you the money?" said Edith, coming over and standing by his chair.

"I couldn't let you do that, dear," he replied, looking up at her.

"But why? You know I have over twenty thousand dollars lying idle in the bank—interest, not principal. You must let me lend it to you. How much do you want?" She went over to a desk in the corner and drew a check-book from one of the drawers. "Please, Donald. It will be such a pleasure to me." She looked at him in eager expectancy.

"I can't accept it, Edith. I want to stand on my own feet. Now that you have all this money, I'm doubly anxious to do it. I don't want to be just Mrs. Rogers' husband."

"You could never be that, dear. I want you to do all you say—can't you see that's one reason I'm so anxious to help you? We will make it a business transaction—you can give me a mortgage, or whatever you call it, just as if you were borrowing from some hard-fisted old miser. I have a perfect right to invest my money in a glass factory, if I please. You wouldn't owe me anything." She paused, smiling.

"You are a great financier, Edith," laughed her husband. "You have discovered the art of borrowing money without owing it."

"Don't laugh at me, Donald," she protested. "I'm in earnest. I want you to take it—just to oblige me. You will—won't you, dear?"

"Would you think just as much of me?" he asked, evidently revolving the matter carefully in his mind.

"How can you ask me such a question? It would be a mighty poor sort of a world, if we couldn't help one another over a hard place, once in a while."

Donald rose from his seat, and went over toward his wife. "I didn't intend to speak of this, Edith," he said, "but now that I have—perhaps poor Billy would be glad, if he knew. I'll take it—but as a loan only, mind you, and with proper security."

At this reference to West, Edith shivered slightly and turned away to hide her feelings. "How much do you need?" she asked in a strained voice. "Fifteen thousand?"

"Oh, no. Ten will be ample. But it isn't necessary to bother about it now. Wait until I go back to town."

"No, Don. You might change your mind. You'd best take it now." She hurriedly began to write out a check. "You can send the mortgage, or note, or whatever it is, down to me—that is, if you really want to do it that way."

"I certainly shouldn't think of doing it any other," said Donald.

Edith rose, and, going up to her husband, put the check in his hand."Here, Donald," she said. "I hope this will fix everything all right. If it does, it will make me very happy."

"Thank you, Edith," he remarked simply, putting the check in his pocket."I shall never forget this,—never. You have been very good to me. I only hope I shall not have to keep it long."

"Don't thank me, Donald. Just consider it a little loan from a dear friend." He put his arm about her, and drew her to him. "God bless you, dear, you and poor old Billy. How I wish he were here to enjoy it all."He kissed her lovingly, then started in surprise. "Why, Edith, you are crying," he exclaimed. "What's the matter, dear? There's nothing wrong, is there?" He smoothed back the hair from her forehead tenderly.

"Nothing," she cried, as she escaped from his embrace, and, going over to the desk, put the check-book back into the drawer, which she locked.

As she did so, they both turned at the sound of someone descending the stairs. It was Hall.

"Hello, Hall! Glad to see you." Donald went up to their guest with outstretched hand.

"Rogers!" exclaimed the latter, shaking Donald's hand vigorously. "You look just the same as you did back in ninety-five. How are you?"

"Pretty well. How are things in the West?"

"Oh, about as usual—too much politics, and not enough rain."

Donald laughed.

"Sit down, Mr. Hall," said Edith. "I must go and see to dinner. I'll be back presently." She started toward the door.

"I hope you are not making any extra preparation on my account," Hall exclaimed.

"Oh—no—nothing unusual," Edith laughed. "We are going to treat you as one of the family."

"That will make a hit with me, Mrs. Rogers," said Hall, joining in her laugh.

"I thought it would," she cried, as she left the room.

"How would a high-ball strike you, eh?" asked Donald.

"Right where I live."

Donald led the way to the veranda. "Suppose we sit out here. It's a bit cooler, I think. There's some whiskey on the table."

"All the comforts of home, I see. Nice place you've got here, Rogers."He seated himself comfortably in a wicker lounging chair.

"Yes, very." Donald's voice had a peculiar note—he felt the irony of the situation. "Shall I pour you out a drink?" he asked, going to the table.

"Thanks, old man. Here's to you!" Hall raised his glass. "Nothing like the seashore, after all, in the summer for health and happiness. How's your little boy?"

"Great. Growing like a weed." Donald took a chair opposite his guest and drew a cigar-case from his pocket. "Have a cigar?"

"No, thanks; not before dinner. I'll light a cigarette, though, if you don't mind." He took out a box of cigarettes and offered it to his host."Have one?"

"Thanks." Donald put his cigar-case back into his pocket, and took a cigarette. "I understand," he said, "that you are with the Pioneer Construction Company of Chicago."

"Yes. I've been with them for several years. Made me chief engineer last year."

"Good work! Ought to be a splendid job. Keeps you moving about a good deal, though, doesn't it?"

"Yes. More than I like. I've pretty well covered the West, this past year. Meet a lot of Columbia men, off and on. I like 'Frisco. Wonderful place. Dennett, ninety-six, is in business there. You knew him, didn't you?"

"Slightly. He was in the class below me."

"And Walker, ninety-five. Remember him?"

"Tall fellow? Wears glasses? Yes, I remember him. Very bright man. How long did you stay in 'Frisco?"

"Two months. Finished up a job in Denver before that."

"Denver? That's where poor Billy West died. He was a ninety-five man. You knew him, didn't you?"

"Slightly. Great friend of yours, wasn't he?"

"Yes, I thought everything of him. His death was a terrible shock."

"So sudden, too. He was ill only a few days. Appendicitis, they told me."

"Yes. He died right after the operation."

"I was in Denver at the time; but I didn't think to look him up. Didn't even know he was sick until I got your telegram."

"My telegram?" Donald looked at his guest in sudden surprise.

"Well, perhaps not yours, exactly. Miss Pope wired me that he was sick, and asked me to find out how he was. I supposed it was on your account."

"Miss Pope?"

"Yes. Your sister-in-law."

Donald's surprise and confusion were painfully evident. "I—I—don't understand why she should have wired. I didn't even know he was sick, myself."

"She must have known it," replied Hall, a trifle uneasily. "I went to the hospital at once. They told me he had been dead several days."

"Strange," muttered Donald. "I can't see why she should have wired."

"Perhaps Mrs. Rogers asked her to do so. She didn't know me, herself, you know."

"You went to the hospital, you say?"

"Yes. He had been buried by that time, poor chap. I had a talk with the nurse who attended him."

"Did he suffer much?"

"No, not physically, that is. They told me he worried terribly over his illness. Died raving about some woman."

"Some woman? That's strange."

"Why so? Most men do, don't they?"

"West didn't. He never cared much about women."

"He must have, from what I heard."

"Why so?" Donald shifted uneasily in his chair.

"It's a queer story. I suppose the nurse ought not to have told me, but she must have thought I was a very dear friend of his. It seems he was terribly in love with some married woman here in New York—wrote to her every day, almost—up to the last. I understand she did to him, too."

"A married woman?" cried Donald, in astonishment. "I don't believe it. I knew Billy West intimately. He had scarcely any woman friends. It's hardly likely he

could have been carrying on such an affair without my knowing it. I saw him every day, almost."

Hall took out his cigarette-case and lighted a fresh cigarette. "I don't know," he replied. "That's what the nurse said. She used to read him her letters. They had arranged that she was to leave her husband, and she and West were going to run away together—to Europe. He'd gone out to Denver to close up his affairs, and turn all his property into money. They had everything arranged to go as soon as he returned to New York. That's what made it so hard for him to die."

Donald gazed at the face of the man opposite him with horrified intentness. "Who was she?" he asked suddenly.

"I haven't the least idea. I didn't ask the nurse, and she probably didn't know. It was the strange outcome of the affair that interested me particularly. I wonder if you heard it."

Donald looked puzzled. "I don't know what you mean," he said slowly.

"Well, it was like this: West, I understand, was worth a lot of money."Hall leaned forward in his chair, and addressed his host impressively."The day before he died," he said slowly, "he called in a lawyer, and made a will, leaving every cent he had in the world to the woman he was in love with."

Donald Rogers allowed his half-smoked cigarette to drop unheeded to the floor. He started forward in his chair, his face flushed, his whole appearance that of a man who had suffered a sudden and terrible shock."It's a lie!" he gasped hoarsely, then sank back in horror.

A look of amazement spread over Hall's face. "Pardon me, old man," he said slowly. "I didn't suppose you'd feel so strongly about the matter, or I should never have mentioned it. I only know what the nurse told me."

Donald recovered himself with an effort. He tried to stem the tumult that surged through his brain. "Excuse me, Hall," he said weakly."It—it was a great shock." Then he began nervously to light another cigarette.

Hall looked at him in astonishment. "Yes," he said vaguely. "It surprised me a good deal, too. I guess it's true, though. The nurse would have had no reason to lie about it. I've often wondered what sort of a man this woman's husband must have been, to let her take the money—if he did. Pretty cheap skate, to stand for a thing like that—don't you think?"

"If he did," repeated Donald mechanically, and, fumbling in his pocket, drew forth the check which his wife had given him a short time before.

"Thought you might have heard about it," continued Hall, as he finished his drink.

"No." Donald's voice was strained—he was vaguely groping in his mind for some solid ground in the chaos that surrounded him. "I should have known, but I did not," he continued; then began slowly to tear the check into bits.

"Women are the devil, aren't they?" said Hall, as he rose and began to walk about the spacious veranda. "Perhaps her husband never even knew."

Donald rose, and, going to the railing, dropped the pieces of the check in a shower upon the rose bushes beneath. "He never knew," he repeated mechanically.

As he spoke, Edith appeared in the doorway. "Dinner is almost ready,"she announced gaily. "Haven't the others come down yet?"

Chapter XVI

Donald Rogers had given eight years of his life to working for the welfare of his wife and his little boy. He was a man of one idea, and to that he bent his every effort. It may be that, in his devotion to the future, he had neglected the present, but the thought that Edith, the woman whom he had trusted and believed in all these years, could be unfaithful to him had never crossed his mind. The very idea seemed monstrous—as he looked up and saw her sweet, familiar smile, he felt that he must be the victim of some weird and horrible mistake.

Edith, her face flushed and happy, beamed upon them from the open doorway. Hall was the first to speak.

"Not yet, Mrs. Rogers," he said, then looked curiously at Donald, as he noted the latter's silence.

"I suppose you two have been having a nice, long talk about your college days?" said Edith, glancing from Hall to her husband.

"Yes, in a way. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Rogers, we were talking about poor old Billy West." He turned to Donald as he spoke, and failed to observe the look of horror that crossed Edith's face.

"Billy West?" she cried, with a gasp, as she started back, her eyes big with fear.

"Yes. You remember I went to see him in Denver that time—after your sister wired me—but I was too late."

Donald interrupted him. His voice sounded harsh and unreal. "Tell Mrs. Rogers what you have just told me," he said.

Hall looked from one to the other in surprise. He had evidently been treading on strange ground—he was unable to see his way clearly."Why—I—well, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Rogers, I was gossiping a bit—something I don't often do. I heard a curious story about West while I was out in Denver, and I was just telling your husband about it."

"Go on!" cried Donald hoarsely.

"It wasn't anything," said Hall nervously. "Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned it at all. They told me at the hospital that he had left hisentire fortune to some married woman in New York with whom he was madly in love."

Edith groped blindly forward. Her whole world had come clattering down in ruin about her head. She grasped the back of a chair with both hands, and tried to recover her self-control. "Yes," she gasped. "I—I know."

Hall saw her agitation, but did not in any way understand its cause."Pardon me, Mrs. Rogers; I'm sorry," he faltered, then turned to Donald."I say, old man," he said, "won't you please take me out and kick me gently around the block? I feel that I am making all kinds of an ass of myself—gossiping here like an old woman."

Donald stepped suddenly forward. "Mr. West's death was a great shock to us both, Mr. Hall. Mrs. Rogers has never got over it. You can understand, of course."

He came to her rescue almost unconsciously, protecting her from the breakdown which now seemed inevitable. She stood clutching the back of the

chair, her face twitching with emotion, afraid to look at her husband, afraid to look at Hall, her eyes upon the distant blue of the Sound. The blow had fallen—she knew that tragedy stood at her side, ready to strike her down. The tenseness of the situation was momentarily relieved by the appearance of Mrs. Pope and Alice.

"Are we late, dear?" asked her mother, puffing heavily out on the veranda.

Edith did not answer; she scarcely seemed to hear. Alice went up to Hall with a smile.

"I dressed in fifteen minutes," she announced gaily. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Making an ass of myself, as usual," he muttered; then looked toward Mrs. Rogers.

"What do you mean?" Alice inquired as she followed his glance. "What's the matter, Sis?" she asked, going up to Edith, and putting a hand on her arm.

The other tried to smile. "Nothing, dear; nothing," she said, her voice sounding far off. "Mr. Hall said something he thought made me feel bad, but it wasn't anything—not anything at all."

"What do you mean, Mr. Man, by saying mean things to my little sister?" demanded Alice playfully, shaking her finger at Hall.

His reply was interrupted by Mrs. Pope. "How long before dinner, Edith?"she inquired. "It's almost seven now."

"It will be a little late, mother. Perhaps ten minutes yet," Edith managed to say. She glanced timidly at her husband, but his stern, impassive face contained no message that she could read.

"Then I needn't have hurried, after all," exclaimed Alice, in an aggrieved tone. "How would you like to take a look at the grounds before dinner, Emerson?"

"There's hardly time, my dear." Mrs. Pope's manner was severely disapproving.

"Oh, yes, there is." She took Hall by the arm, and moved toward the steps. "Come along, Emerson."

"I will accompany you, Alice," said her mother, hastily joining them. She evidently intended to keep Alice and the despised possessor of only four thousand a year under her watchful eye.

"Won't you and Donald come too?" asked Alice sarcastically as she left the porch.

Donald regarded her without interest. He scarcely heard what she said."No, we will wait here," he replied; then looked searchingly at his wife.

"Call us when dinner is ready," Alice flung back at them over her shoulder, as she and Mr. Hall disappeared around the corner of the veranda, Mrs. Pope puffing along in their wake, like a fussy little tugboat under full steam.

Edith was the first to break the silence. "Donald!" she faltered, her voice breaking pitifully; then took a step toward him.

"Is this story true?" he demanded.

"Wait, Donald—wait!" she cried. "Don't judge me harshly."

"Is this story true?" he repeated, his face drawn with anger.

She continued to approach him, her arms held out in piteous appeal. "Donald—what do you want me to say?"

Donald's expression turned to one of bitter anguish. The denial he had half-hoped for, in spite of Hall's story, was not forthcoming. In every word, in every gesture, his wife showed her guilt.

"My God, I can't believe it!" he groaned. "Why did you do this thing?"

"Don't ask me any more—don't! Can't you see it's all past and gone?"

"No! It has only just begun. Were you in love with him? Don't lie to me!"

"Donald—I—I—really wasn't. I—" Her voice choked with sobs; she was unable to meet his searching gaze.

"I don't believe you."

She came near to him, her look, her manner, her every movement an appeal for forgiveness. "Donald!" she cried. "I—I—only thought I was. It wasn't true. I never loved anyone but you—don't you see that I am telling you the truth?"

"You've got to tell me the truth." His voice was stern—implacable. "Did West ask you to leave me, and go away with him?"

"Donald—dear—don't!" she cried wildly. "Let me explain!"

"Answer me!" he demanded angrily.

"Yes." The word was scarcely audible through her sobs.

Donald passed his hand unsteadily across his eyes and turned away. It seemed unbelievable. West—his bosom friend—the man he would have trusted with his life. "The scoundrel! And I trusted him so!" he groaned, then looked again at his wife. "Did you agree to go?" he demanded.

"I did not know what I was doing—I was mad. Oh, Donald—forgive me—forgive me!" She put her hand on his arm, the tears streaming down her face.

"Did you agree to go?" His voice was even harder and more peremptory.

"Yes," she whispered, "I did."

The bitterness of it all almost overcame him. He loved her very deeply."How could you?" he moaned. "How could you?"

She saw his momentary weakness, and, woman-like, took quick advantage of it. "Donald," she cried, through her tears, "Donald! Forgive me! I agreed in a moment of madness. I have tried so hard, all these months, to be worthy of you—of your love. Can't you believe me?"

"You would have gone," he said bitterly. "You would have gone!"

"Donald! I—"

"Don't deny it. I know it is true. What did he go to Denver for?"

"To sell his property—to—"

"To sell it out, so that he would be free to go away with you," he interrupted hotly. "He died raving over your daily letters, and left you every cent he had in the world. Does that look as though you had changed your mind?" He turned from her with an expression of disgust. "What a fool you have made of me!" he cried.

"Donald! Listen to me. You must!"

"No! I'll do the talking now. Did you know he had made his will in your favor?"

"No!"

"Why did you wire to find out how he was?"

"Because he was sick, and I was worried about him. I hadn't heard a word from him for three days. I knew nothing about the money until that awful night when the lawyer came."

"And you took it! In spite of all—you took it. You accepted this man's money!"

"Donald—I couldn't help it—I was afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid to refuse it, for fear you would not understand—for fear you would suspect—and think terrible things about me."

"For fear I might find out the truth," he flung at her angrily. "For fear you would not be able to hoodwink me, as you had in the past. For fear I might know how disloyal and unfaithful and untrue you had been to me."

His words, and the way he spoke them, roused in her a sudden anger."Yes, if you wish to put it that way," she cried defiantly. "For fear you would no longer love me, when I had come to know that your love was the only thing I wanted in all the world."

"And to keep my love," he exclaimed bitterly, "you were willing to stoop to that—to accept this man's money."

"Oh—my dear—my dear! I didn't want his money—I didn't want it! Won't you believe me?"

"You took it."

"I had to take it. There wasn't anything else I could do."

"You could have given it away—you could have come to me, and told me the truth—anything but this."

"Could I have done any more good with it by giving it away than I have by keeping it? Think of what I have been able to do for my mother—my sister—our boy. Don't you see? It wasn't for myself I wanted the money. You will believe that, won't you?"

"No! You have always wanted money. You never lost an opportunity to tell me how much I failed to give you. Now you've got it"—he glanced bitterly about him—"at the expense of your honor. You've lied to me, and tricked me, and made a fool of me, and now you've got it; and, to crown it all, you were even willing to let me share in it. You gave me that check, knowing all this." He raised his hands in helpless fury. "My God! What a humiliation!"

Edith looked at her husband in a frightened way. "If he were alive to-day he would be glad to know that he had helped you," she said pathetically, seeking some adequate answer to his accusations. Her choice was an unfortunate one—it only increased his rage.

"Stop!" he fairly shouted. "Don't dare to say that to me! Do you think I would accept anything from him?—this man I loved and trusted and honored as a friend—this man that crept into my home and tried to ruin me—to take from me everything I held dear in the world—this liar—this hypocrite—this crook—to help me! God! You must have fallen pretty low to think that I would accept help from your lover!"

Edith cowered before his biting scorn. "Oh! How can you—how can you?"she sobbed. "I did not love him."

"I would respect you more if you had. You might have been honest with him, at least, if you couldn't be with me. No—you did not love him. You turned from me, and gave yourself to him because he had money! Money!Money! You—you—God, I can't say the word! Don't you know what they call women who sell themselves for money?"

She flushed darkly at his words. "Don't dare to say that to me!" she cried. "I may have been disloyal—I may have intended to leave you—but I never wanted his money—never—not for myself. It was for the others."

"Look at yourself," he interrupted. "Your clothes—your jewels—this place! Has all this been for others? Haven't you enjoyed it? Isn't itthe very breath of existence to you? What sort of a woman are you, anyway?"

"You are cruel, brutal!" she cried, dashing the tears from her eyes."You have no right to say such things to me. I took this money because I couldn't refuse it. If I had given it away, you would have suspected. I had begun to see what a terrible mistake I had made—I wanted to keep this thing from you—because I loved you."

"Why didn't you tell me the truth—then—then—not leave me to find it out now? You knew if you told me about this money, you would have to give it up, and you thought you could deceive me."

"No—no, it isn't true!"

"It is true. You thought you could buy your fine clothes, your luxury, your happiness at the expense of my honor—and you have done it. What do you suppose Hall will think of all this when he knows the truth?"

"Why need he know anything about it?"

"Good God! Haven't you any sense of decency—of right? Do you suppose for a moment I am going to let things go on like this?"

"Donald! What are you going to do?" she asked. "Remember what all this means to others. Forgive me, and let us forget."

"Don't say that again!" He took a step toward her threateningly. "I don't want to hear it. Give up every cent of this money, now—at once! Put on your cheap clothes, your home-made hat, your pride—if you have any left. They will look better on you than what you are wearing now. Go back to your cooking—your housework. It will be time enough then to talk about forgiveness."

She shrank from him, her hands clutching nervously at her bosom. After all, even she herself had not realized how horrible the thought of her old life had become to her, now that she had tasted of the new. She shuddered before the sordid vision. "You can't mean it—you can't!"

"You dare say that?" he demanded; then became suddenly silent, and looked toward the door.

Edith followed his glance, and saw Bobbie standing on the threshold, his nurse behind him.

"Papa!" cried the little fellow, rushing up to his father with outstretched hands. "Have you seen my new pony?"

Donald put out his arms, and took the child to his heart. "Bobbie—my dear little boy!" he cried, as he kissed him.

"Mamma got him for me yesterday," the child prattled on. "He's brown, and has a shaggy mane, and I like him ever so much better than the old one. I've named him Billikins, because he has such a funny face. Won't you come and see him?" He caught his father by the hand, pulling him toward the door.

"I can't come now," said Donald, resisting him. "He's asleep by this time. We'll see him to-morrow."

"And we'll go in swimming, papa. I've learned a lot since you were here last week. I can keep up dog-fashion." He capered about, illustrating with his arms.

"Mamma's going to get me a pair of white wings. Aren't you, mamma?" He turned to his mother for confirmation.

"Yes, dear," she said, with tears in her eyes.

"And, papa, I've got a sailboat. Patrick is showing me how to sail it. Will you come to-morrow?"

"Yes, Bobbie," his father answered mechanically.

"I wish you would stay here every day. I don't want to ever go back to the nasty old city. Why don't you, papa?" He took his father's hand again. "I want to show you where Patrick and me found a lot of clams yesterday."

"Yes, dear." Donald's voice was scarcely audible. There were tears in his heart, if not in his eyes.

Edith came over to the child, and put her hand upon his curly head."Kiss papa good-night, dear. It's time you were in bed."

"I don't want to go to bed." The boy looked at his father appealingly."Papa, mayn't I stay up a little longer?"

"Why, Bobbie, you always go to bed at seven o'clock."

"Not nights when papa comes, mamma."

The nurse took a step forward. "Come, Bobbie, that's a good boy," she coaxed, and held out her hand.

The tumult in Donald Rogers' brain ceased. His face took on a look of determination; it was evident that he had arrived at a decision. He put his arm about the child's shoulder. "Fannie, wait in the dining-room,"he said. "I will call you when I want you." The nurse turned and went into the house.

"Donald—what are you going to do?" Edith looked at his set face, and a great fear entered her heart.

"Go over to that desk, and write what I tell you," he demanded sternly, pointing to the writing-table in the hall.

"What—what do you mean?" Her voice trembled with fear, but she made no move to obey.

"Do what I tell you," he said harshly.

"No! First I must know what I am to write."

"You refuse?"

"Donald," she cried piteously, "you can't mean to ask me to give up everything—not now. Wait, dear—for Bobbie's sake. No one has any claim on this money. I'll give it all to you, to do with as you like, but I want Bobbie to have this summer. Don't you see how well he looks—how brown and well and strong? I can't let him go back to the city in all this heat—I can't!" She was pleading now—desperately—for the sake of her boy.

"Will you do as I say?" he asked ominously.

The thought of the thing nerved her to sudden resistance. "No!" she declared angrily. "Not that way. You are asking more than you have any right to ask. I have been foolish, weak, disloyal, and I regret it most bitterly. You can do what you please, to me, but you shall not revenge yourself upon my boy. This money is mine. It was left to me by a man who loved me dearly. I am not dishonoring either him or you by using it to make others happy. You want me to sacrifice my mother's happiness, my sister's, my child's—all to satisfy your sense of pride. Now that someone else is able to do something for me you resent it because you cannot

do it. You have no right to ask me to throw aside this wonderful opportunity for doing good. What would you have me do with this money? Give it away? To whom, then, should I give it, if not to those who are closest and dearest to me? What you ask is selfish. You only want to satisfy your man's pride, your so-called sense of honor. What is your sense of honor to me, when the welfare of my child is at stake? Do what you like, think what you like, but don't ask me to give up this money, for I won't do it—I won't—I won't!" She stood facing him, her hands clenched, her face flushed with passionate determination.

Donald looked at her in amazement. He had thought, after the discovery of her disloyalty, that she would accept his forgiveness at any price."What you have just said," he exclaimed slowly, "shows me that henceforth your path and mine lie far apart. I did not think that you could have said such things, that you could have so far forgotten your sense of honesty and right. Even after all that has happened, I thought that you still loved me."

"I do—I do—and you know it."

"No," he said bitterly, "you do not love me. A woman who loves her husband would live on crusts, and go in rags, and beg from door to door before she would sell herself for a few miserable dollars. What if you did have to give up your expensive dresses, your fine house, your automobiles? Is that anything, compared with giving up your husband's love? Do you think I want my child to owe his health, his happiness, the bed he sleeps on, the nurse who cares for him, the food he eats, the very clothes on his back, to the scoundrel who tried to ruin me, who tried to deal me a deadlier blow than if he had stabbed me in the back with a knife? What if your home was poor, and simple, and plain? What if it had no luxuries, no purple and fine linen? At least, it was honest; at least, I could hold up my head in it, and feel that it was all mine, that I was a man. Do you think I can do that here? Do you expect me to look about at all this luxury, and say to myself: God bless the man who stole my wife's love from me, and gave me this in return? There may be men in the world who would take what you offer, and be glad of it, but I thank God I am not one of them. As long as you are my wife, what you have comes from me—do you understand, from me—and, whether it be much or little, for better or worse, you shall accept what I have, and make the best of it!"

Edith looked at him for a long time. She found no words with which to answer him. "Very well," she said, at last, slowly. "At least I have my child." She put out her arms. "Come, Bobbie," she said.

Her husband swept the boy to him. "Get out of my way!" he cried roughly, as she attempted to intercept him; then started down the steps of the veranda.

"Donald!" she shrieked. "My God—what are you going to do?"

He paused on the steps. "I'm going to New York," he cried. "You can live on the price of your shame, if you want to. I and my boy shall not!" He dashed down the steps, and out toward the entrance to the grounds, the child held closely to his breast.

"Donald! Donald!" she screamed after him. "Come back! Come back!"

He went on, not heeding her cries, and, as the bells on the yachts in the harbor marked the hour of seven, she crumpled up upon the veranda floor, clutching at the arm of a chair as she fell; and lay there, a pathetic, sobbing figure, until her mother and sister found her, some ten minutes later.

Chapter XVII

When Alice Pope and the others returned from their walk in the garden they did not at first see the crumpled-up figure on the veranda floor as they came up the steps. Suddenly Hall started back with an exclamation, then ran over to the prostrate woman and lifted her in his arms.

"It's Mrs. Rogers," he cried. "Quick, some whiskey. She's fainted."

Alice poured out some of the spirits from the decanter on the table and gave it to him. "What can have happened?" she gasped, looking about."Where is Donald?"

"He must be inside. He was here only a moment ago." Mrs. Pope took one frightened look at her daughter's white face, then rushed into the hall, calling loudly for her son-in-law.

They carried the unconscious woman into the house and placed her upon a big lounge in the hallway. Mrs. Pope was still waking the echoes of the place with her cries.

In a few moments Edith opened her eyes and looked about. "Donald," she gasped, "come back—come back."

"Where has he gone, Edith?" her mother demanded sharply. "I left you together."

Mrs. Rogers continued to gaze, frightened, at the others as they crowded about her. She dared not speak—dared not tell them the truth of what had happened. "We—we had a quarrel," she moaned. "Let me go to my room." She struggled to her feet.

"But—my child—what is the matter? What has Donald said or done to you? Why has he left you like this? He never did have any consideration for you, but this is unpardonable. Where is he?" She glared about, eager to pour out the vials of her wrath upon her son-in-law's head.

Edith staggered up, and made for the stairway. "He's—he's gone to New York. He took Bobbie with him—We had a frightful quarrel—Oh—I can't tell you any more." Sobbing loudly, she ran up the stairs.

The others looked at one another in amazement. Only Alice understood, and she but vaguely. How had Donald found out? What had been said? Shebethought herself of his talk with Hall, and turned on that young man, a dangerous glitter in her eyes.

"What did you say to Donald?" she demanded.

A look of astonishment overspread Mr. Hall's usually placid countenance. The whole affair seemed absurd and meaningless to him, nor could he see wherein he had been at fault. "We were talking about—about our college days. I—I mentioned some story about Billy West—I don't understand—"

Alice cut him short. "Never mind, Emerson. It isn't your fault. They probably quarreled about something else. You and mother go in and have your dinner. I'll go up and have a talk with Edith."

Alice's talk with her sister was short and to the point. Edith, between sobs, told her what Mr. Hall had said, and what, as a consequence, Donald had demanded—that she give up West's money.

"Are you going to do it?" Alice asked.

"Oh—I don't know—I don't know." Her sister tossed about on the bed where she had thrown herself, moaning as though her heart would break.

Alice regarded her thoughtfully. "I told you what he would do," she remarked at length. "I don't blame him. But, after all, he might be a little less unreasonable—just now, too, when Emerson and I are about to be engaged. It's a shame! Why didn't you humor him—say you would give the money to mother, or something like that? He has no right to make such a tragedy of the matter. Why not wait a while and see what he does? He may reconsider, and come back."

"He never will—he never will."

"Well, then—it's up to you to decide which you want more—him, or the money. It doesn't look as though you could have both. Take my advice and go to sleep. Your mind will be clearer in the morning. I'll have Richards bring you up some toast and tea. Now I'm going to see what I can do to set this thing right with Emerson."

All the next day Edith lay in bed, tortured by the most agonizing thoughts. At one moment she would decide to go to Donald and beg his forgiveness, with all thoughts of the money cast to the four winds. At the next, she would recoil before the hideous prospect of giving up all that her life now held, and going back to the drudgery of her former existence. It was a difficult position for any woman to be in, she wailed to her mother, who sat beside her, alternately blaming Donald, and reproaching Edith for not having at once denied the whole affair.

"Why didn't you laugh at Mr. Hall's story?" she demanded. "Some hysterical tale of a nurse. Bah! I told you he was a fool. What right has Donald to object, I should like to know, if you did encourage Mr. West a little? I can't see anything so terribly wrong in that. You didn't do anything wrong, did you?" She became furious when Edith mumbled her denials. "The man is mad. He thinks he owns you, body and soul. Mr. West was worth a dozen like him. He could appreciate a woman's wants and needs. The idea of demanding that you give up what rightfully belongs to you—just to please his whims. I'd let him understand that he couldn't treat me as though I were a piece of property. What has he ever done for you, that you should be so grateful and obedient? Made you live like a servant. Don't think of going to him. I forbid it. You are my child, and I have some rights. Let me talk to him. I'll go up to town to-night, and tell him what I think of him. I've been waiting to do so for some time. As Alice suggests, if he objects to your keeping this money, promise to give it to me. I'll see that none of it is spent on him, since it seems to hurt his pride so. His honor dragged in the mud! Absurd! This honor he talks so much about isn't going to pay your bills, and make your life worth living, is it? Selfish, my dear! That's the way with all men. They want everything, and are willing to give nothing. Even my poor, dear J. B., kind as he was, never understood me thoroughly. He seemed to think that I should humor him, and wait on him, just as though I hadn't any wifely rights at all. I tell you, Edith, husbands nowadays are getting to expect entirely too much. If they give you something to eat, and a place to sleep, they seem to think that they have done all that is required of them. I

wouldn't stand it, for one. I told your father he would have to give me what I was accustomed to, or I'd leave him. That's the way to treat a man, my child. Don't let Donald think you are a doormat."

Edith scarcely heard her mother's words as they rumbled on. Only one suggestion seemed good to her, and that was the latter's plan to go to New York and see Donald. She felt too ill, too greatly unnerved, to do so herself, and she was not yet ready to sacrifice all the material joys of her existence to bring about a reconciliation. Perhaps some compromise might be effected. At least her mother's visit would show Donald that she was ready to meet him on some common ground, whereas to ignore him altogether would but widen the breach between them. She consented, therefore, to her mother's going, and wrote a little note to Donald, begging him to forgive her, and to return to New London at once. Meanwhile her mother hastened away to prepare herself for the fray.

Alice came in early in the afternoon, and told her that Mr. Hall had proposed and that she had accepted him. "I don't know just what Emerson thinks," she said. "He hasn't mentioned the matter since, but I believe he half-suspects the truth. I've told him nothing, of course, except that you and Donald have had a quarrel, but that everything will be all right. He's acted so nicely about it all, though, that I think I'll tell him the truth. He's going up to town with us this afternoon. Oh, yes, I am going, too. Mother is likely to make a mess of everything. You know how she goes on, when she once gets started. I'm sure I'd better be on hand to steady her a bit. Donald is in no humor to be trifled with."

"No," murmured her sister; "he isn't. I never heard him speak so before. It was terrible."

Alice drew her mouth into a mirthless smile and regarded Edith critically. "I don't believe you know Donald as well as I do," she remarked at length. "You've always thought him quiet, and mild, and easy-going. You've even complained to me that he had no backbone—that he didn't master you. You once said you'd have cared for him more, if he had. You're like lots of women, Edith. You think because a man loves you, and treats you tenderly, he's weak. You'd rather be beaten than petted, I guess. Well, Sis—you've made a big mistake. Donald has always been like clay with you, because he loved you, but I guess the fire that you've started in him has burnt him hard. Don't imagine you can pull any wool over his eyes now. He's likely to give you the surprise of your life." She went over to the dressing-table and began to arrange her hair. "Emerson is going to take mother and me to dinner as soon as we get in town, and then we're going up to the apartment—about eight, I think. We won't be back until to-morrow."

"Oh—if you could only bring Bobbie back with you!"

"Not likely, Edith. Donald loves that child with the love of a strong, silent man, and he'll never give him up."

"But he's mine—mine."

"Not a bit more than he is Donald's. In fact, I rather think he has the law on his side, if you come to that."

Edith renewed her sobbing. "I don't know what to do—I can't let him stay there in town, in all the heat. It would kill him."

"Oh, no, it wouldn't. Bobbie isn't as frail as all that. Of course he'd be better off here, but I guess he'll survive."

"Then you do advise me to give up the money?" Edith's voice held a note almost of anger.

"Not at all. I advise you to give it to mother. That will satisfy everybody—especially mother."

"And you, I suppose," remarked Edith petulantly.

"Oh—I don't care a rap. I'm too happy, thinking about Emerson, to care about money. All that I ask is that you patch things up somehow, so as to avoid a scandal." She turned to go. "Just suppose, Edith, that Donald had been on the point of leaving you with some other woman, and the woman had died, and left him a fortune. Would you like to spend any of it? Think it over. Good-by, now. We've got to hurry, to make that train."

Mrs. Pope looked in for a moment on her way downstairs. "Cheer up, my dear," she said. "Don't let this thing worry you into a spell of sickness. I'll arrange everything. I'm going to let Donald see that he isn't the only one to be considered in this matter. The greatest good of the greatest number—that's my policy. I won't have any high-flown theatrical nonsense spoil your life."

"Mother," Edith called after her, "please be careful what you say." Mrs. Pope paid no attention to her. The militant-looking feather upon her large black hat wagged ominously as she strode down the stairs. "Idiot!"she muttered to herself. "Why can't he act like a sensible human being?"

Left to herself, Edith started once more the treadmill of thought which whirled around and around in a circle, and left her always just where she had begun. No matter how she strove to justify Donald in his anger, the dread specter of poverty grinned at her through all her arguments, and her resolutions fled. She looked about the room. The rose pink velvet carpet, the soft white bearskin rug beside the bed, the lovely wall paper, the exquisite hangings, the graceful mahogany furniture, all called to her compellingly. One of the maids, entering soft-footed, brought her some bouillon and the breast of a chicken, on a silver tray. The servant moved about noiselessly, pulling down the shades to shut out the afternoon sun. Edith drew her clinging silk night-dress about her throat, and sat up.

"Will madam have a glass of sherry?" the maid asked, as she removed an immense bunch of roses from the low wicker table, and placed the tray upon it.

Edith thought she would. Somehow, she was beginning to feel better. Her mother, with Alice's assistance, would doubtless arrange everything satisfactorily. After all, she had done no wrong. She ate the chicken with considerable relish and sent the maid for some fruit. How different all this was from the dingy, ill-smelling little apartment of the past, where half her life was spent over the gas range. It all seemed very far away from her, as she sank luxuriously back among the pillows and picked up a book she had been trying to read.

The book proved dull and uninteresting. In a little while she fell asleep. As she lay there, her firm round throat exposed, her lips, red and full, slightly parted over her small white teeth, she looked very alluring—very beautiful. The maid coming to the door, closed it softly, and went downstairs to discuss the scandal of Mr. Rogers' disappearance with Patrick and Fannie and the other servants. Over the whole house brooded the hot white silence of a mid-August day.

Chapter XVIII

It was close to midnight when Donald Rogers, with Bobbie asleep in his arms, reached the door of his apartment in One Hundred and Tenth Street. The little fellow had protested at first against this unexpected journey, but was too tired to give the matter much thought, and soon slipped away into the land of dreams, where he found himself gaily sailing his pony cart, which, strangely enough, seemed to resemble a sailboat, with the pony sitting beside him in a very dignified manner, acting as crew.

Donald himself spent a sleepless night. The cruel revelation of the treachery to which he had been subjected at the hands of his best friend, and, crowning this, the knowledge that his wife had been equally untrue, left him like a man shipwrecked on an island of desolation, with no one to whom he could turn for help or sympathy. He had trusted Edith implicitly—had given her the best there was in him all these years; and now it seemed that nothing but a cup of bitterness was to be his reward. The minutes dragged as though they were hours, and it seemed as though the dawn would never come. But at last the wretched night was over, and morning found him in the little kitchenette, trying painfully, with unaccustomed fingers, to prepare breakfast for Bobbie and himself.

Most of the day he spent with the child, wandering through the park, his thoughts never far removed from the tragic moments of the evening before. What would Edith do? was his incessant thought. He felt sure that she would come to him because of Bobbie, but he was by no means certain, realizing her innate vanity, that she would consent to give up the money which West had left her, in return for his forgiveness. On no other condition, however, would he treat with her. On this point he was fully determined.

The dusk of evening found Bobbie and himself dining solemnly together in a little restaurant at which he had been in the habit of getting his meals during the hot weather.

On their return to the apartment, Donald, avoiding Bobbie's questions as far as he could, regarding his mother's absence, sent the little fellow to his room, and sank into his accustomed seat by the desk, staring moodily into space. The sound of the buzzer in the kitchen, announcing that the janitor was ready to remove the garbage, brought him back with a sudden shock from his dreaming, and he began to realize his utter loneliness. He picked up a paper, and made an ineffectual attempt to read; but for some minutes was unable to concentrate his mind on the page before him. Presently there emerged from the maze of type the flaring headline:

DIVORCED AFTER TEN YEARS' MARRIED BLISS.
WIFE GETS CHILDREN—HUSBAND A SUICIDE.

He threw down the paper with a curse, and strode impatiently up and down the room, glancing from time to time at his watch. A faint voice from the bedroom door caused him to pause.

"Papa," it said.

He turned and saw Bobbie standing in the doorway. "Why don't you go to bed, Bobbie?" he exclaimed, almost irritably, but his manner changed as he observed the pathetic, appealing little figure. The child had taken off his blouse, and wore only his little undershirt and his shoes.

"Won't you take off my shoes, papa? I got them all tied in knots." He glanced reproachfully down at the cause of his trouble.

With a great pain gripping at his heart at the helplessness of the child, Donald came quickly forward, and, seating himself, placed the boy on his knee.

"We'll soon fix that, little man," he said, as he began to remove the shoes.

"Papa—where is mamma?"

"She's in the country, dear."

"When is she coming?"

"I don't know, Bobbie," he responded, with a heavy sigh. In his interest in the child he had for the moment almost forgotten the absence of his wife.

"Is she coming to-night, papa?" the little fellow continued tremulously.

"No, Bobbie, not to-night."

"Why isn't she, papa?" And then, after a short interval of puzzled reflection: "She belongs here, doesn't she?"

"She can't come to-night, my child. And you must be a good little fellow, and not ask papa any more about it. Now, it's time you went to sleep," he concluded, as he finished his task.

"Papa, are you angry with mamma?"

The childish question hurt him to the quick. "Don't bother your little head about it, my child. You wouldn't understand. Remember that she is your mother, and you must love her always."

"I do, papa. She got me my pony, and my boat, and lots of things. I wish she was here right now."

"You must be patient, dear, and go to sleep quietly, like a good boy. To-morrow I will get a nice, kind lady to take care of you."

"I don't want a nice, kind lady. I want my mamma. She always hears me say my Now-I-lay-me."

"Your what?" he asked, not understanding.

"My Now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep. That's my prayers. She always hears me say them when she comes to kiss me good-night."

He looked away, with a sudden rush of pain. There were tears in his eyes now. "Of course. Bobbie—I—I understand," he faltered.

"She said I must never, never skip, for the Lord would know, and be angry."

"Let me hear you, dear."

"Do you know prayers?" The child looked at his father in wonder. "I didn't know men knew prayers."

"Yes, Bobbie. Sometimes they do. Go ahead."

The child folded his hands, and stood at his father's knee. "If I don't remember it all, you must tell me," he continued.

"Very well, dear; I will." The tears were coming fast now.

"'Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to—to—'" The quavering little voice halted.

"'Keep,'" his father supplied.

"'Keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen.'" He looked at his father expectantly. "You didn't say, 'Amen,'papa. Mamma always says it."

"'Amen,'" repeated Donald gravely, as he kissed the boy's tousled head.

"Do you think, papa, if I pray the Lord to send mamma back, she will come?"

"I think she might, dear. When you go to bed, you must wish that she will just as hard as you can."

"And then to-morrow she will be here?" cried the child eagerly.

"I—I hope so, dear. Are you ready now?" He rose and led the little fellow toward the bedroom door.

"Yes, papa. I'm not afraid now. Good-night." He put up his face to be kissed.

"Good-night, dear." The father kissed him almost reverently, and, after the door was closed, stood for a long time gazing at it—his face twitching. Then he threw himself into a chair, rested his arms upon the desk, and buried his face in his hands, in a paroxysm of sobbing. It was the first time in many years that Donald Rogers had cried.

It was some ten minutes later that he was roused by the ringing of the door-bell. He rose, crossed to the door, and opened it, to admit Mrs. Pope and Alice.

Mrs. Pope advanced into the room with her accustomed air of ruffled dignity. "Donald—what does all this foolishness mean?" she inquired.

"I don't understand you," he answered shortly. "What do you want here?"

"Can you have the audacity to ask me that? I am here to protect my daughter's rights."

"Did she send you?" he asked quietly.

"I do not need anyone to send me when my child's happiness is at stake. What does this outrageous conduct mean?"

"Mother! For goodness sake, be a little more polite," interjected Alice.

"Alice, be quiet!" Her mother regarded her with stern disapproval. "This is no time for mincing matters." She turned angrily to her son-in-law."Do you intend to answer my question?"

Donald regarded her with a dislike he took no pains to hide. "I owe no explanation of my conduct to you," he said.

"Sir, do you think a mother has no rights?"

Again Alice interrupted. "Mother—wait—please." She stepped between them. "Edith is suffering very much, Donald."

"So am I," he remarked grimly.

"Then why don't you stop it?" Mrs. Pope was not to be put off. "What do you mean by dashing out of the house like a madman, kidnaping your child, and disgracing us all before a stranger? It's outrageous!"

"Disgracing you! What about my disgrace?" Donald turned from her and addressed himself to Alice. "Alice," he asked, "does your mother know why I left New London? Do you?"

"Yes—I—know what Emerson said."

Again Mrs. Pope interrupted. "I know that you accuse my daughter of carrying on a love-affair with Mr. West," she cried. "I don't believe it—but what of it? What if she did? You did precious little for her, goodness knows. Now that she has a little happiness, you want to take it away from her, just because you didn't give it to her. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I'll settle this matter with my wife—not with you." Donald's voice showed his irritation at her interference.

"Poor child! My poor child! Why will you not listen to reason?"

"I don't care to discuss the matter any further. Our ideas are too different on some subjects." He went over toward the desk, turning his back upon the others.

Mrs. Pope, however, refused to be turned aside. "I should hope they were," she asserted doggedly. "I didn't come here to discuss the matter, either. I came to ask you to come back to New London with Bobbie at once."

"What you ask is impossible," said Donald, without turning. "I shall never go back there again."

"What! After taking the house for the summer? What will everyone think?"

"It makes no difference to me what they think. It is what I think that concerns me now."

"You always did think of no one but yourself. Do you expect my daughter to spend the summer there alone? Can't you see that it is out of the question?" Mrs. Pope was shaking with rage.

"No," cried Donald, turning on her angrily. "I do not expect her to spend the summer there alone. I expect her to return here to me."

"To return here!" exclaimed Mrs. Pope, aghast. "To spend the summer in this place! Are you mad?"

"No—I am not. Sometimes I think money has made you so."

Mrs. Pope paid no attention to his words. She was too busy trying to grasp the full purport of what she had just heard. "What can you be thinking of?" she cried. "Spend the summer here—in this tenement—with thirty thousand dollars a year?"

Donald regarded her coldly. "My wife will not have thirty thousand dollars a year if she returns here," he said. "She will have what I am able to give her, and no more."

"Then what on earth will she do with her money?"

"I intend that she shall give it to charity."

"Charity! Doesn't charity begin at home? If you are mad enough to deprive her of it, she must give it to Alice and to me."

"Never—with my consent. That would be the same as if she had it herself."

"Half a million dollars! To charity! I shall use every effort to prevent her from making such a fool of herself. I insist that she give the money to Alice and me."

"Count me out, mother," exclaimed Alice, with a short laugh. "Emerson wouldn't let me touch a cent of it. He told me so."

"Does Mr. Hall know about this?" asked Donald suddenly.

"Of course he does. How could he help it? Do you suppose I could keep it from him, after what you did last night? Edith in hysterics—you and Bobbie gone—mother carrying on like a chicken with its head off. What could you expect?"

"And he refuses to let you have any share in this money?"

"I don't believe he'd marry me, if I had. Emerson's mighty independent. He says he has enough for both of us, and what he hasn't we'll do without."

"God bless him!" said Donald earnestly. "He's a man!"

"He's a fool," Mrs. Pope exclaimed angrily; "as big a one as you are."

Her words, her manner since entering the room, had slowly been causing Donald to lose his temper.

"No!" he blazed out, facing her. "You are the one who is a fool. What have you been drumming into your daughters' heads for years? Money! Money! Nothing but money! You would put up your children at auction, and sell them to the highest bidder, just for money. You come here and blame me for all this trouble, and you haven't sense enough to see that it is all your fault, and yours alone. Ever since Edith and I were married you have talked to her of nothing but my poverty, my shortcomings, my failures. You have preached discontent to her until she was ready to fall in love with the first man who came along with a little more money than I had. You are the cause of all this trouble—you, and nobody else. Don't come here and talk to me about my conduct. Try to be a little more careful of your own."

Mrs. Pope took out her handkerchief and applied it gently to her eyes."And is this the thanks I get, after all these years?" she said tearfully. Then she turned to Alice: "Are you against your poor sister, too?"

"No, I'm not. I want to see Edith happy, and I don't think she ever will be as long as she keeps a cent of this money. I know I advised her to keep it in the first place. I thought she could do lots of good with it. So she could, if Emerson hadn't put his foot in it. As it is, I don't see anything for her to do but give it up."

"You've changed a good deal, it seems to me," remarked her mother stiffly.

"I have. I've talked it over with Emerson."

"Emerson! Pooh!" Mrs. Pope gave an indignant snort.

"Never you mind about Emerson," said Alice with spirit. "He and I are going to find happiness in Chicago, in our own way. I know you don't like him, so perhaps it's just as well we are going to live a thousand miles off."

Mrs. Pope began to weep audibly. "Of all the thankless tasks," she groaned, "a mother's is the worst. Here I've spent twenty-five years in raising you girls, living for you, waiting on you, slaving for you; and, now, you turn on me like this. It's a shame—that's what it is—a shame! When my poor, dear J. B. was alive—"

"Never mind about that now, mother. We didn't come up here to have a family row. Let's see if we can't fix up this trouble between Donald and Edith." She turned to her brother-in-law with a look of deep concern."Mother insisted upon this interview, Donald. I told her it would do no good."

"Not if Donald insists upon making beggars of us all," Mrs. Pope interrupted tearfully.

Alice took no notice of her interruption. "You got Edith's note?" she continued.

"Yes."

"Are you going to her?"

"No. She must come to me. You can tell her so. But I insist upon seeing her alone." He glanced significantly at Mrs. Pope.

"I shall not inflict my company upon you any longer, Mr. Rogers,"exclaimed the latter indignantly. "Good-night!" She swept toward the door. Alice followed her.

"Good-night, Donald," Alice said, as she left the room. "I hope you and Edith will come to some sort of an agreement. Remember Bobbie."

Left alone, Donald went slowly over to the chair in which he had been sitting, and, stooping, gathered up Bobbie's little shoes and stockings, and placed them gently within the bedroom. Then he began to pace endlessly up and down the floor.

Chapter XIX

On the following morning Donald Rogers determined to go down to Mr. Brennan's office and have a talk with him. As the executor of West's estate, as well as Mrs. Rogers' attorney, he felt that the lawyer might be able to suggest a basis for an understanding of some sort between Edith and himself. Bobbie he took to his own office and left in the care of his draughtsman. The child was delighted, and spent the morning drawing ships and dogs and many other things upon a great sheet of cardboard with which the latter provided him.

Mr. Brennan was luckily in. Perhaps he suspected the object of Donald's visit—at any rate he received him at once, dismissed the stenographer who had been taking notes at his side, and waved his caller to a chair.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Rogers," he began. "How is Mrs. Rogers? I trust she is enjoying her stay at the seashore."

"Mrs. Rogers is very well." Donald nervously began to light a cigar, fumbling with the matches awkwardly in his agitation. Now that he was with Mr. Brennan, he felt at a loss to know how to begin.

"Let me see. You are at New London, are you not? Beautiful old place. I spent a summer there, once. You go down for the week ends, I presume."

Donald ceased his efforts to light the cigar, threw the box of matches, which Mr. Brennan had handed him, upon the desk, and looked up.

"Yes. I was there on Saturday. I left Saturday night. I had a disagreement with Mrs. Rogers. That's what I came to see you about."

Mr. Brennan raised his eyebrows, put on his glasses slowly, and inspected his caller with deliberate care. "I'm very sorry to hear it, Mr. Rogers," he said. "Nothing serious, I trust?"

"I'm afraid it is—very."

"Hm-m. Dear me! And what can I do in the matter?"

"You are a friend of both Mrs. Rogers and myself. I want your advice. I want you to see her—to talk to her."

"What's the trouble?" Brennan sat back in his chair, prepared to listen, with a grave suspicion in his mind as to the cause of Donald's heavy eyes and careworn face.

"Before I can discuss the matter with you, Mr. Brennan, I want to ask you one question."

"Yes? What is it?"

"Do you know why West left his money to my wife?"

"My dear sir. That is a very peculiar question. How should I know?"

"You were the executor of his will."

"Undoubtedly. Yet I fail to see what that has to do with it."

"You must have seen his papers—his letters." Donald looked at the lawyer intently. "Answer me frankly, Mr. Brennan. Do you know?"

"Surely, Mr. Rogers, you can hardly expect me to answer such a question, even granting that I could do so."

"Why not?"

"As executor of Mr. West's will, it is certainly not my business to discuss the reasons which may have prompted him to make it."

Donald rose and went over to the lawyer. "Mr. Brennan," he cried, "don't try to quibble with me. I have asked you a plain, blunt question. You are under no obligation to answer it, of course, but, until you do so, we can proceed no further."

"I always supposed it was because he was very fond of her," ventured the lawyer uneasily.

"Fond of her! Yes! But how, Mr. Brennan? How?"

"They were very old friends, were they not?"

"Were they nothing more?" Donald leaned over the desk and fixed his eyes keenly upon those of the man opposite him. He felt the blood surging to his temples. "Why don't you answer me, Mr. Brennan?" he went on, as the lawyer dropped his eyes. "Were they nothing more?"

His searching questions began to annoy the lawyer. "Why do you ask me such a question, Mr. Rogers?" he snapped.

"Only to find out how much you know. Mrs. Rogers has confessed everything to me. You can do her no harm by telling me the truth, and you will make it much easier for us to go ahead. Do you know?"

"Yes," Brennan answered at length, in a low voice.

"How?"

"All the letters your wife wrote to West came to me along with his other papers."

Donald recoiled in bitterness of spirit. However certain he had been of Edith's guilt, he still hoped that Mr. Brennan, in some way, might disclose mitigating circumstances, facts of which he himself was not cognizant, whereby her affair with West might present an appearance less damning.

"My God!" he muttered. "And you read them?"

"Yes. I considered it my duty to examine all his papers."

"How did you know they were from my wife?"

"By her initials, signed to them—by the handwriting."

"And you have known this all these months, and said nothing?" Donald strode to the window and looked out. The North River, quivering in the hot sunlight, was a clutter of barges, tugs and ferry-boats, but his eyes, blurred with tears, saw nothing. Presently he turned. "Where are those letters now?" he asked.

"I do not know. I gave them to Mrs. Rogers. I advised her to destroy them. I presume she has done so."

An angry light crept into Donald's eyes. "You had no right—" he began hotly.

Mr. Brennan raised his hand. "You are in error, Mr. Rogers. I had every right. The letters belonged to your wife, by law. Mr. West left her everything he possessed."

"What did she say to him?" He strode excitedly toward the desk. "Tell me, man. Can't you see what it means to me?"

"They were the letters of a weak, foolish woman, Mr. Rogers—not a bad one—of that I am sure."

"Not a bad one? You mean—?"

"I mean, Mr. Rogers, that whatever your wife may have intended to do—however far she may have intended to go—West's death saved her from the one step which the world considers unforgivable."

"I hope you are right—God knows I hope you are right."

"I am sure that I am. Now tell me what has happened."

"I have left my wife. I have left her, and taken my boy."

"Well—now that you have taken that step, what do you propose to do next?"

"I don't know. That is what I want to discuss with you. It is a terrible situation. I scarcely know which way to turn. She has sent me a letter, asking me to see her. I have agreed to do so—to-day. What I shall say to her I do not know. Within the past forty-eight hours I have had every good and kind and generous impulse within me shattered and destroyed. The friend that I loved and trusted has betrayed me. The wife for whom I would have given my life has proven disloyal—false. My self-respect is gone. My home is a wreck. The money that keeps it up comes from a man who did his best to ruin me." He began to walk about, distracted, his voice choking with feeling. "Is it any wonder that I feel bitter? Is it any wonder that I do not know what to do?"

The lawyer removed his glasses and considered them carefully for a long time. The problem was indeed a serious one.

Presently he spoke. "The first consideration, of course, is your child."

"I know it. I have taken him from his mother. He wants her—needs her. Have I the right to deprive him of her love?"

"Not unless she has proven herself unworthy of it."

"Hasn't she? Is a woman who is unfaithful to her husband—who is willing to live on the money given her by the man who made her so—is such a woman fit to bring up a child—to teach him to be straightforward, and honest, and good?"

"You use strong terms, Mr. Rogers. As I said before, I do not believe your wife has been unfaithful to you."

"I do not refer to any specific act. Unfaithfulness is not alone a physical thing. She has fallen in love with another man. She has agreed to abandon her husband, and run away with him. She was willing to sacrifice even her child, by robbing him of his father. In one week more, but for this man's death, she would have done all these things. Is not such a woman unfaithful? Is not that enough? Could any one act have made her more so? If your wife were to do these things, would you not call her unfaithful?"

"You refuse to forgive her, then?"

"No. I do not refuse to forgive her. I have told her that I am ready to do so, on one condition."

"What is that condition, Mr. Rogers?"

"That she give up this man's money."

"Has she agreed?"

"No. She has refused."

"Why do you insist on that?"

"Is it possible that you do not understand? What else can I do? If she returns to me, it must be with clean hands."

"You ask a great deal, Mr. Rogers. It seems to me that your chances for happiness would be a great deal better, if you were to let her keep this money."

"Man—do you realize what you are saying? Isn't there a greater question at stake than just my happiness? Isn't it right? Isn't it her duty? Isn't it necessary to her own self-respect? I cannot see how she could hesitate for a moment."

"Then you do not understand women. There are not many of them, situated as she is, who could resist the temptation of thirty thousand dollars a year."

"Then you defend her, Mr. Brennan. I did not expect it from you. I had hoped you would see her—talk to her—show her what a terrible mistake she is making."

The lawyer rose, and began to walk up and down in deep thought. All his life, he had been concerned with the one idea, the one duty—that of preserving for his clients every dollar that the law allowed them. Money in a way had become almost sacred to him. Other points of view seemed foolish, quixotic. "I'm a cold-blooded, practical man, Mr. Rogers. Life as I have seen it has not made me sentimental. Lawyers rarely are. Half a million dollars is a large sum of money. It means freedom from all the wretched, grinding cares of existence, that fret out one's soul. Few things in life make much difference, after all, if one has a comfortable bank-balance. You ask your wife to give up all that this money means, and come back to poverty—comparatively speaking at least. It is a hard question for any woman to decide—a mighty hard question."

"You are wrong. You judge from the cynical, money-getting standpoint of Broadway. There are bigger and finer and nobler things in the world than money. It's the right of the thing that counts."

"Perhaps it is, Mr. Rogers, but most women don't look at things that way. They are creatures of impulse. Logic is not their strong point. You expect too much of your wife. I have known a great many women—in my time—and my experience is that the best of them have their price." He noticed Donald's dissenting gesture, but waved his interruption aside."Don't misunderstand me. I do not necessarily mean in a wrong way. It may be a title, or a million, with some—with others the price of a meal, or a lodging for the night. The man who expects too much of women is bound to be disappointed. Let your wife keep this money. With it she will be happy—contented. Without it, she will be miserable. She has tasted the pleasures of wealth—now—and her old life will seem doubly distasteful to her. Don't be unreasonable. Remember that after all, she is, like most women, a good deal of a child."

Donald took up his hat, and his face showed the disappointment he felt."Mr. Brennan," he said, "I'm sorry I can't think as you do. I was brought up to know the difference between right and wrong, and I haven't forgotten it. It would be impossible—absolutely impossible—for me to share in any way in this money, or to let my boy do so. On that point I am determined."

Brennan looked grave, and regarded Donald with cynical compassion. "I'm sorry to hear it, Mr. Rogers. In that case I do not see that I can be of any service to you."

"Then you won't undertake to see Mrs. Rogers, and convince her of her mistake?"

"I do not think it will have any result. You are very young yet, Mr. Rogers. You look at this thing entirely too seriously."

Donald turned away with a great sense of bitterness, of injustice, in his heart. "My God!" he cried. "How can you say such a thing? There is only one way to look at it, and that is the right way. In your heart, you know it. Don't you suppose it would be the easiest way, for me to take this money? Isn't there every reason why I should? My wife—my child—my business interests, all urge me to accept it—to make of myself that most contemptible thing in the world—a man who is willing to live on a woman—to share with her what she has got from her lover. You know what they call such creatures. You know that no decent, self-respecting man could do what you have advised me to do. I value my wife—my home, more than most men do—I have given them the best I had in me—but one thing I value even more than them, and that is my self-respect. I have not made a great success in life, in a material way, but what I have made, I have made honestly. I have always been able to look the world squarely in the face, without feeling ashamed, and I propose to keep on doing so. Advise my wife as you please. Her mother and sister are with you. But I want you to understand—the whole lot of you—that she need not expect me to forgive her, and take her back, so long as she keeps a dollar of this man's money, for I won't do it—by God, I won't do it!" He flung angrily toward the door.

Mr. Brennan stared at him for a moment, then reached out his hand. "Mr. Rogers," he said, "your views may not be practical, and they may not bring you happiness, but, by God, sir, I respect you for them. Good-day."

Donald went back to his office like a man who has met a crushing blow, but met it undaunted. He found Bobbie, tired of his pencil and paper, looking out of the window at the boats on the river, and wailing for his mother.

The father disposed of his mail while the boy played about his desk, gave his assistant a few instructions, and, with Bobbie holding his hand, once more started up-town. On the way, he bought the child some little chocolate cigars, thereby lulling him into temporary forgetfulness of his mother's absence. Life seemed all of a sudden to have become very gray and bitter.

One ray of light, however, pierced the overshadowing gloom. Forbes, his partner in the glass-plant venture, had wired Donald from Parkersburg that he had succeeded in securing from some bankers there the necessary money to tide over the crisis in the company's affairs. Several large orders had come in also. It appeared certain that they would be able to weather the storm. The good news seemed trifling, somehow, in his present state of mind, but it was something, and for the moment he felt grateful.

Chapter XX

Edith Rogers came to see her husband, probably less inclined toward the sacrifice upon which he insisted than she had been when he left her the Saturday before. Her heart had ached to see her boy, but she felt a growing resentment toward Donald, for what she felt was his hard-heartedness. Her feelings in this

direction had been fanned to a flame by the arguments of her mother, who had succeeded in persuading her that what Donald asked was unreasonable and wrong. She knew that the affair between West and herself had not gone to the ultimate lengths that Donald evidently suspected—she did not stop to consider that in all else but this one thing she had been utterly faithless, and that even this step she would have taken, had not death intervened and saved her. Being a woman, she could not put herself in Donald's place, and understand the brutal way in which his feelings had been outraged by the treachery of the two persons on earth whom he had most loved andtrusted—his wife and his friend. Hence it was in no spirit of repentance that she entered the little room in which she had spent so many weary hours, but rather as one who came to demand her rights.

Her mother had returned from New York furious with Donald, and determined to use every means in her power to prevent a reconciliation between him and Edith. Her carefully detailed description of the reception which her son-in-law had given her, a description which lost nothing by reason of the fury into which Mrs. Pope had succeeded in working herself, made Edith realize fully that Donald was very much in earnest, and not at all likely to return to her, however long she might wait for him to do so.

There was clearly but one thing to do: she must go to him, and endeavor to show him the cruelty, the unreasonableness, of his attitude. Something in the firm stand which he had taken compelled her admiration; even while it dealt a blow to her pride. She had never known Donald to be like this before—he had always humored her, always been apologetic, regretful because he was unable to gratify her every desire. She longed for the moment to come, when she might see him and Bobbie again, and determined to use every power of attraction she possessed to bring him to her way of thinking. It had been easy in the past—her tears, her reproaches, had usually brought him contritely to her feet.

Mrs. Pope, in her anger, attempted to dissuade Edith from this intention. "I shouldn't go near him, my dear," she said, her eyes snapping. "Let him stay there alone for a week or two, with Bobbie to look after. That will bring him to his senses." Edith, however, would not listen to her. "I shall go, mother," she said. "After all, Donald has been pretty badly treated. I never should have acted as I did. I mean to do my best to let him see that I care for him just as much as I ever did. Of course, he must be reasonable, too. I'm not going to give up this money. He ought not to ask it."

Alice had been listening to the conversation between her mother and sister in gloomy silence. Mr. Hall had decided to move to the hotel for the remainder of his stay, and she was annoyed to think that all her plans had been upset. "What's the use of deluding yourself, Edith," she remarked pointedly. "Donald will make you give up that money as sure as fate. I never saw him so angry."

"Alice, you talk like a fool," said her mother. "How can he make her give it up? He's hardly likely to use a club."

"Wouldn't be a bad idea," Alice flung at them, as she left the room."Edith has needed one, for some time." Mrs. Pope was aghast. "Sometimes, Edith," she confided to the latter, "I think Alice is losing her mind."Edith was not so sure. She had always had great faith in her sister's judgment, and the latter's remark worried her.

There was one way, she concluded, and only one, to deal with Donald. She must make herself as attractive, as alluring, as possible. When she dressed herself, the following afternoon, for her trip to the city, she put on her most becoming gown, her most effective hat. She prepared herself with the greatest care. Her maid spent most of the forenoon getting her ready, manicuring her nails, washing and drying her hair, massaging her face, doing everything, in fact, that might be done to enhance her physical charms. She knew she had always been a beautiful woman—she was sure, when she glanced at herself in the cheval glass in her bedroom, that she had never appeared to greater advantage. It did not occur to her that she might make a better impression upon her husband in the sober garb of repentance. She wanted to attract him, to charm him, to force him to desire her so greatly that he would make any sacrifice in order to bring her to his arms.

In all this she showed her lack of understanding of Donald's character. Everything she wore, from her dainty suÃ¨de slippers to her costly hat, she owed to West. The jewels she wore had been purchased with his money. The gold purse which dangled so carelessly from her wrist, accompanied by an array of pencils, vanity boxes and fashionable gew-gaws, his wealth alone had made possible. Had she but appreciated it, everything about her was calculated to send Donald into a storm of rage, rather than to attract him and bring him submissively to her feet.

Mrs. Pope nodded proudly as her daughter came down the stairs. "You look stunning, dear—a wife of whom any man might be proud. Don't give in an inch. You have right on your side, and it only requires a little courage to win." She settled herself comfortably in her chair. "Would you mind ringing for Richards, my dear? I must have a refreshing drink of some sort. This heat is positively unbearable."

The ride to town was hot and uncomfortable. Edith, on her arrival, went at once to a hotel near the station and ordered dinner. She did not feel particularly hungry—she was too nervous and excited for that; but she felt the need of something to sustain her throughout the trying ordeal which, she knew, lay before her. Then, too, she had at least two hours to wait, before eight o'clock, at which time she felt that Donald would have finished his dinner and be ready to receive her.

She drove up-town, after her meal, in a taxicab, and arrived at the Roxborough a little before eight. The tawdry entrance to the place, with its imitation marbles and imitation palms, sent a shiver of apprehension through her. God, to come back to a place like this! It was not to be thought of. In this frame of mind she ascended in the elevator, and in a moment stood before the doorway to their apartment. Everything seemed the same—even the crack in the tinted plaster to the left of the door, the smell of gas and cooking, the flickering gas jet in the hall. She realized their familiarity, yet she might have been away for ages, so far removed from her present life did they seem.

Donald opened the door, and quietly closed it after her, welcoming her with grave politeness.

"Donald!" she cried, as he came toward her. "Where is Bobbie?"

"In his room," he replied.

"I want to see him."

"He's asleep."

He gazed at her exquisite pongee gown, her costly hat, the lace coat she carried upon her arm, and frowned.

"How could you take the poor child away like that? It must have broken his heart to leave all his things—his pony, and his boat, and all. Is he well? Have you taken good care of him? You know how careful I always am about what he has to eat."

Donald's frown deepened. "Bobbie is very well," he said slowly. "It seems to me there is a bigger question between us than that."

"Can there be any bigger question than Bobbie?" she asked.

He gazed at her for a few moments in moody silence. "Did you come here to tell me that?" he presently asked.

"No, Donald. I came to ask your forgiveness."

"You know the conditions under which I will discuss the matter," he interrupted.

"Yes. You blame me for taking this money. You want me to give it up. Don't you know that all I have done has been for him?" She glanced significantly toward the door of the bedroom.

Donald stood for a moment in silence. He felt in this woman no sense of sorrow, of repentance, but only a stubborn insistence upon what she considered her rights.

"Was it for him that you agreed to abandon your home, your husband, and run away with another man?" he asked bitterly.

She reproached him, pleading with her eyes, her voice."Oh—don't—don't!" she cried. "Can't you forgive me? Can't you?"

"Not until you show yourself worthy of forgiveness. You belong to him as long as you accept his money."

She came up to him, her hands outstretched. "Donald!" she cried. "That is what I want to talk to you about. I have been a very foolish woman. I have done things that I can never forgive myself for as long as I live. I am bitterly—bitterly—sorry. If it were not for our boy, I would go away, and never trouble you again. I have been a miserable fool, and I cannot blame you if you hate and despise me. I threw away everything that was dear to me for nothing—nothing! Now I know that it is your love and my boy's that I want more than anything in the world. But, Donald, what has this money to do with what I have done? Will it make it any the less wrong, to give it up? If you are really willing to give me another chance, can't you do it without bringing this question of money into the matter? Can't you do it because I am sincerely, honestly repentant; because I love you, and want your love, your forgiveness so much—so very much?" She put her hand upon his arm, and there were tears in her eyes. "Donald, listen to me, please—won't you?"

"If you had come here in the same poor things you wore before all this happened," he said, turning coldly from her, "it would be easier for me to forget. What do you mean by flaunting this man's money in my face, with your jewels—your finery?" He looked at her, and a feeling almost of disgust crept over him. "Can't you see that everything about you reeks of him?"

"Oh, Donald," she cried, "don't be angry with me—please don't. I didn't think about my clothes—indeed, I didn't." She seemed unable to understand that it was not her clothes he objected to, but what they represented.

"You mean you did not think about my feelings. You never do think about the things that count."

She turned away from him, sobbing. "Oh, don't! How can you say such things to me? Isn't it the repentance of my heart that counts?"

"If there were any real repentance in your heart," he said, "you would put those things from you as though they were polluted." He began to walk up and down the room, unable to contain his anger.

Edith saw that upon the one point—that of West's money—he was inflexible. She looked up with an air of resignation. "Very well," she said suddenly. "I will do as you ask. I will give up this money. I will never touch another penny of it as long as I live, but I want it put aside for Bobbie."

"Never!" he cried angrily.

He had thought, when she began to speak, that she had yielded; her concluding words told him that she was only quibbling.

"Donald, you can't mean what you say. Think of his future!"

"I don't want to argue the question," he exclaimed impatiently. "You know perfectly well I will never consent to what you ask. It's contemptible."

Again she began to sob. "How can you be so cruel? How can you?" she moaned.

"Isn't it true?" he replied indignantly.

"It doesn't make any difference how you hurt me—I know I deserve it—but you shall not take this chance away from my boy. It isn't right! it isn't fair! Hurt me all you want to, revenge yourself upon me to the best of your ability, but don't take it out on him. I am fighting for his happiness, and I intend to give it to him."

"Then you are going about it in a very strange way. Let him grow up and go out into the world with clean hands and a clear conscience; let himknow that truth, and right, and honor are more important than all the money in the world, and I'll answer for his happiness."

"He need never know," she began.

"You know, and I know. I refuse to degrade myself, even for his sake."

"There is nothing I would not do for his sake."

"Nothing! The very first thing is to give up this shameful inheritance, and you refuse to do it."

"It is for his sake that I refuse."

Donald turned away from her. There seemed no use in trying to appeal to her sense of right.

"Donald," she began again, "if you will not let Bobbie have the money, then give it to my mother."

"No, I won't do it, and I have told her so. Even your sister, it seems, has decency enough to see that I am right."

"If Alice had been married eight years, and had a child, she might feel differently."

"I hope not," he said, without looking at her.

Edith threw herself disconsolately into a chair. "You make everything so hard—so very hard," she cried. "Is there nothing I can say that will move you? Is your business in West Virginia nothing to you? Tell me, Donald, are you willing to see that fail?"

He turned on her, indignant. "I did not think you would come here and taunt me with that! Let it fail—a thousand times; let every cent I have in it go, rather than owe its success to him!"

"How can you be so bitter?"

"Haven't you done enough to make me so?"

"If this business does fail, what then?"

He swept his hand about the room. "This," he said. "Whatever I have—however little it may be—as long as it is honest."

She followed his gaze and shivered, as though the place chilled her."And you expect me to come back to such a life?" she asked bitterly.

"If you come back at all—yes."

"To cook, and scrub, and scrape, and save, and wear out my life like a servant! Ugh!" She shuddered.

"So it was yourself you were thinking of, after all," he cried scornfully. "After what you have done, you ought to thank God for the chance."

She got up and approached him, holding out her hands appealingly. "Oh, Donald—Donald!" she cried. "Please don't make me do this—please don't. I can't stand it—indeed, I can't."

"I do not make you do it," he answered her. "I do not even ask you to do it. You know the conditions under which you can return here. Do as you please."

"Can't you show a little generosity? I had hoped to come to you and talk over our affairs in a friendly spirit."

"There is nothing to talk over. You know your duty. There is only one question, and that question is, are you going to do it?"

She stood for a long time, as though unable to make up her mind. Suddenly she put the whole thing aside. "It is too big a question to decide off-hand," she said, walking away from him, her hands clenched."Donald—" she turned—"I want to see Bobbie." She took a step toward the bedroom door.

Donald stepped in front of her, blocking the way. "No!" he cried passionately. "No!"

"Donald! Don't!" she exclaimed, alarmed at his manner.

"You cannot come in here."

"I cannot see my own child? You dare tell me that?"

"Yes. You shall not see him. You shall not go near him, until you agree to do as I say."

"You shall not do this!" she cried, her eyes blazing. "It is wrong—wrong!"

"Then come to your senses."

"Is it possible that you could be so cruel?" she asked slowly. "Is it possible that you could deprive that innocent child of his mother's love?"

"It is you who are depriving him of it—not I."

"Have you thought what it will mean, if you do this thing? Don't you know that it will break his heart? Night after night he will cry for me—for his mother—and you cannot comfort him, and all through the long days he will want me, and ask for me, and will not understand. You talk about giving him truth, and right, and honor. What are those things to him, compared to a mother's love? You shall not come between me and my boy—you shall not—you shall not!" She concluded with

a burst of hysterical sobbing, then again started toward the bedroom. "Open that door!" she demanded. "Open it, I say! I want my boy!"

Donald did not move. "No," he said quietly. "Bobbie stays here with me."

"You cannot take him from me. The law will not allow you." Her face blazed with angry defiance.

"I am not taking him from you. Your home is here. It is the best that I can provide. If you are not satisfied with it—if you leave it—you leave me and your child as well. No law can give him back to you."

She had grown furiously angry by this time. "Do you think you can force me to do as you wish through my love for my child?" she cried.

"I am not trying to force you to do anything," he replied. "You came here. I did not ask you to come. Whether you stay or not depends entirely upon yourself. The decision is yours."

She turned quickly to the chair, and picked up her coat and purse.

"Very well," she said bitterly. "If you can be determined, so can I. I shall demand my child in court. We shall see who has the better right to him."

"You would not dare."

"You shall see." She started toward the door.

"You are making a terrible mistake," he warned her.

She paused, turning to him. "No," she said slowly. "It is you who are making the mistake. I came here with nothing but love, and sorrow, and regret in my heart. You have turned them all to hate, with your cruelty—your brutality. You have tried to hurt me through my love for my little boy, and I hate you for it—I hate you!" She swept toward the door, weeping hysterically.

"I have asked you to do nothing but what is right, and you know it."

"No—I do not know it. Is it right to keep me from my child? Is it right to ask me to sacrifice his whole future? If that is right—I want none of it." She placed her hand upon the door-knob, and turned it. Donald followed her, an ominous look in his eyes. "Edith—where are you going?"he demanded.

"I am going back to New London. If you have any regard for me, if you have any regard for your child, you will come to me there." She threw the door open, and stood upon the threshold.

Donald approached her still more closely. "If you go out of that door, you go out of my life forever," he said sternly. "I shall never come to you—of that you may be sure."

"Very well—you—you brute!" she cried, and turned to go.

"Stop!" he cried, springing toward her.

"No. You have gone too far." She swept into the hall.

He took her roughly by the arm. "Come back here," he cried, beside himself with fury. "Since you say I am a brute, I will act like one." He pulled her forcibly into the room and slammed the door.

"Don't," she cried, resisting him. "Oh! You are hurting me—Donald!" She looked at him in wonder.

"Be quiet!" he said. "I am not hurting you half so much as you are hurting me. I have told you what you must do, and you have got to do it."

"What do you want with me?" she cried, still struggling with him. "Let go my arm—let go of me, I tell you! I want to go! Oh!"

"You shall not go."

"I will! You have no right to keep me here."

"Be quiet, I say." He forced her toward the center of the room.

She burst into tears. "How dare you treat me like this?" she cried. "How dare you? Are you mad?"

"If I am, it is you who have made me so," he said, in a fury. "You talk about love, and repentance, and you come here and insult and humiliate me with every word you say—with everything about you. Whom do you have to thank for that dress, that coat, those diamonds, that jeweled purse, and the money in it? West! West! West!" He swept upon her a look that made her eyes fall. "I tell you I won't have it—do you understand? I won't have it!"

She stared at him in absolute amazement, and, with her wonder there came a feeling of admiration, almost, at his mastery of her. Never before, in all the eight years of their married life, had she seen him as he was now—never before had he dominated her. She felt a child in his grasp, and in some strange way her anger began to leave her, and a sense almost of gladness at this primitive method of dealing with the problem which confronted them swept over her.

"Donald," she called softly to him. "Donald!" but he did not hear her.

"You are my wife—mine, do you hear?" he cried, then tore from her arm the jeweled purse, and flung it violently from him. "Take off those things—take them off! The sight of them insults me!" He grasped the lace coat she held over her arm, and threw it aside. "He gave you this necklace—damn him!" he cried, tearing it from her neck, and throwing it upon the floor.

She looked up at him, amazed. "Donald—listen to me—please!" she cried.

He paid no attention to her. "Do as I tell you," he commanded. "Take off that stuff—take it off!"

She tremblingly removed from her fingers a diamond and ruby ring, and another of pearls, which her mother had persuaded her to buy.

"Give them to me." He took the rings, and hurled them across the room.

"Donald, how can you treat me like this?" she protested weakly.

"I shall treat you as I like. Henceforth I am master in this house."

"You have no right—" she began.

He took her by the arm, and flung her to the floor. "Get down on your knees," he said, "and thank God that you have your husband, and your child, and a roof above your head."

She looked up at him in wonder. He seemed no longer the kind and patient husband whom she had held in secret contempt because of what had seemed to her his lack of force—of spirit. Here was a man who meant to be obeyed.

"And, when you have done so," she heard him saying, "ask Him to help you to be worthy of them. God knows you need it." He stood over her, looking down at her with fierce determination.

She caught his glance, and her eyes fell. "You—you won't let me go?"she faltered.

"No. Your place is here, and here you shall stay. I have stood all of this folly that I intend to stand."

She buried her face in the pillows of the couch beside which she was kneeling, and lay thus for a long time, shaking with sobs. Into her mind had come a new

emotion—a new understanding of her love for her husband. Always before he had failed to master her, to make her feel that in the conjunction of their two lives he was the dominant spirit, willing even to govern her by force, when force seemed necessary to her welfare. What had changed him so? What had caused him to keep her here, at his side, against her will? What, indeed, but his love for her? She knew it was that, knew that, had he been indifferent to her, he would have let her pass from his life without lifting a hand to prevent it. A fierce joy rose within her heart that this man desired her so greatly—that he held her, as the primitive man held his women, by the right of might. She wanted all the luxuries that had come to her—wanted them still, but, compared with the joy of realizing that Donald still loved her, they seemed as nothing.

So he had held her—meant to hold her, against everything in the world—against even herself, and her own folly. She rejoiced in the thought, and her sobbing ceased. After all—he—he and her little boy—were more to her than anything that money could buy. Had Donald temporized with her—allowed her to keep the money that had come to her, she knew in her heart that she would have secretly despised him, that in the end she would have ceased to love him. It seemed good to be home again—good to be alive. She had always wanted someone to rule her—she felt strangely humble, knowing her own weakness. Presently she raised her head, and found him standing beside her. With a swift, eager movement she grasped his hand.

"I'm so—very—very glad!" she sobbed, unable to keep back her tears. "I did not—want—to go. I never—never—want to—go away from you—again."She looked up, her eyes shining. "Donald—do you—still care for—me—a little?" she asked, in a quavering voice. "Do you?"

Donald's sudden burst of rage had gone. He stood looking at her with a deep sadness in his eyes. After all, she seemed so much a child. "Do you think I would take the trouble to keep you here, if I did not?" he asked.

She began to sob violently. "Donald—forgive me—forgive me!" she cried."I shall—never go away from you—and—Bobbie—as—long—as—I live."

Illustration:
„You—you won‘t let me go?“ she faltered

He looked down, not understanding this sudden change in her. "I have kept you here for the sake of our boy," he said slowly, "and here you must stay. But, for your sake and mine, independent of him, you must answer me one question. Were you West's mistress?"

She started to her feet, and dashed the tears from her eyes. "No!" she cried. "Before God—no! I was just as bad, I know, for I intended to be, but that one thing I had not done."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Oh, Donald, I am—I am!" she cried hysterically.

"Then there is still a chance for you, and for me," he said, his face lighting up with sudden joy.

"Donald!" she cried; "Donald!" and tried to smile through her tears. As she spoke, the door of the bedroom opened, and she heard a childish voice. "Mamma!" it said, and Bobbie rushed up to her, and threw his arms about her.

She reached down and clasped him to her breast. "My darling—my darling!" she cried, as she kissed him.

"Mamma—I'm so glad you've come. I had such awful dreams. I dreamed that you and papa were fighting, and I came and called, and you wouldn't listen to me."

"Never mind, precious. It's all right now," she said, soothing him.

"Papa told me if I prayed very hard for you to come back, you would—and you did, didn't you, mamma?"

"Yes, dear," she said; then looked toward her husband, and smiled happily.

"And you won't ever go away and leave me any more, mamma?"

"No, Bobbie—never more." She rose, and, tearing off her hat, flung it carelessly aside, then went up to her husband, holding out her hands."Donald," she said, "I am ready to do anything you wish—anything." She appeared very happy, and looked at him with a new and almost girlish embarrassment.

He held out his arms, and took her to his heart. "Edith!" he said; then softly kissed her hair.