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THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

JAMES BARNES

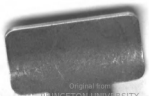
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The CLUTCH *of* CIRCUMSTANCE



“You are a very happy man—aren't you?”

[Page 10.]

The CLUTCH *of*
CIRCUMSTANCE

By

JAMES BARNES

Author of

“Outside the Law”



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1908

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TO SOMEONE
TO WHOM I TOLD THIS STORY LONG AGO
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

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THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

CHAPTER I

THE REUNION

I CONFESS you surprised me. But I see how it is—the big cities no longer tempt you,” observed the Rev. Franklin Bellwood, glancing out of the window as he toyed with the worn string of his eyeglasses. Then, abruptly and somewhat absently, he added: “My! but it is hot to-day! Eh? Very close and hot!”

The little front garden back of the evergreens exhaled a moist fragrance—bees hummed everywhere. The sunlight was sifting through the vines into the rectory study, scents of box hedge and honeysuckle mingling with the odors of old books and tobacco smoke.

“Well, the cities didn’t tempt you when you became a country parson,” returned the occupant of the armchair, ignoring the reference to the weather, “and you see a doctor has an advantage, in a place where he enjoys a fairly good reputation to begin with. Besides,” he continued, pausing an instant thoughtfully, “you know my position, Frank; it isn’t money that I am after—only a chance to settle down in a place where I hope to be contented and incidentally, perhaps, to be useful. I’ve had enough of big cities!”

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The minister, who had turned to the window once more, half rose suddenly and sat down again. Throughout the interview he had shown signs of extreme nervousness. Two or three times his friend had looked at him with the quick glance of the physician who is making a clandestine diagnosis of a patient's condition. Now, as there was no reply, he put his train of thought into words.

"Frank," he went on, "you've been working too hard—I know you like a book—you keep things too close to you. You should let go now and then. How many times I longed to have you with me in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, or London! The old firm together: 'Bellwood & Kellogg'! Remember when we burned our names into the door at college?"

"I remember that you did and paid all damages," responded the minister with an attempted smile.

"Rather a neat job; I was quite proud of it! It seems long ago that we parted company, doesn't it?"

"Twelve years ago—this June."

Lawrence Kellogg half echoed the other's sigh. Then he brightened, in an effort to lessen the very evident constraint.

"Do you recollect the long arguments we used to have?—especially the one in which we nearly came to blows, because I said Brimfield was a stupid hole of a place, only fit for clergymen, old maids, and collectors of beetles?"

"Yes, I think I do. You've changed your opinion in a measure, now, haven't you?"

"Rather! People over there began taking me for an Englishman, and I thought it about time to return to 'My country, 'tis of thee!' I cleared out without

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saying 'good-by' to a soul—I suppose they think I've gone to Thibet again. But I needed rest. I've a book in my mind, mistily, too. Here would be a good place to do it."

"You felt that you had a 'call'—is that it?"

"Exactly—no joking; you've hit it! And talking of that—do you remember another argument we once had upon the 'Calls of Conscience'—the year of our graduation? How eloquent you grew when Sprague defined conscience as 'mental indigestion'! I'll bet you made a sermon of it."

The Reverend Bellwood lifted his eyebrows and shot a glance at his friend, uncertain at first if he was chaffing or serious.

"Come now, didn't you?"

"Let me think; perhaps I may have."

"Same old Frank! Direct questions are a bother! But now, more quizzing: My arrival was rather a surprise, eh? Don't blame you for thinking I'd never come back. I suppose people here have forgotten me; but I intend to open up my father's house at the corner—it's kept in good repair; old Mary and her daughter have lived in the kitchen wing. Then I'll get an office somewhere and hang out my shingle. I can scarcely believe that I have been but six hours in the town. There has been a lot of building. The new church, near the station, they tell me, is yours. You've done good work here, Frank, haven't you?"

"I fear I've done very little. We finished the church last fall; there's still a mortgage on it." In the reply there dwelt a slight note of uneasiness.

"Well, as I intend to become a member of your congregation, you might let me——"

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"No! no!" came the interruption quickly. "You have always done too much for me, Lawrence. I owe you a great deal now—more than I can ever repay! You are the one person in the world I cannot take it from. Please, please do not; I ask you!" He raised his hand in a gesture of protest.

"Nonsense, nonsense; don't talk like that, old chap! I won't have it! You know, you never owed me anything."

The minister carefully arranged the papers on the desk at his elbow.

"It isn't nonsense," he replied. "I don't want you to think I've forgotten, that's all. . . . I could never have gone through 'The Divinity' if it had not been for you. Then you remember how it was at college; and there are lots of things besides."

"Now, my dear Frank—" began his companion deprecatingly, and then he stopped.

For a moment there was silence. Despite Kellogg's attempt to rough it off, there was, underlying their talk so far, a vague feeling of being, as it were, on guard. Their first greeting and hand clasp had been followed by that strangeness of manner that comes, not infrequently, to old friends who have gone divers ways, to meet long afterwards. Evidently, also, both were avoiding a subject that sooner or later they must touch upon. Each was waiting for the other to begin.

It was the minister who did so.

"Amy should be in now, presently. I can't imagine what keeps her so long," he said, straightening the papers with the ivory ruler. "She took the children down to their grandmother's for the afternoon. You will stay to tea, won't you?"

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"It's very good of you, but I'm afraid I can't wait much longer"—this with a responsive accent of formality. "I promised Judge Hollins to meet him at the hotel—I am stopping there, you know, till I get matters settled. He has had charge of all my affairs here. . . . You said 'children' just now, Frank; there are two of them, aren't there?"

"Yes, a boy and a girl—didn't Amy write you? I've been a bad correspondent; I am more than ashamed."

He looked up appealingly, drew a long breath, and began again to fumble with the glasses on his worn, clerical waistcoat.

"We've both been very bad correspondents; let it drop at that," Kellogg replied.

There was another pause. Not a line had he received in the last ten years from Amy Bellwood, except the strangely short and strangely worded note announcing her approaching marriage, and one of thanks for his wedding present. Several of his epistles antedating this had remained unanswered. Why had she not explained some things he had asked her? He had felt cruelly hurt and disappointed and, in regard to some happenings, utterly at loss to understand. In Bellwood's letters, subsequent to his marriage, he had made but little reference to his wife and few to his family affairs, until, as such things happen, the correspondence had practically ceased. For five years, at least, no word had been exchanged.

Kellogg began to wonder if Amy had grown into a settled, matronly person, suited to the home of a minister with a small and struggling congregation. He recalled her ambitions, her wide viewpoints, and

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her love of living. She had a soul above sewing circles and a mind above mission boxes. He had always thought of her as being capable of great things. He smiled slowly to himself as he recalled their boy and girl affection—for he endeavored thus to look at it. Bellwood, of course, had known. It seemed very long ago; but, nevertheless, for some reason, Kellogg's heart beat a little faster at the recollection. He was to have returned—surely he would have returned—and they were to be free, absolutely free in the mean time. That was the compact between them.

Their youthful wisdom, apparently, had been well borne out—she had decided for herself; there had been no ground for reproaches. He still possessed a bundle of letters she had written him during the first months of his sojourn in Berlin and Vienna before the sudden announcement of her engagement to the present rector of St. John's. He closed his mind to the retrospect. He would keep the letters no longer.

To break the uncomfortable silence he inquired casually about some of the townfolk; the intent was obvious.

As the minister was about to reply, there came the sound of children's voices from the vine-covered veranda. Kellogg rose at once. Bellwood crossed quickly to the door.

"I'd better tell her you are here," he said, speaking in a whisper. "It would be better, perhaps, eh?"

He paused irresolutely, with his hand on the knob.

Kellogg, half smiling, nodded, and stood waiting by the desk as Bellwood stepped into the hall.

The doctor looked about him. Everywhere else in the house was the exacting threadbare neatness with

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which pride covers the borders of poverty. But here how well he remembered everything!—the rows of old, ragged-backed books that Frank had inherited, with his calling, from his father, the worn leather chairs, the hanging lamp, the disreputable stuffed owl that had now lost an eye and looked more disreputable than ever, the mantelpiece crowded with odds and ends of old china and faded photographs, reminiscent of college years and bygone memories.

Something, very foreign to the rest of the surroundings, forcibly intruded itself: a toy horse peeped from under the frayed edges of the window curtain, and a work basket full of unfinished sewing was on the table. He pulled himself together as the door opened.

“Amy, you have not forgotten—” began Bellwood’s voice, with an attempt at cheeriness. And then she came into the room.

No, he had not misjudged her; he saw that at a glance—she was capable of great things! But in that glance, even before she spoke, he saw much else. She had changed but little and yet a great deal, inscrutably. She was not matronly; in fact, if anything, she was slenderer, she was more beautiful; but the essence of her, the spirit, had altered. Her face was not careworn or lined; it was slightly flushed and very girlish now, as she advanced toward him with her hand outstretched. But the tangle of brown hair, that had been so gloriously wayward, was drawn back closer on the temples; the gray eyes had grown steady, they danced no longer. Something surged up in his heart as she drew nearer—it disconcerted him.

“Forgotten!” she exclaimed. “Frank must be taking leave of his senses! So you’ve come back to us!

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Who was it?—somebody was speaking of you the other day, and we were wondering—” She paused and looked back at the doorway where her husband was still standing.

Beside him, peering shyly into the room, were two children; the elder a boy of six, the younger a little girl of four.

“Come in, come in, young people,” she continued, with the slight amusement young mothers affect when presenting their offspring. “Here’s some one you must know.”

“And some one who wants to know you,” cried Kellogg, bending forward.

It was the first time he had spoken, and the words seemed to afford a relief from the tension he felt he must be showing.

The boy held back, viewing the visitor with steady, observant eyes, one hand clinging to his mother’s skirts; but the girl came to him at once.

Kellogg picked her up in his arms and kissed her almost fiercely. The little one looked at him in bewilderment. Then the boy came forward extending his hand.

“You were always fond of children, weren’t you, Larry?” said Mrs. Bellwood evenly.

It was a grateful shock of further relief to him that she had gone back to using his first name so readily. Woman’s natural gift had come to the rescue of the awkward moment.

“Yes,” he returned, “very, always.”

“Do let us sit down. We have so much to talk about,” she continued, at the same time giving the children a whispered dismissal. The minister edged up

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his chair, his eyes following every expression on his wife's face.

"What are your plans now?" asked Mrs. Bellwood directly, her gray eyes studying Kellogg as if searching for some change in him. "I suppose that you will soon be going off again. You intended to surprise us, didn't you?—perhaps Frank has asked you that very question."

"Yes, he did," returned the doctor. "As to my plans, I'll repeat them: I hope to settle down here—well—for the rest of my life! I'm sending over all my things, even my dog. That ought to show a permanent idea! Of course, I may run away now and then, but I intend to make Brimfield my home."

Unintentionally he had given an emphasis to the end of the sentence. Then he went on and detailed his plans with a volubility that was new to him. He spoke of the longing that had been growing for some time within him, and how, of late, his mind had reverted to the old scenes and surroundings. He described how, at last, this desire, this longing, this "call," had been so strong that he had burned his bridges behind him, giving up the beginnings of a very good practice that he had established in London, and turned his footsteps homeward. Like wandering Ulysses, he had returned to his Ithaca. "Only," he added, in conclusion, "there's no Penelope, and people seem to have gone along very well without me."

There was more desultory talk, more questions and answers; then the guest rose to take his departure. Again he had to refuse the invitation to stay and sup, and Bellwood followed him to the gate of the little front garden. There the two shook hands.

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"Larry," said the minister, as if acting upon impulse, "the latchstring is always out for you. You remember how it was when we were boys together—my home is yours."

"Thanks, old fellow," returned Kellogg; "you are a very happy man—aren't you?"

Bellwood flicked a caterpillar from a leaf of the big rosebush. "Happy?—yes," he replied; "sometimes so much so that—that I wonder if I could have deserved it."

"There, you see; that introspective conscience of yours bobs up again." His friend slapped him playfully on the shoulder. "Same old Frank!"

Then, with a laugh and a wave of the hand, he hurried down the street.

As he strode away he was indulging in a little introspection on his own account. As yet he could not analyze his feelings completely. He was almost angry with himself for being disturbed—at least for showing it—upon his meeting with Amy Bellwood. Yet, as he went over all the sensations of the first interview, they occurred again. Even the recollection of the sound of her voice started his heart beating faster. What a wonderful voice she had! So suggestive of all the qualities of expression, and the same old way of looking squarely and deeply into one's eyes! But she was changed—in what he could not determine, nor did he wish to. Just at that moment he was anxious to shake off his mood, to change the trend of his recollections. He rejoiced when he saw Judge Hollins's portly figure standing near the veranda of the hotel across the street.

"Well, Lawrence, my boy," began the old gentleman in his didactic, sonorous voice, "I was saying to

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myself—just saying to myself, as you came along: ‘So much like his father, the general’—even the way you walk! Now, I couldn’t pay you a higher compliment, could I?”

“No, sir, you couldn’t,” laughed Kellogg, “and I confess I appreciate it—I mean the flattery of it. . . . Been waiting for me?”

“Yes, my boy; and my appetite’s waiting, too.”

The judge tucked his arm inside that of the younger man and they entered the hotel. As they seated themselves at the table in the long, bare dining room the proprietor looked in and, seeing them, approached with all the easy familiarity of the country boniface. He leaned with one hand on the judge’s chair and one hand on Kellogg’s, and wagged his head between them as he spoke.

“I was jes’ tellin’ the judge, a few minutes ago, that you come back to the right place,” he said, addressing the latter part of the sentence to the doctor. “We need a pushing young physician here in this town. Old Doc Rublee’s first class, but gettin’ old, and—and t’other doctor, Porter, he’s a homopath, and folks here, ’spite the fact that we’re up to date, is kinder old-fashioned.” He changed to somewhat of a mournful tone: “We had a powerful lot of sickness here last fall—kind of a influenzy. Mrs. Slo-cum and my married daughter was took real bad. They said as how it was an imported disease, the ‘Lar Grip,’ they called it; but I dognozed it as a sort of contagious cold. I suppose you treated lots of such cases,” shifting his hand from the back of Kellogg’s chair to his shoulder. “We’ll have to get up something more complicated to amuse him, eh, judge?”

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"Well, I don't know," responded the old lawyer, spreading his napkin over his capacious waistcoat. "We're a pretty healthy community."

"Jess so, jess so," responded Mr. Slocum. "But we're glad to have the young man back with us. Kind of a prodigal's return! I guess you'll soon be trottin' off again!" He laughed and pushed Kellogg's shoulder. "Best way to keep a fellow in one place is to marry him down! Ye ain't married, are ye?" Again the gentle push, accompanied this time by a wink. "Yes! Seems to me, now, I heard some talk of it."

"No," answered Kellogg tritely, "I'm a confirmed old bachelor."

"That's the way we all talked once," laughed Mr. Slocum. "Hullo! hullo! here comes our usual evening shower!"

A few shutters banged; there was a grumble of thunder and a sudden, pattering downpour of slanting rain. Mr. Slocum rose to the occasion.

"I never see'd such peculiar weather," he began; "seems to me you can't count on it at all. I don't remember such——"

Just then somebody called from the doorway and, with a final wag of his head, he departed.

The judge heaved a sigh of relief.

"Ellery isn't changed much," he observed. "Chancellor McGee once had him on the witness stand and 'dognozed' his case properly."

"What was that?" laughed Kellogg.

"Rush of words to the face," the judge replied, "chronic and incurable. . . . Did you see Frank Bellwood? I knew you were going there."

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"Yes," Kellogg nodded, "and I want to ask a few questions. . . . How is he doing?"

"Very well, I should say; very well indeed; preaches most remarkably fine sermons sometimes—wonderful words, beautifully spoken! He gets a good stipend, too, thanks to old Esterbrook's endowment. But I guess for some reason they're pretty hard up just now. There was a good lawyer lost when he turned parson—would have made a splendid special pleader! Our friend Ellery here has joined his congregation; goes, all togged up, to St. John's every Sunday. I went to hear Frank once—I ain't much of a churchgoer—but he would have had the jury with him, I can tell you that! It was shortly after his marriage to Amy Winter. The subject of the sermon was 'The Demands of Conscience' or something of the kind, if I remember rightly."

Kellogg started slightly, but did not smile.

"Tell me of the Winters," he said. "I knew the old colonel died very suddenly, soon after I went abroad; I supposed he'd leave the family well to do."

"Hardly a red cent," was the return. "Like your good father he didn't have the proper eye for speculation. To be exact, he left two or three government bonds, a thirty-acre farm, well mortgaged, some debts, and about one hundred and ninety-odd thousand dollars' worth of stock in a no-good gold mine out West somewhere. No, come to think, down in Mexico; I remember the name now—the 'El Cintura'; but 'twasn't worth paper! How he'd have made out if it hadn't been for his pay as supervisor I don't know! Mrs. Winter's got her pension and just about enough

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to scratch along on. Her widowed sister-in-law, Mrs. Blatchford, lives with her; she's librarian now at the Athenaeum. Take it the two old ladies have a pretty hard pull at times; Mrs. Winter's been ailing since spring." He paused for a moment and then resumed thoughtfully: "Amy didn't get a penny! Splendid little woman, though, worth her weight in gold, and still the prettiest girl in Brimfield. When she was studying trained nursing up at Antioch, why, Walter Smith and half the young doctors— Do you know, I once thought you——"

His friend did not reply. The judge, who had quick perceptions, changed the subject and soon pushed himself back, brushing the crumbs from the folds of his waistcoat.

"Let's go outside and smoke," he said. "The shower's cooled things off and laid the dust."

Together they went out on the veranda and seated themselves in the polished wooden chairs. There was a refreshing breeze swaying the elm branches overhead, the eaves of the old portico were dripping slow drops into the little pools in the glistening, graveled walks, and somewhere from a garden a thrush was piping blithely. It was peaceful, beautiful, and homelike; and yet Lawrence Kellogg, as he sat there silently smoking, wondered if he had found what he was seeking after all! The judge, who had been watching him, turned suddenly and interrupted his thoughts.

"Larry," he said, "suppose we put off any talk we had for this evening, if it's the same to you. I've got some papers to look over, and we can take things up to-morrow."

"All right, sir; to tell the truth I don't feel much

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like it myself. I've had a long, tiresome journey to-day."

"Then I'll say good night and leave you. You'll want to turn in early."

"I don't think I will sit up very late, judge. Good night."

They parted with a friendly hand shake, the old gentleman crossing the street to his office, leaving the doctor alone on the veranda. The electric arc lamp that had begun to sputter from its pole in front of the hotel threw its wavering light full upon him, but the brilliant glare did not seem to disturb him in the least.

It was rather a remarkable face, Kellogg's—not handsome, certainly, from a classical standpoint, but full of the latent suggestion of many things. It was the humanity of it that was distinctly appealing: the lurking contradiction of the kindly brow, and the deep-set, keen-sighted eyes—eyes that could be masterful, or soft and humorous. The determined nose and chin belied the curve of the smooth-shaven lips, the restless lips of a man that might be tempted, not easily, but strongly, who would enjoy things to the full—who might, perhaps, enjoy the temptations. Just now the curve was drawn into a straight line over the white, even teeth.

The 'bus, that had gone to the station to meet the ten o'clock train, drew up with a lurch at the portico steps. A few passengers clambered out. The sound of voices and the thumping of baggage disturbed Kellogg's reverie; he rose quickly. Declining Mr. Slocum's invitation to join him and one or two guests at the bar, he climbed the stairs to his room. For a long time after he had gone to bed he tossed uneasily

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—he had not yet adjusted his mental focus to the changes that had occurred. . . . So the Winters had been in dire straits! Amy had studied at the hospital—he had not heard of it. There were lots of threads for him to pick up.

Would he ever be happy here, in Brimfield? Would it not be better to abandon it all now, before he had further committed himself? What strange urging was it that had prompted his impulse to return? Even now, as he thought of the interview with Frank Bellwood and the meeting with his wife, he wondered at the force of his own complex sensations. Again he felt half angry at the effect of Amy Bellwood's presence upon him—that sudden heart gasp that had been so unexpected! And why had she started when he had spoken of being "called"? Those questioning gray eyes, why had they searched him so? Why had he come? But retreat was easy! He could make some plausible explanation for his sudden departure, despite his confident assertions at the rectory. A day or so would suffice for him to arrange any business affairs, and by the end of the week he would be once more on the ocean. The short voyage over, back in London again, he could take up his life where he had left it. He determined finally to put off his decision until the morning, and at last fell into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER II

MISGIVINGS

A VERY modest "shingle" had appeared at the entrance to a little two-story brick structure on Main Street. It announced a name, followed by the usual M.D. and, in numerals, the hours of consultation. It had been there just a week.

In the goodly sized front office on the second floor Lawrence Kellogg sat in a big leather chair near the wide-open window. On the edge of the desk beside him was a large leather portfolio and pile of uncut magazines; a copy of a medical journal lay open on his knee. His strong fingers were clasped across his chest, and his eyes looked blankly out through the elm branches at the clock tower of the new building on the opposite corner of the square. The strident-voiced bell had struck the hour unheeded. The lengthening shadows were creeping over the grass plot about the Soldiers' Monument, trimmed with its little pyramids of shiny black cannon balls, but he still sat there, breathing deep, long breaths.

The retrospect that was apparently so absorbing could hardly have been enjoyable, judging from Kellogg's expression; and his expressions were generally truth-telling. The fact was that he was looking back at the strange mixture he had made of life. He knew

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that the only reason that he had ever accomplished anything—and, by the way, he very much belittled his accomplishments—was because he had never lost belief in his dominant will. He had touched many sides of life—he frankly admitted that he possessed the germs of most human weaknesses—but born in him had been the desire to worship and to serve. The first he had satisfied by a mental obeisance to a somewhat intangible ideal, and the second, increasingly as the years, by seeing the practical results of his work in his profession.

It had been here that he most frequently had been obliged to call upon his will. His interest depended directly upon the seriousness of his task; he greeted difficulties with relief, accepting the trivial with a frank acknowledgment of its boresomeness.

Lawrence Kellogg's inheritance and his early training might, beyond all doubt, have accounted for some of his peculiar contradictions. His grandfather, Amandus Kellogg, whom he just remembered as a strong-willed old man of eighty, had been one of the founders of Brimfield, moving from New England to what was then the almost unpeopled West, early in 1800. He had built the old homestead with its wide-ranging outbuildings that clung to the outskirts of the town; and it was his original holdings there and in the neighboring manufacturing center of Kenton Falls, eight miles below on the river, that had enabled his only son to live his life as it pleased him, and placed his only grandchild, now, if not in the class of the wealthy, at least in the ranks of the independently well to do.

His mother was not even a memory to Lawrence.

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She had died, alas! when she had presented him to the world. His infancy had been spent among strangers, subject to the mercies and ministrations of nurses and governesses, for his father had taken but little interest in his existence until the boy, who had been born in England, was some seven years of age. It was then Lawrence had returned with his somewhat erratic parent to Brimfield.

His father had always been a puzzle to him from his earliest days; he had had so many interests, so many friends. From a reunion of the Grand Army at Shiloh to a National Committee meeting in Chicago, from the race track at Saratoga to the *salle de jeu* at Monaco, the old veteran had drifted. He had something about him that forestalled familiarity; at the same time he had the gift of progressing socially without effort, and this his son had, in a measure, inherited.

It had been so in college. He had captained both the nine and the eleven with no thought to himself of the unusual honor, and he had spent his large allowance freely with no idea of gaining popularity.

The reason that he had adopted a profession was simple. His father's advice, given but a short time before his death, the boy had worked into what was, more or less, a personal code.

"Larry," the general had said, "you will find plenty of people eager to help you enjoy life; but you will only find happiness in being able to do something worth while, alone and unaided. If, in the doing of it, you can help others, so much the better. Don't make the mistake I did—the war unsettled me at the crucial point of my life. *Be something!*"

"How about medicine?" the boy had asked.

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“Capital,” his father had replied; “only don’t half learn it; promise me—if you undertake it—you’ll put it through.”

And Lawrence Kellogg, from sheer force of determination, had “put it through,” and could look at his work without the shamed feeling of neglected opportunities.

But now, as he sat there thinking, he was forced to the acknowledgment that Amy Winter had played a bigger part in his life than he had ever confessed before. He had tried to reason himself out of this conviction the first night of his home-coming; but it had grown to a certainty. Very often during his unsettled and, at times, rather feverish existence abroad—after his decision to remain there—he had found himself making an involuntary mental comparison between the mere memory of her charm and her personality—this sometimes with a bitter heartlift—and the proximity of a very tangible physical attraction. Yet, since her marriage, he had tried to shut her out of his thoughts. He would not pause to build the what-might-have-been on the foundations of an uncemented tenderness. Nevertheless, his dreams had often brought to him a reality of loss, a loss confirmed in the force of his present and somewhat startling re-awakening.

There was no use in attempting to reason himself out of the situation, however, any more than there was in dwelling on his present mood. *She* would never know—to that he subscribed himself with a firmer pressure of his straight-drawn lips.

He rose from the easy chair and picked up the portfolio. Taking from it a packet of letters he broke

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the string that held them and, going to the fireplace, touched a match to the pile of kindlings.

A drawing, accompanying a banal little poem entitled tritely, "Old Love Letters," that he had seen in a cheap magazine, came to his mind—only these could hardly be called love letters. But the forced smile wasted. He caught a few words in the ink, still visible on a crinkling, blackened sheet that had slipped its envelope; they were the last she had written him preceding her strange silence. "Dear boy: I shall never cease to—" He threw the remaining letters hurriedly into the grate. For some time he stood there looking down at the embers.

"Hullo, Larry; hullo!" cried a voice from behind him suddenly. "A fire! on this warm evening! Well, well! My stars! What ails you—blood thinning?"

"No," replied Lawrence, looking over his shoulder and seeing Judge Hollins standing there, almost filling the doorway. "No fear; just burning some old papers."

"Destroying no evidence, I hope, son?"

"No, judge; hardly."

"Beg pardon; I was only funning. I was about to offer you my legal services at a discount! Once lost a case for a client of mine—'tarnation glad I did, by the way!—and when we left court he said: 'See here, Mister Hollins, they told me you were a big lawyer and a *good* one, and now I know why: you weigh over two hundred pounds and you've never yet been in jail!'"

Lawrence joined belatedly in the judge's laugh—somehow he did not feel in the mood for levity. The old gentleman clapped him on the shoulder.

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"Come, come! don't be so 'serious! She may relent, my boy. You know the old adage——"

But Kellogg had interrupted him, stepping quickly to the window. "Look here, judge!" he said. "You're just the one to answer a question! Here comes that big car—it's been going up and down the street all the afternoon—whose is it?"

"Mrs. Ned Rice's," the judge rejoined, drawing closer, "and that's Mrs. Ned in the back, and sitting alongside of her is the derndest skunk in this country—and his name is Wilford Murger, spelt M-u-r-g-e-r."

"Yes, I've heard of him; hopes to be our next district attorney, eh? But tell me about Mrs. Rice—who is she?"

"You remember Rice, who used to own the Upper Falls Mill?"

"Yes, certainly; I thought he was dead."

"So he is—deader'n a door nail. That's his widow—people still call her 'Mrs. Ned.' She's a wonder! Take care of yourself, my boy. I'm an old man—Hullo! hullo!"

The big Panhard, in charge of the machinist, had swirled in a circle, and had come to rest with a burbling, choking spasm, immediately beneath the window. A man climbed out of the tonneau and stood talking earnestly with the woman, who, lifting her veil, leaned forward to hear better what he was saying. A laugh, hearty and musical, but a trifle loud, perhaps, suddenly sounded above the slow throbbing of the machine.

"My stars, they hold hands a long time!" observed the judge, with an amused little chuckle. "Our friend, Mr. Murger, is a very favored mortal!"

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Lawrence looked down and perceived that, sure enough, Mrs. Rice's fingers reposed in those of Mr. Murger, or his reposed in hers; which, it was hard to tell. And just then, for some reason, the lady raised her head and saw that she was observed. Lawrence was conscious of a bold pair of eyes and a smile that flashed white teeth, as she recognized the judge. But she made no effort to disengage her hand, and waved the other in an unembarrassed gesture of greeting and invitation above Mr. Murger's shoulder.

"So much for him!" laughed the old gentleman. "That gives him his status—plain as a note from Bradstreet's!" He backed from the window. "I like Mrs. Ned in her way—but I don't like some of her friends," he went on. "She wants us to come down. You'll have to meet her sooner or later; she asked me to bring you to see her. But all I can say is: Be careful!" He shook his head knowingly, with mock seriousness.

"Have no fear for me," returned Lawrence, smiling; and unconsciously his glance strayed to the pathetic little pile of ashes in the grate.

The judge had caught the look and the momentary shadow of a saddened reflection.

"You're in no trouble, Larry boy, are you?" he asked. "No entanglements or anything? Come, now, 'fess up! My affection for your father and my regard for you may make me seem inquisitive; but believe me——"

Lawrence turned to him smiling.

"No trouble, old friend," he said. "If I ever should have any, you are the one I would come to."

"Don't ever forget that," rejoined the judge.

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"And now let's go down and meet the widow—I feel like a recruiting sergeant, 'pon my word I do."

"Well, I don't feel like a raw recruit exactly," returned Lawrence, resting his hand on the judge's shoulder, and with a laugh they went down the steps together.

Mr. Murger had flown by the time they reached the sidewalk; his retreating figure could be seen hurrying swiftly down the street. With a half glance behind him he turned the nearest corner.

Mrs. Rice's greeting was cordial and unaffected. Lawrence was conscious of the very firm pressure of a large and well-formed hand, and a sincerely interested pair of light-blue eyes that gazed, half challenging, into his.

"The judge has told me something about you, Dr. Kellogg," said the widow, her red lips parting in a frankly open smile that showed again her beautiful teeth, "and I really wanted to meet you before you left us for good."

"But I don't intend leaving; I've no such idea."

"If I was a betting man," laughed Mrs. Rice, "I'd lay you two to one that you won't stay here six months."

"And having moral scruples against betting on a certainty, I would refuse to accept any such wager." Kellogg was fully conscious that the bold eyes had taken him in, not unapprovingly, from head to foot.

"We'll compromise," suggested the widow; "I'm going away myself, to be gone two months—a flying trip to Paris. If you are here when I return, you'll have dinner with me."

Much amused, Lawrence thanked the lady with the

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easy gallantry befitting the occasion, but inwardly, for some reason, he congratulated himself that the next meeting was so long postponed.

"I'll keep you to your promise, remember!" smiled Mrs. Rice. "Judge Hollins will tell you that my dinners are not so bad!"

"The best, madam," replied the old lawyer, bowing; "they belong to the 'meals that will be memories.' . . . When are you leaving us?"

"To-morrow afternoon; didn't you observe my affectionate parting from 'the opposition'? Surely you didn't think that, if I was going to see him very soon, I would have been party to such an affecting tableau!—wasn't it heartrending? I won't have anybody to quarrel with now for a long time."

"Is he worth quarreling with?" inquired the judge.

"You seem to have thought so, from what I hear," bantered Mrs. Rice. "At all events, he is such an earnest donkey that he amuses me; he's like a pet vice that we haven't learned to like and don't approve of, but hate to give up altogether."

"You should join the Reformers, my dear madam!"

"I hope you are speaking politically, judge. You know I belong to the 'Spiritual Independents'—wasn't that what we agreed to call it? Don't compromise me before Dr. Kellogg, please, please!"

Mrs. Rice laid her gloved hand on Lawrence's arm, with more of a touch of good-comradship than coquetry, and turned to him.

"I must be off," she said. "If you are in Paris during the next six weeks look me up at the Ritz. If not, dine with me when I come back. Good-by."

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She spoke a word to the man at the wheel of the huge car, and in another minute was speeding up the street waving a farewell through the dust, to which the judge responded with a flourish of his black slouch hat.

"Mrs. Ned has mighty little of the 'spiritual' and a good deal of the 'independent' about her," commented the old gentleman at last. "She is most naturally and charmingly earthly; and I dare say she might be—er—contagiously unconventional. What do you think of her?"

Kellogg replied nothing just then; but as they strolled down the street, he asked a question.

"Has Mrs. Rice any children, judge?"

"One daughter about fifteen—goes to school in New York—seldom or never comes here. . . . How old should you suppose Mrs. Ned to be?"

"Heavens, don't ask me! How do *you* tell a woman's age?"

"Well, I suppose she's thirty-five or forty. If you asked her she'd tell you—and you could rely on its being the truth, which is more than you can say of some women. Yes, sir—ee—even on the witness stand! She once said that 'a man's as old as he feels, and a woman's just as old as she makes a man feel.' She's about as honest as they make 'em, and about as erratic! I don't gossip generally, but her husband left everything in trust to the daughter, only considerately stating that it was by his wife's request, and another strange clause: Mrs. Ned has got to spend a portion of her time, every year, at Brimfield. She enjoys her share of the income and it's big enough to keep the pot boiling, and it does boil at times, I reckon—ah,

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‘woman—woman, in her hours of ease’—she, er—does whatever seems to please! My apologies to the poet! . . . Hello! there’s Ellery; let’s dodge him.”

They had reached the broad entrance to the old hotel. Mr. Slocum, lounging on the porch, was cackling to a horsy-looking individual who made occasional short replies to Ellery’s rush of words.

“Howdy, doctor!” cried the voluble proprietor to Kellogg, as he passed, at the same time winking to the judge; “I see’d you!” He followed them into the hallway. “I see’d you talkin’ to the lady in the auter up the street.” Then, confidentially, lowering his voice: “She’s a case, eh? Regular storm-along! Ain’t she?”

There was no reply; the judge’s expression was absolutely stone deaf. But Mr. Slocum was unabashed.

“I tell you there’s a lot of good in her, though,” he continued. “The factory folks down to the Falls just swear by her.”

“Supper ready, Ellery?” asked the judge cheerfully.

“Go right in, go right in!” replied Mr. Slocum, waving his hand toward the dining room, and with that he went back to the patient sufferer on the Mansion House porch.

“Old gossiping wind bag,” grunted the judge. “But he’s right; there’s a lot of good in her, despite all that—” He checked himself, and putting on his spectacles picked up the bill of fare.

CHAPTER III

A PLEDGE OF VERITY

IT was over two months later. Kellogg had moved from the hotel, and was living in the big house, with the white Greek portico, that stood in lone solemnity back of the wide lawn dotted with evergreens. His office on Main Street had been found out by a few of the sick and the halt, and already he had begun to pick up a little outside practice, despite the judge's remark about the healthfulness of the community.

One day he had been summoned to Lower Meadow Farm, and there he had found that Mrs. Bellwood's mother, old Mrs. Winter, was really very ill. He had been there to call, of course, in a friendly way, as he had called upon many of his old acquaintances. Any number of times of late he had dropped in at the Bellwoods'; he had lunched, supped, or dined with them with the privilege of old friendship. But never, yet, had he found Amy alone—except for one or two, to him, heart-stirring, silent minutes, or occasional, accidental intervals, when the talk had drifted, as if by consent, into channels carrying it far from any reference to themselves. She seemed bent on leaving her husband and him together, absenting herself on pleas of household duties usually. To tell the truth, he had seen her at longer intervals at church than elsewhere!

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Since his coming Lawrence had attended the services at St. John's religiously—that is, the Sunday morning services. He had always believed in the capacities of his friend, the minister; but on two occasions, at least, he had been surprised by the flow of eloquence, the contagious, spiritual enthusiasm with which the Reverend Bellwood had swayed his congregation. It was not the deep reasoning he had shown, but the power of putting himself in another's place, of giving vent to the expressions of another's mental attitude.

Not only did Kellogg agree with the judge in his opinion that the bar had lost a splendid pleader, but he was convinced that, if acting was ever the truthful expression of real feeling, the world had lost an artist. Yet he could not recall that Bellwood had at any time been on the verge of the sensational. The convincing part of his discourse had been due to its subdued intensity, its powerful suggestion, and the words, the beautifully spoken words! Once or twice he had wondered if the minister's powers were not thrown away upon his immediate following; he marveled that he had not been tempted to a wider field than was to be found in the little half-town, half-village community.

He was thinking all this over, now, as he drove up from the street toward the big lonely house. Amy was happy! That comforted him somehow, even if her surrender to the placid vista had puzzled him at first. He smiled as he recalled that long-ago tirade of his in the days of his early restlessness, when he had arrayed ambition and pleasure against peace and contentment; wherein he had proclaimed boldly for the living joys of the city, and decried the bucolic existence—above all such places as Brimfield. Yet, here, he believed

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were two people who had found what few find in life. It was odd that so often he was forced to argue that it must be the truth.

The man who was waiting to take his horse to the stable spoke to him before he climbed out of the buggy.

"Somebody come down from Mrs. Winter's at three o'clock," he said, "and left a message for you to come up there as soon as you come in."

"Who was it?" Lawrence asked.

"The hired man, sir. He 'lowed that the old lady was took rather bad. Mrs. Bellwood's been over there most of the afternoon."

"Put the horse up. I'll go across lots," said the doctor, "and tell Mary I won't be back till later."

He tossed the reins round the whip and, jumping lightly to the ground, squeezed through an opening in the evergreen hedge and started at a fast walk through the meadow.

It was only one of those changes that, alarming to the uninitiated, are merely, to the physician, signs of the inevitable end. He had spoken but a few words to Mrs. Bellwood when he had first entered the house, so he was not surprised, when he came down from the sick room, to find her waiting at the bottom of the stairs. As he reassured her, he could feel her eyes searching him.

"Then there is no immediate danger?" she asked.

"None in the least. It is just a symptom," he replied.

"There is no necessity for my staying here to-night?"

"None at all. I think she will rest comfortably. May I walk home with you, if you are going?"

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She nodded thoughtfully. "I was going to ask you to—please do." Then she added slowly: "I've wanted to see you, Larry—wanted to talk with you. I've been waiting for the opportunity; somehow it did not come as I hoped it would. But I shall have to think a little. How shall I begin?"

The pathway led back from the road and across the meadow to a footbridge over the river. For a few minutes neither Kellogg nor Amy said a word, walking on in silence. He wondered if, in her mind, there was any connection of thought between their presence and that particular spot where the willows threw their deepest shadows over the lazily moving water. There must have been, for suddenly she spoke.

"Do you remember, ever so long ago, a certain compact that we entered into, Lawrence?" Then, as if to forestall another recollection that the words might bring to him, she went on hurriedly: "It was here—here, on this very spot—long ago."

"Yes," he replied, pausing, with a catch of breath at the perturbing vividness of the remembrance. "Here where we stand now."

"You said," continued she, as if he had not spoken, "that you would always tell me the truth, that we would be very, very honest with one another—always, always, no matter what happened. Does that compact hold good now?"

"It does," was the slow reply; "we have never broken it."

"How long can my mother live?"

"It is hard to tell—maybe a year; or longer, perhaps, if she could get away." The bluntness of the speech was softened by its note of sympathy.

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They had started walking again, but lingered upon the footbridge. She had made no comment at first, but now she spoke, so low that he bent down to listen.

"A year! It seems so short a time! Yet a great deal can happen in a year. . . . She should get away, you say?"

"Yes," assented Kellogg. "Your mother might live longer if she could get to a warmer and drier climate. It is the winter that I fear."

"It is quite hopeless, then?"

"I am afraid so."

"And nothing one can do—nothing, nothing!"

Amy Bellwood stopped, with both elbows on the rail, looking down at the black water, then she placed her finger tips to her eyes for an instant. Lawrence looked at the slender white hands and those finger tips—marked, alas! with signs of the industrious needle—and the wonderful, beautifully youthful sweep of her neck as she inclined her head. His heart began to beat more rapidly; he longed to comfort her—to help her.

"It is dreadful to be poor," she said at last slowly, half passionately; then she turned to him quickly, a swift entreaty in her glance: "No, no; forgive me for saying that—I mean for showing it. You were kind to tell me the truth; always tell me the truth, Larry. We have to accept life just as it comes to us, don't we?"

"It is the best rule we're taught—so far as the world goes," he rejoined, controlling himself by a summoning of will. "Some people call it philosophy. I wonder why! Does it make it easier? I'm sure I don't know. It's a bit of a riddle—no matter how we read it."

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"It's all in what we bring to it," she answered. "It's not what is written there to read. We must bring the best in us; yet it is so hard to be patient at times, isn't it? . . . I must tell Frank." She hesitated. "He's not well—Larry, you must try to help him. That's what I meant to say to you—what I wanted to see you about. You must get him to talk with you. Has he spoken much about himself?"

"No; but you are right, he is not well; he should take a long rest—worry is bad for him. He feels too keenly; you are right, Amy—and things dwell with him. He is one who should save up his sympathies."

"Can we do that?" she asked bravely. "Surely, if we didn't see and feel with others, life would be very hopeless. We are either lifting or leaning; there is no middle way. . . . But I want you to tell me—what to do. Always be the same good friend of his—and mine you used to be. I shall not exact too much of you."

"You could exact nothing that would be too much," answered Kellogg slowly. "Nothing."

She looked up at him. Had she ever exacted anything? Dimly it seemed to her she had. And had he ever failed her? Unconsciously there was a question in her eyes.

"What is it?" He stood there gazing down at her. "You were going to say something. Don't hold it back! Ask me."

"No." She said it very gently. "No—I was just thinking—wondering."

"What about?"

"Many things—we've both changed, haven't we?"

"I have, I dare say; I hope so! You haven't—"

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as I look at you. But— No, really, you haven't changed, in any way I could define."

"Oh, yes, I have; a great deal. People don't stand still; some show changes less than others; but everything we go through leaves a mark, inside or out. We may forget it or hide it for a time; but it's there."

"But you were going to ask me something—you said that you were 'wondering'— Please go on." He had been thinking of a plan; he hoped that she would lead the way to his proposing it.

"I was wondering if you had been happy." Her eyes sought his face with an unspoken offer of swift sympathy. "I had so hoped——"

He hesitated now. The question opened so many dangerous passes. He parried. "Do I look unhappy? Is that what you see in me?"

"Yes, sometimes. But your chief change is that you can make up your mind now. You are *sure* of things. . . . But I will ask it! Have you been unhappy?"

He tried to smile. But she saw that he did not wish to go on—if the subject was himself.

"Do forgive me," she murmured softly. "You see, you should not have let me ask— I only wish that I could help. . . . I can't, can I?"

He shook his head and turned to her again. "It is you I want to talk about," he said, meeting her eyes. "I know it may be tactless; but I always wanted to do things my own way—won't you let me manage things now?"

"You can—you're going to."

"You mean about Frank and——"

"Yes; you will try to get him to give up here,

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for a time, and rest. Advise him to drop his work, won't you? He must, really he must. And you will tell me just how it is with him?"

"Of course I will; I'll give him an overhauling, and you must back up all my sage instructions. But now listen to me, Amy: that's not all I want to do!"

"Well?"

"Let me make it seem possible—I mean easier—for him to drop work, as you say; advice is so cheap that it is less than nothing."

"Oh, no, no; please don't," she interposed. "I know what you are going to say. We couldn't accept. We couldn't! I'm just as grateful—don't mistake me—I'm ever so grateful. But it couldn't be done that way! If you could persuade him to go somewhere and rest; then he could return, perhaps, and go on again, strong and well. Then I might take my mother South this winter; I—we have a little saved. I've been preparing for it—since—oh, long ago; and Mr. Lewis—he's the senior warden—he knows Frank's not in good health. The congregation might—I am sure they would——"

She stopped, almost in dismay, as a person does who, in a self-argument, runs up against the blank wall of the unanswerable.

He stood silent, thinking hard. He knew that the congregation had all they could do to meet the interest on that millstone of a mortgage. He saw the despair in her face. He reasoned to its source, but perceived he must not show his pity—though her head was bowed again.

"But, Amy, doesn't our old compact that we made here, so long ago, mean more than just simply being

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truthful? You once gave it a name, a name like a story: 'The Great Friendship'—wasn't that what you called it? Let me just be that friend, won't you?"

"Why, of course, you will always be 'that friend.' You are the very one—the only one! How could it be otherwise? You know when you returned so suddenly it was as if you must have known how much I—*we* needed you—needed you just now."

"But—unless one is given a chance—how can the need be proved? And you have made up your mind not to let me help." Although it was a simple statement it was keen with questioning.

"But I've told you how."

"Not practically. Frank has an absurd prejudice; he won't listen. It's worry that's the greatest part of his trouble. Worry kills quicker than pace—Now, please, won't you listen to an idea of mine, a suggestion? It is just as easy——"

She anticipated his words and checked him. "Please don't begin that way; it is the wrong way to begin. We must be in your debt for friendship; that is something we can repay." She smiled a pathetic little smile. "Don't you see?" she asked.

"I won't say I see—but count on my aid."

Their eyes met again. "Always," she said, "and you must trust me, too—to understand." Again she hesitated. "Something very big, very great, has come into your life. That's what has changed you, Lawrence!"

"Yes—something bigger than I ever knew, or thought."

"Poor Larry! And I had so hoped you would be

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happy. I had longed so to hear of it. I thought perhaps you might like to tell me. I used to keep saying: 'Some day, perhaps, I'll hear.' But I never heard."

"There is nothing to tell, Amy."

Unknown to him his voice had shaken. He stepped back and half turned away to smother the impulse of heart and tongue. He was frightened at his sudden exaltation, wrung through and through by the stirring of his great unspoken longing.

"I wish I could help. I am so sorry." She had half extended her hand toward him; he seemed to feel it, although he did not see it. By all means it was better so just then that he did not touch that hand!

"We must be going," she said at last.

The lights were beginning to show in the windows of a few of the outlying houses, and the illuminated front of the clock tower in the big building on the square showed that it was after eight. They walked on again in silence, a silence he felt grateful for, as he left her at the gate of the rectory. But the pressure of her fingers, as they rested in his for a minute, stayed with him a long time; the thrill of the low voice, the pathos of the brave gray eyes, haunted him. How her beauty had been enhanced by the twelve years! It was, too, as if he had a fresh gift of understanding of her soul and mind. Again there swept over him that overwhelming sense of loss, untinged as yet by any thought of jealousy! And he was puzzled by her attitude. He would have to watch his own more carefully! He felt the subconscious gratitude that a man does for an accidental, but timely, warning. But there had been

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some guarded intention in her questioning. What could it be?

When he reached home he picked up the letters on his desk in the library and brought them into the dining room; placing them beside his plate as he began his lonely and belated meal.

One, written in a strange, bold hand, attracted his attention. He opened it before the rest and, as he read, abstractedly, he first frowned, then half smiled and tossed it carelessly aside. But before he came to his coffee, which he brewed himself in a little bubbling French caldron, he read it through once more.

DEAR DR. KELLOGG :

So you are still here! and I have returned! Come and dine with me as you promised? Have lots to talk about—Paris was delightful as ever! You will be longing to be there soon! Have you a good memory? If so, you can prove it to me! I will give you four months more—or is your certainty still certain? Come Thursday at eight; or Friday, or any old time— But come! *Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es!*

Yours hopefully and faithfully,

CATHERINE E. RICE.

The note was certainly familiar in its rather sudden offhandedness. But at last it seemed to him that its very good nature outweighed anything else, although there was something in it that perplexed, even as it amused him. Every sentence ended with a question mark or exclamation.

He opened the rest of his mail. Three letters bore foreign postage stamps; one was from Vienna, another from Brussels, and the third from London. He looked

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them through carefully, without a change in his expression, and took up the others. There was an invitation to lecture at the Medical College at Antioch, the big city twenty miles away on the lake front; and one requesting a contribution to a surgical journal. He gathered them impatiently together; then, hastily rising, went outside and, lighting a cigarette, seated himself on the portico steps.

A cold damp something touched his hand.

"Hullo, Robin Adair," he laughed, slipping his arm about the rough body of the big Airedale terrier. "You don't have any problems to face, do you, old chap?"

He fell to thinking of that strange conversation on the footbridge. One thing was clear: he must lead Frank Bellwood to talk about himself. Then he would see what could be done. There was some lurking trouble that up to this time had been unsuspected by him.

His thoughts drifted back to Amy: her wifely devotion, her loving solicitude, the fear that she had so bravely tried to conceal, the attempt she had made to encourage her own hope and that had shown so plainly its futility.

He made no concealment of his own position to himself. He had loved her in the old days with the love of a frank-hearted, reckless boy—he had felt so sure of her!—the playmate love that signals over hedgerows and whistles under windows, the romping, hand-swinging affection of rejoicing, untried youth! It had been strong enough to have lived intangibly through the long, unhearing years of separation. But now! Well, he could serve—that was left to him! It

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would be a trust as sacred as if she herself had placed it in his keeping, a trust to be guarded from himself as well as its existence kept sacred from the eyes of others. And she had given him a task also—a responsibility that showed her confidence. It made a bond between them, no less because it raised a barrier.

CHAPTER IV

VANTAGE POINTS

IT had been a long pull up the steep, winding path, but at last they had reached the bare knoll that crowned the wooded hill overlooking the valley. Often, as boys, they had made the journey, and now, on their first day's outing, they had chosen this for their excursion.

"It begins to look like fall," panted the minister, stooping to pick up a blood-red maple leaf that the wind had drifted to the summit. Then, after a pause, between long-drawn breaths, he continued slowly: "I don't like to see it come—it saddens me."

"I love it," returned Kellogg, seating himself on the ledge of a big gray boulder. "There is no sadness in it really. Everything bursts into a diapason of color, like a grand finale that leaves you contented to rest and remember it. I have been longing for the sensation; one misses it abroad. Man! could anything be more beautiful!" He swept his arm out in an all-embracing gesture.

Three miles away, and many hundreds of feet below them, lay the town of Brimfield, the white houses showing through the trees and orchards, the clock tower and two or three church spires rising above the elms. The big red factories at Kenton Falls could be

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seen in the distance, and here and there shining expanses of the river. Up the stream, in a little valley to the eastward, the great, unsightly standpipe of the waterworks was softened by the distance into the tower of a feudal castle; the only blot was an ugly gash of excavation and unfinished masonry across a cuplike meadow, where the new dam was in process of construction. The woods all about had begun to show patches of autumn coloring; the hillsides everywhere were touched with haphazard spots of purple, red, and yellow.

Bellwood, still breathing hard, leaned back against the rock, twirling the leaf stem in his fingers. His eyes gazed out into nothingness, for, despite his physical exhaustion, his thoughts were busy. Lawrence Kellogg turned from a rapt enjoyment of the view and, for a full minute, watched him closely. He saw the laboring chest, the flush on the pallid face, and the trembling palpitation at the throat and temples; the hard climb up the hill had told on the minister's vitality; the clockwork was out of gear; the pendulum swung unevenly.

"Frank," he suddenly exclaimed, "I never meant to set you such a pace! you're out of condition; you've got to look out for yourself. Let's hear the old heart?"

Bellwood smiled.

"Something's been wrong for a long time, Larry," he returned, as Kellogg slid down beside him and placed his ear against his chest. "Too much tobacco, too much coffee—go on——"

"Too much worry, too much many things—too little rest," broke in Kellogg. "I'll have to take you

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in hand, Frank, old chap; you need a thorough going over."

"It's the same old trouble. That's all!" Bellwood was drawing himself together. "You remember I never could go in for athletics. I'm a bad risk; no company will take me; I've tried several. Don't let's talk about it."

"All right, if you don't wish to; but I repeat—you need looking after."

"I need something, yes," Bellwood murmured pathetically; "indeed I do."

"What is it, old chap?"

"I can't tell you in so many words; but if I should try, I should say I needed peace, peace!—God give me peace!"

He stopped suddenly, panting as hard as if he had again climbed the hill; he turned to his companion as if half in fear, expecting him to say something, to search him further. But Kellogg had seated himself on the ground, apparently without noticing the sudden outburst; it was better to let him finish without pressing him just then. Bellwood, recovering slowly, sank down beside him. The shadow of a bitter smile was on his lips; his fingers trembled as he laid them on Kellogg's arm.

"You see," he said, "you cannot help me; no one can help me! Pray forgive me all this, won't you?—and forget it."

"I'm going to help you a lot," said his friend earnestly.

The minister shook his head and, clasping his knees, leaned back against the stone in silence, with closed eyes. Kellogg stole a long look at him.

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It was a beautiful face—Greek, almost, in its purity. Only the wrinkles across the brow, and the lines downward from the eye-pit, and the drooping corners of the lips, prevented its being youthful. The long, dark lashes against the cheeks that were now pale again were curved and fine, like a woman's. Yet, there was nothing neutral in its combination of strength and weakness; it possessed certain marked elements of power.

There was a young actor, Kellogg remembered seeing often in Paris, whose resemblance to Bellwood had been striking, and whose appearance had been the subject of much discussion. He repelled some people as strongly as he attracted others; there was no mere toleration of his individuality. Women either loved him or detested him; men were enthusiastic partisans, or out-and-out detractors. He appealed in his acting, also, directly to individual temperaments or passing moods; he aroused the sensations, not the senses. Personally he had been both a libertine and a coxcomb.

Bellwood shared few of these characteristics with this outward appearance. He certainly had some control over women, from his good looks alone, and to these he added the quality of brains and a tenor voice of rare quality which would have made him doubly dangerous had he chosen knight errantry for a pastime; seemingly, however, he possessed no desire for adventure. His nickname at college, "Saint Anthony," quite aptly described him so far as his feelings for the gentler sex were concerned. With men his influence had its limitations; he had been unpopular as an undergraduate with the mass of his fellow-students, yet he possessed not a few firm friends, and a number of de-

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voted followers among those who went in more for books than for brawn. The only time he had attracted popular attention was once when he had appeared in a serious old English morality play, given by the Dramatic Association. Then for a week his name was on all lips. It was his first and last appearance.

Frank Bellwood's intimacy with Lawrence Kellogg had puzzled many. At a hasty glance they seemed to have little in common; but they had been fellow-townsmen, old schoolmates, and were inseparable during the four years of their university life. That Lawrence's father had paid their joint bills was known only to the Registrar of the Faculty.

Neither of the two on the hilltop had moved or spoken for some minutes. It was Bellwood at last who broke the silence.

"Had we better be moving?" he asked. "I feel all right now."

"No; let's sit here a little longer, Frank; there's no hurry. I want to talk to you about something."

"No questions about health, or habits, or tiresome medical advice, please. I refuse to answer on any grounds. There's nothing the matter."

"No, I don't mean to touch on that subject just now; it's something else. Do you happen to know a Mrs. Rice who lives at the big new place on the river? 'The Hill,' we used to call it."

The minister turned on his elbow and regarded Kellogg curiously.

"Mrs. Ned Rice? No—that is, I have not met her for a long time. Years ago we had just a speaking acquaintance. Everyone here knows her by sight, though."

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"Then she's not a member of your congregation?"

"A member of my congregation! man, dear!—she's a Pagan, out and out! She never goes to church—she—" Bellwood checked himself suddenly. "I suppose she has redeeming qualities, saving graces; I hope we all have," he concluded. "She comes of a good family on her father's side; her mother was the daughter of a hatter in San Francisco."

"I am interested," put in Kellogg. "That's the only reason I inquired; but I had no curiosity in her pedigree."

"Do you want my opinion of her? I haven't any to express," rejoined Bellwood slowly. "She subscribed largely to the Atheneum and to the Working Girls' Home we started at Kenton Falls. I wrote her a letter of thanks—but I never would let Amy call upon her."

"Why not?"

"Well, to be honest, I couldn't bear the thought of it! She may be maligned, of course; but she's too reckless of public opinion; people say so many things!" He paused, evidently distressed.

"I don't wish in the least to hear what people say, old chap," smiled Kellogg. "Nor to extract gossip from a man who hates it. You know me better than that. Let it pass!"

Bellwood thought for a moment and then went on nervously: "Well, I'd just as lief tell you, there's no reason why I shouldn't. She's supposed to be a sort of a freethinker—I mean a free lance. You know my colleague, Remsen Bache, of St. Mary's at the Falls?"

"No, I don't think I know him."

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"An able man—rather high church, but he has a cutting tongue at times—he calls her 'Catherine the Great.'"

"Does *he* know her?" asked Kellogg, mentally forming an opinion of Mr. Remsen Bache.

"I haven't the least idea; I am—er—sorry I've said what I did; I don't usually——"

"I understand, old man; *you* didn't say it," Lawrence interrupted.

Bellwood started to rise and then sat down again. "May I ask why you are interested?" he inquired. "Have you met her? She is here quite seldom; I—I thought she was still in Europe."

"She returned two days ago; I'm dining with her to-morrow night—" He stopped at the look on the minister's face, and went on hurriedly: "I've only seen her once in my life, here. I could not call myself a friend nor, as yet, a champion of hers. Don't feel bad about it."

"Larry," said the minister earnestly, "don't go; I wouldn't go!" He laid both hands on Kellogg's arm. "Can't you get out of it? She's not the kind of a woman that does a man any good; men are her game, she is a destroyer of lives, an obliterator of ideals. What good can come of knowing her? I tell you she is out of her sphere—out of her century! Who are her friends here? whom does she go with?—Men who drink with her openly at the Antioch Country Club on the Sabbath! Some few people who are afraid to offend her because she has money! What does she do on her excursions to New York? How does she conduct herself at Paris and Monte Carlo?"

"Hold hard, Frank; you've been talking to women

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—you'll make a champion yet of me. Judge Hollins——”

“Judge Hollins!” repeated Bellwood, interrupting fiercely. “He's one of them—and old enough to know better! But mind you——”

He stopped suddenly with a catch of labored breath, his face hidden in both hands. Kellogg watched in some alarm; here was some trouble he could not understand! But Bellwood recovered quickly and, as he raised his head, all his passion had left him.

“Who am I to talk this way?” he said at last, almost whispering. “Does the punishment we may suffer hereafter equal the punishment we may suffer on earth? Who am I to judge thus of my fellow-creatures! By what right may one sinner judge of another?”

The preacher had disappeared, although the words were set and clerical; it was the *man* thinking, talking—talking more to himself than to his listener.

Kellogg looked at the drawn white face; the lips were moving as if in ejaculatory prayer.

The concerned interest of the physician, suddenly aroused, faded into the pity of one friend for another in distress. Lawrence let his arm fall upon the minister's shoulder, but the latter evaded the kindly meant caress.

“Come,” he said almost harshly, “we'd better be going.”

“Right—O! Up we get! Easy, down the hill now,” returned Kellogg, rising.

Bellwood ignored the proffered hand and pushed himself to his feet.

Slowly they descended the path, winding through

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the maple grove, interspersed with the black masses of the pines. Crossing a steep pasture, filled with hardhack bushes, they came to a rocky lane down which they made their way to the well-traveled road that led to the railway station.

The Antioch local was just stopping at the platform, the few passengers were descending; the strangers the object of attack of the rival hotel runners, and the Brimfield citizens making their way to the line of waiting vehicles.

"There is one of Mrs. Rice's particular cronies—a nice kind of a creature for a woman's intimate associate!" said Bellwood, indicating a tall, thick-set man of forty who was climbing into a rubber-tired runabout. "A divorcé, a gambler, smirched in connection with the bribery scandals, whose price in politics has been known for years, and whose lack of personal morals is notorious!"

Kellogg half smiled; it was almost the first time the minister had spoken since leaving the hilltop. His words were in marked contrast to his bitter self-arraignment of an hour before.

Mr. Murger—for it was none other—caught a glimpse of Bellwood and his companion, and turned to a large, red-faced man who sat on the narrow seat of the runabout beside him. The red-faced one, laughing over his shoulder, included Bellwood and Kellogg in a long, insolent stare.

"Barney McCutcheon, the labor leader—candidate for mayor of Kenton Falls," remarked the minister. "Murger is on the ticket for district attorney. A fine pair of rascals! They both have tacitly encouraged threats and violence when we've had strikes.

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Trouble is expected any day, now, at the water-works."

"Judge Hollins has told me a little something of the situation," Kellogg rejoined. "They are not elected yet!"

"But they will be, unless something unforeseen happens," said Bellwood. "They have the lawless element and some money back of them, and that means votes in this part of the country. I've heard more than one person express a wish that your father was alive to handle the situation. Why don't you declare yourself, eh? and go in for politics?"

"I've neither taste nor bent for it," answered Lawrence lightly. "I've lived away so long, and being born over there, I hardly know my status as a citizen; you know I never could make a speech to save me. I always trusted you to do that for me, in the old days, didn't I?"

Bellwood hesitated.

"Yes, I believe you did," he said slowly, a strange note in his voice. His step lagged a little and Kellogg, shortening his stride, looked down at him. There was an expression on his face as of one in sudden physical pain.

"Frank," suggested the doctor, "stop at my office, like a good chap, won't you? There may be a message for me. And then I'll walk home with you. It's only a minute out of the way."

On the slate that hung at the door were scribbled a few straggling sentences. Kellogg read them through as he took out his keys.

"I've got to go down to the Tevelins' at The Bend," he said. "'Hubble, bubble, toil and trouble!' I

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should think there were enough children already! But come in; I want to have a word with you."

Bellwood stepped through the door into the little hallway, off the consulting room.

"Are you attending the Tevelins?" he asked. "They're a bad lot—the whole family. I wish they would clear out of the neighborhood. They begin all the diseases, and Tevelin's been twice in jail."

"So I understand," answered Kellogg, as he raised the blinds in the front office; "Pat was predestined—a man with a wide envy for other people's property—especially dogs! Come in here, Frank."

The minister entered nervously. Kellogg turned and, seating himself on the corner of the desk, motioned him to the easy chair.

"Frank," he said, "why don't you take a vacation? You need it. Speaking as a physician and repeating what I probably will repeat again, you've got to take care of yourself."

"Vacation!" exclaimed Bellwood, passing his fingers through his long, brown locks—his only external affectation—"I really couldn't think of it—really! . . . Has Amy been talking to you?" he asked quickly, shooting a half-suspicious glance at Kellogg, as he raised his head. "You've been meeting her frequently at her mother's—has she?"

"I've only seen her once there; but I want you to listen to a proposition: Mrs. Winter is an ill woman; you're *not* a well man— Hold on now! I may be abrupt, but I know what I am talking about! Why don't you and the old lady and Amy and the children go off for a season? Rest and take it easy for six months."

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“Rest and take it easy for six months!” The minister quoted the sentence with a bitter laugh. “I wonder who you think I am—what you think we are? It is more than out of the question; such talk is absolute, downright rubbish! Rest!”

Again he laughed, this time contemptuously, with a toss-back of his head.

“No, I don’t think it is such rubbish. Won’t you—won’t you, as an old friend, let me put something before you and listen? Let *me* do this. You could get some one to fill your place; it could be made to appear as if it came from the whole congregation. I’m not qualified for a warden, but I am a pew-holder. Won’t you let me?”

“No, sir!”

The vehemence of Bellwood’s reply was absolutely startling. Kellogg looked at him in sheer amazement. He had risen to his feet, and his slight form was trembling with hardly repressed emotion.

“Do you think I can go on forever accepting largess from your hand?” he continued hoarsely. “I tell you, if I was in poverty and distress, I could accept nothing further from you—I couldn’t, I couldn’t take anything more! It would kill me to think of it—I forbid you to offer it—or to speak of it to Amy—I forbid you!”

Kellogg looked at him undisturbed. Bellwood had always been more or less elusive, even to him, but now it was more marked than ever. His conceit had a hair trigger that demanded careful handling.

“Sit down, Frank, sit down,” he said quietly. “I had no wish to offend you. If, as you say, it’s out of the question, well and good; we’ll drop it. I won’t

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trouble in that way again, of course. But—and don't let your pride stop me here—I must tell you certain things. I must warn you. If you resent my suggestion as a friend, you must take my advice as a doctor; you need it. Go and see Smith at Antioch—I know him—and he will tell you the truth. You must avoid overwork, excitement. You fainted twice after the afternoon service last Sunday, in the vestry room. Barton, the sexton, told me so."

"It was nothing; it was very hot, and I had had no luncheon. There is nothing the matter that can be mended."

"There is something the matter and it must be mended."

Bellwood, who had sunk down in the seat again, leaned his elbows on his knees and bent forward. His shoulders heaved as if he was on the verge of a complete breakdown. Kellogg took hold of him gently.

"Come, let's thrash this all out," he said, dragging up a chair with one hand, the other still resting on his friend's arm. "Let's begin at the beginning."

"No, no! Not now!" cried the minister, drawing himself erect. "Another time, not now!" Something akin to fear showed in his voice.

He rose and stood, half swaying, fumbling for his hat and stick on the desk. When at last he found them he turned, with an effort controlled himself, and spoke calmly, apparently voicing a heartfelt sincerity.

"Don't think that I fail to appreciate your kindness. I spoke hastily—bitterly; and I crave your pardon! You are the bigger man, Lawrence—the better man; you can forgive me. I may not have long to live— But let me ask you something: Don't, don't,

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I pray, force me deeper in your debt! Some day, if I should ask——”

“Ask it now,” interrupted Kellogg, seeing that he had paused as if at loss. “As for being in my debt—you’re not! And as for being a bigger or better man—I am not worthy to tie your shoes. I’ve gambled and drank, and done those things that I ought not to have done, and I dare say I’ve given you no end of worry over my spiritual condition. So we will cut all that out of the argument. You have got to take care of yourself; that’s all I insist on!”

Bellwood now had himself well in hand. Only his intense pallor and a nervous twitching of his lips betrayed his effort to appear at ease.

“I must hasten home,” he said. “I’m afraid they’ll be wondering what has become of me. The Dorcas Society meets at the rectory this afternoon; I’ve got to speak to some of the members. Good-by!”

He extended his hand and Kellogg took it, noticing that his fingers were cold as ice. “Don’t worry over me, please don’t,” he continued with a piteous appeal in his eyes. “I can assure you it isn’t necessary.”

Another moment and he was gone. From the window Kellogg watched his tall, slight figure crossing the square.

“Poor old Frank,” he said to himself. “A physical need and a spiritual quandary make a bad combination.”

He had failed in his first attempt to relieve the situation—failed utterly—but he was not disheartened. There was some mystery about it all. He could not help wondering if Amy knew anything definite of the trouble, whatever it was. She was so strong, and yet

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so instinctively feminine in her swift intuitions. A man in Bellwood's position needed something more than even his religion could supply. He needed the tangible evidence of another's abiding faith in his work, his future, and in himself. But surely he had that, if ever a man had!

Lawrence crossed to the rosy western window and stood there looking out. It was not the strong glare of the noble sunset that made his eyes glisten; it was not the scent of the late mowing that swept in with the breeze that made him draw that long, quivering breath.

Suddenly he remembered the message on the slate. The Tevelins were the black sheep—and incidentally the scapegoats—of the community; but that had nothing to do with the fact that they needed assistance. He packed some things in his bag and telephoned for his trap to pick him up at the office. This done, he threw himself down in the easy chair.

Thinking of the Tevelins had brought him back once more to the standing subject of his thoughts. The association of ideas was not without cause. He smiled a little as his mind flew backward to a day a score of years before.

He was a slim-legged little boy just in his teens, dressed in an imported Eton roundabout and a big white collar. It was a rainy day in early spring. He was walking along a Brimfield back street, holding a small umbrella with such chivalric generosity that his shoulder caught most of the drippings. Huddled quite close to him was a little girl of ten. He remembered how her hair seemed to curl up tighter by reason of the dampness. One hand held the crook of the um-

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brella beneath his. As they went chattering by the corner near the blacksmith's shop (how it all came back to him!) Jack Hogan, the blacksmith's son—the young cock of the school and juvenile bully of the village—addressed him from the shelter of the hitching shed in terms contemptuous with unmistakable opprobrious intent. It may have been the collar, it may have been the Eton jacket, it might have been the umbrella. He tingled red, he remembered, but went on. This had been enough incentive for "Fisty Jack" Hogan. A muddy stick, hurled perhaps at the slim legs in their long gray trousers, caught the little girl on the hem of her white skirt. She turned with him and took in the situation.

"Go for him, Larry," she said. "I'll hold the umbrella."

Never did knight go forth to do battle under prouder prompting! At the end of five minutes, disheveled and muddy, with a fast-closing eye and a strange warm taste in his mouth that kept him swallowing, he stood above the prostrate Hogan in the middle of the muddy street. And not until then did he notice that the little figure under the umbrella was not the only spectator. From the shelter of the blacksmith shop, a number of hard-featured men had stood and watched. He remembered now the strange words of encouragement and appreciation, addressed to himself, or his antagonist, he could not tell; but when the fight was over a big hand had rested on his shoulder.

"Blood'll tell," said a rough voice in his ear. "Blood'll tell, me b'ye! You're a great fighter, son, and you'll live to prove it! And if ever you want a hand in your corner, call for Paddy Tevelin; I'll be

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there! And now home, my dear, an' a bit o' raw beef on the eye; that'll take out the swellin'."

Oh! that journey home through the rain! He did not realize until halfway there that his little companion was sobbing soft sobs of fearsome pride. When they had reached the gate to her father's house he remembered now that she looked up at him, the tears still in the long, dark lashes.

"Oh, your poor eye!" she murmured sympathetically.

"Never mind that!" he had replied. "My eye's all right."

"I'll kiss it and make it well," she said, and there, under the umbrella, was the salve administered. Never had soldier borne the scar of courage with less shame than he, as he carried that blackened orb for a fortnight.

Tevelin had always remembered that little impromptu mill; he had always claimed, as it were, a feeling of respectful brotherhood, and when a few days before he had told the "new doctor" of the coming trouble at The Bend, it was with an appeal as powerful in its reminiscence as the freemason's signal of distress.

Lawrence glanced out of the window again. The trap was there waiting.

CHAPTER V

THE CHARM OF CIRCE

MRS. RICE turned, as she entered the dimly lighted hall, and drew aside the *portières* for a last look at the dining room.

It certainly was most inviting. The two high-backed Spanish leather chairs fronted one another cosily at the small round table—which is much more *intime* than a square one! She had seen to the icing of the champagne, sincerely hoping that her expected guest drank champagne instead of whisky and soda. She had carefully selected the most beautiful glass, and chosen the most becoming petticoats for the wax candles in the little Dresden candlesticks. The dinner had been a matter of some discussion between Henri and herself—she had all French servants—and now she was satisfied there was nothing more to be done. Giving a fidgety glance at the clock she devoutly hoped that doctors were punctual people.

Mrs. Ned had spent as much time on her gowning as she had on the dinner, but, at first glance, it might not appear so. The final effect had a comfortable carelessness that could hardly be called studied. The wide, open sleeves showed her smooth, round arms above the elbow, and the drooping lace threatened to slip from the curves of her splendid shoulders; the

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pillar of firm, white throat rose above the magnificent expanse of her bosom. Her dark hair was massed together in some wonderful fashion that seemed innocent of pins, and a red rose, thrust, as if by inspiration, at exactly the right angle, in exactly the right place, gave a finishing touch that was distinctly pleasing, as she glanced at herself in the big hall mirror.

Mrs. Ned's natural color needed no retouching; but, if the truth be told, the arch of her eyebrows was just a little bit fine, and somewhat suspiciously dark.

As the big ormolu clock began to strike, the crunching of wheels sounded on the graveled driveway. Mrs. Rice stepped to the open door and greeted Kellogg as he descended from the buggy.

"On the very stroke!" she said, as they shook hands. "Tell your man to drive to the stable; he can wait there. Henri—he's my *chef* and a dear, crotchety old soul—will owe you a vote of thanks for your promptness. Isn't it a heavenly evening? I'm so glad you could come!"

At first Lawrence, as he removed his coat, wondered if Mrs. Rice was nervous or was endeavoring to set him at his ease by the informality and the volubility of her welcome; but a second later he concluded it was only her natural, hospitable manner. It was too dark in the hallway to see that his hostess, as she was speaking, had flushed to the very roots of her hair.

"You've never been here before," she went on, "have you? You should see the view on a fine evening; Mr. Rice named this place 'Elmside,' but I like the old name, 'The Hill.' The moon will soon come up; we can sit out here and see it after dinner. Look! she's just showing over the tops of the trees!"

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Mrs. Ned had gone to the big window that opened on the stone-flagged terrace, and was standing there, outstretching a jeweled hand, the lace sleeve falling gracefully from the point of her elbow. She beckoned to him.

Lawrence joined her and they stepped slowly out into the open air.

"Hadn't I better get you a wrap?" he asked.

"Heavens, no!" laughed the widow. "I never take cold. It seems quite balmy—and we will only be here a minute. Pray don't prescribe for me! I want you to forget your calling and all your learning to-night. Too much knowledge, like self-analysis, is a bar to enjoyment. Please don't be wise or clever. I hate wisdom and cleverness. I detest definitions! Doesn't this make you wish you were a poet—or something quite nice and ignorant?"

"I would make a bad fist at poetry, though I confess to reading it," said Lawrence, smiling. "I could never rhyme 'cat' with 'bat,' and I get quotations badly mixed, so I never quote. But before I leave my calling—or at least before I forget it and you discover my ignorance—I want to tell you how good it was of you to do what you did for the Tevelins. I was so surprised when I saw you there last evening that I didn't have time. They told me that you got the nurse from Antioch, and sent all the rest of those things. If you only knew how grateful they were——"

"Poor people! everybody's down on them," interrupted Mrs. Ned; "they're quite beyond the pale of common charity it seems. However, I find it pays to keep on the right side of Pat! If you ever have a sick cow, or horse, or dog, he's the best vet in the county,

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and such an awful scamp that I positively admire him. They say he's got another wife somewhere. But let's drop it—with one question. How are things?"

"All right—a boy."

"Good! May he live to be a credit to his family—there're too many women in the world."

"There're too few of certain kinds."

"Well, it's a blessing we're not all alike, isn't it?"

"Yes," laughed Kellogg, "I agree with you on that point."

"Which may have a covert meaning, not complimentary to the only member of her sex present," rejoined the widow. "But she will let it pass. . . . Here's Eugene with the cocktails and dinner is ready."

The heavy hangings were drawn aside at the dining-room door, admitting a flood of light into the hall. Lawrence paused and looked about him. The obsequious Eugene, who disdained the strutting form of servitude, had disappeared.

"Taste it slowly," said Mrs. Ned, with her glass to her full, red lips. "It's the invention of a friend of mine from Virginia."

"That is one thing we learn from a residence abroad, too," answered Kellogg. "I mean to sip pleasant things, not to gulp them."

As he spoke he glanced about him again.

The decorations of the hall could hardly be called feminine; a tall bronze of the Flying Mercury stood poised on the broad newel posts; there were some dim oil paintings, and, on green marble pedestals, two beautiful figures of stone-age warriors, one letting fly an arrow and the other carrying a young bear by the scruff.

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The piano, draped with a rich, gilt altar cloth, was covered with photographs, mostly in silver frames, many of them signed. There were officers in uniform, actors in costume, civilians with orders, a Highlander in kilts nursing a huge feather bonnet, and a well-set-up English bishop who was not in the least ashamed of a finely turned leg. Men, all men! True, on the mantel were one or two portraits, certainly not belonging to the "family" order. He recognized the gay Countess de Baleinier, and a fine likeness of Sara as *Hamlet*. But he could pause no longer. Mrs. Ned took the empty glass from him, putting it down with hers on the edge of a little onyx table, and led the way into the dining room.

"I saw you looking at my collection," she laughed, as they sat down. "Some friends of yours, I dare say, among them—we can shred them at our leisure some day. Lady Camilla Macdonald says I parade them as boldly as if I was a head hunter of Borneo, and she ought to know; she's hunted heads in every country under the sun. Do you know, an American woman asked me where she could *buy* them! I told her where I thought she might, without a tremor."

Mrs. Ned's laugh was certainly contagious, and it was accompanied with a little fluttering upward gesture that caused the lace sleeves to display almost the length of her beautiful arms.

If there had been the slightest feeling of constraint at the meeting, thus far, it had now faded completely. Even Lawrence's sensation of being somewhat expectantly on guard vanished, and in its place had come to him a sense of enjoyment of the present, complete and all satisfying, with just the slightest suspicion of

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a delightful excitement. He realized, all at once, the subtle, warmth-compelling influence of sex.

"Do you know, they say that melons take away your taste for champagne," remarked Mrs. Rice. "But I've discovered an antidote—a big swallow of brown sherry taken immediately after the soup."

"Sounds like a prescription."

"Or the advice of a truly scientific *gourmet*—I don't know the feminine for the word," returned Mrs. Ned. "Oh, by the way—how about the wager? You have still four months more to serve."

"I never made any wager. I suppose I couldn't convince you that, as I have told some other people, I have burned my bridges behind me. . . . I seriously intend to remain here and turn into a commonplace country doctor."

"*À la Balzac?*" interrogated Mrs. Rice. "I can't imagine it. Wait until you have a craving that the applause of your well-behaved conscience won't satisfy."

"You mean a desire for the fleshpots of Egypt?"

"No, the sweetmeats thereof; they have a stronger hold."

"I don't feel it yet," returned Lawrence.

"Oh, of course; if you brought your *will* into it, you might turn hermit, if you chose to. You've got a very nice chin that tells me you have plenty of—" She studied him through half-closed eyes. "What shall I call it?"

"Obstinacy?"

"Yes, obstinacy; but there is a cleft in it that shows—well, shows lots of things. We will meet somewhere else than at Brimfield."

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Mrs. Ned made again the fluttering movement with her arms and laughed musically. Then, with her eyes full of merriment, she continued:

"That sounds like an improprietion, a threat, or a comforting reflection, doesn't it? I only meant it as a prophecy. You know people do meet in other places."

"Yes; most unexpected places," returned Lawrence, thinking of the Tevelins. "Hark! What's that?"

"Listen!" whispered Mrs. Rice, holding up a finger.

From the hall, or rather from the terrace outside, came the sound of music, sweet, but thin and tinkling, soft but penetrating. It played a quaint little air, with a throbbing undercurrent of accompaniment and sweeping, liquid runs of melody.

"What is it?" asked Lawrence in pleased bewonderment.

"S-sh! Listen again," cautioned Mrs. Rice. "Have you ever heard it before?"

"Yes; it seems to me I have; but where?"

"Think."

"I can't remember; it's a harp, isn't it?"

"Yes; but the funny little tune!"

"I know, I know; but where was it?"

"I see I will to have to tell you a story," said the widow, leaning toward him, her chin resting on her clasped fingers and her elbows on the table. "There is an amusing little place, not far from a big city; and there is a great tree, and in the tree are little platforms on the big branches, and there are tiny tables——"

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"Robinson's, at Seaux!" exclaimed Lawrence, interrupting.

"And there was a man with a guitar, and he sang that song the harp is playing!"

"The same song——"

"And there was a gay little party on one of the lower limbs, who were much interested," broke in the widow; "and they were directly underneath."

"Underneath what?"

"Underneath me," rejoined Mrs. Ned. The red rose in her hair shook as she laughed.

"There were three of us!" exclaimed Lawrence. "I remember now."

"But the other chap didn't count; I met him afterwards. There were only *two* of us." Again the rose shook.

"I didn't see you——"

"No, I suppose you—er—thought it would be rude to look at a lady when she was up a tree! But I could have dropped a pat of butter on top of your head. I'll never get a chance to do it again."

"The world is a funny little place," said Kellogg, "isn't it?"

"The world is a very nice place, if we don't worry too much over how wicked it is, and if we only remember that we are only here once. By the way, *she* was very *chic*."

"Yes? He's stopped playing!"

"He won't play any more; he's gone."

"Why?"

"I only got him to come up and play that tune three times. I happened to hear him and *it* in the village, on the street, to-day, and I engaged him for

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the evening. I suppose he'd have played all night. 'Tout finit par des chansons.' Do you want him back?"

"No," said Lawrence, wondering. "But it was the other fellow's party. I was a guest."

"I wasn't cross-questioning you," replied Mrs. Ned. "But I found out from him who you were. Only, when I did, you had left Paris; you'd just returned from a shooting trip to Asia or somewhere. So the dinner was postponed until Brimfield. Now, let's have a glass of champagne. I hope you like it *brut*; is there anything better?"

"As wine, no; this is excellent."

"Perrier-Jouet, Special Reserved, '89," said Mrs. Rice. "Aren't you glad you came?"

"Yes, very."

"Only on that account? Don't answer me!"

"All right; I won't."

"You know lots about women, don't you?"

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "No."

"Oh, yes, you do! There is that kind of a female person who resents a man claiming to know anything at all about her sex, but resents, still more, any man claiming that no man at all knows anything. I don't resent, I'm not porcupinish; but I agree it's better not to tell."

"I make no claims to knowledge."

"I know you don't; that's one way of asserting them. . . . Here's to us!"

As he sipped his wine Lawrence was conscious that Mrs. Ned was silently questioning him. He raised his head and caught her long look over the rim of his glass. Mrs. Ned was holding hers in both hands and

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her elbows were still on the table. His eyes were the first to open; the blood had flushed hot to his temples.

"What funny, great big boys some men are!" purred the widow softly. There was a pause. "Eat," she said at last with a little laugh.

The dinner went on. Eugene glided in silently with the salad and then, as silently, glided out.

"Weren't you afraid he was going to knock?" whispered Mrs. Ned, leaning across the cloth.

"He's quite like a spirit or a ghost," said Lawrence, choosing to be obtuse.

"Well, I'm not afraid of him, and I might be of a ghost! You'll find some cigarettes there in that silver box. He won't be in again. We'll have our coffee and *liqueurs* on the terrace, or have you lived so long in England that you say 'leküre'?"

"Oh, well, I speak French," said Lawrence, opening the silver box and taking out a long Egyptian. "So I suppose I pronounce it in the American fashion."

"I've *seen* you 'talk' French," smiled Mrs. Ned, "and you appear to talk very well; that is, judging from a bird's-eye view. Do you know, I rather like Frenchmen, for a short time, and as other people's husbands. I was with a most charming one all alone that day. Now, I've shocked you dreadfully! But I never met his wife—he told me all about her—he'd married her for money. She spent most of her time at Nice—and had cut down his allowance, which he spent in Paris. Thank Heaven, American men don't do that sort of thing—I mean exact money—and they don't talk about women that way, especially their wives! 'By and large,' as the saying is, American

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men are the best, if they don't get too highly sentimental, or go in too much for money-making. Women are all the same the world over—mostly cats—with now and then a stray saint, or a faithful maidservant, among them. . . . But please don't think me a pessimist. I enjoy life and living; I only hate a few things."

"What do you hate most?" asked Lawrence, trying to hold Mrs. Ned to her mood.

"I hate the small unkind things that hurt other people—done or said; I hate to see suffering, or to think about it. I'm an awful coward that way."

"What do you like most?"

"Foolish question! I like a good time and a mentally responsive elbow. I hate people who never act on impulse and who study everything out. Come, let's go."

She touched his arm as she rose, then actually caught his hand and led him into the hall. They stopped at the piano, and Mrs. Rice, her eyes shining, pointed at one of the photographs.

"There's the man I was with at Seaux. Don't you think he's good-looking?"

It was the likeness of an individual in a light frock coat, holding a tall, white hat, a cane, and a pair of stiff gloves. The single eyeglass and the simpering face, the mustache brushed up from the half-open lips, irritated Kellogg; the man was of the kind that made his toe itch.

"No; I think he is a beast," he growled bluntly.

"Good!" laughed Mrs. Ned. "That's just what he was—an amusing, interesting, little insect-beast! much the sort one would discover with a microscope and wonder what he would be like if he were larger.

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He wasn't a bit dangerous—any woman could keep him under her thumb——”

“I should think you would have wanted to step on him,” grunted Lawrence.

“He was awfully jealous of you,” cooed the widow, her eyes again full of laughter.

“Jealous of me!”

“Yes; I threatened to drop the butter and then to have him bring you up so that I could make you a proper apology. But let's drop *him* now. There's a man, if you like!”

She picked up another photograph.

“Pardon me, don't you think you'd better let me have a catalogue, with names and dates, weights and colors?”

Lawrence asked the question with mock seriousness, to which Mrs. Rice replied with mock reproach.

“I never supposed you would be so rude. I am quite surprised.”

“I was only displaying an interest in your specimens.”

“Poor Archie Carrisford!” went on the widow, looking at the photograph. “You remember him?”

“Yes,” said Kellogg. “Killed at the Vaal River. I used to know him in Leicestershire. Let me see it.”

He took the silver-mounted, black-leather panel, and Mrs. Ned looked over his shoulder.

“Such a dear, good fellow—although inclined to be domestic and, therefore, serious,” murmured she; “and such a fine figure. Did you ever see such shoulders! I wept when I heard the news. He really touched my heart; poor Archie!”

There was feeling in Mrs. Ned's voice; Lawrence

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turned; her face was very close to his, her hair brushed his cheek, but she did not look at him; her eyes were on the picture of the young guardsman.

"I believe you have a heart," said he musingly.

"Indeed I have a heart! But I hate meaningless vows and maudlin sentiment. Come! our coffee will be cold and our ice melted—I don't know what to call you," she smiled quizzically. "If I used your title, I should feel you ought to charge for the conversation. Yet you needn't be a doctor; you only are one as an excuse for looking serious at times. I wonder if doctors, knowing so much, feel things like other people! I suppose you would define love as 'a primitive cardiac affection'—but heavens! I must stop! Let me see—I met you in a tree; that's the next thing to a wood; I will call you 'Orlando'! You would look well in a doublet and, I dare say, in hose. . . . Come, Orlando!"

Once more the widow took his hand and led him out on the terrace.

The moon was now well up—there was hardly a breath of air to swing the sleeping elms; but so bright was it, that the colors of near-by objects showed; a few late flowers gleamed wonderfully in the garden below the terrace wall. The river was smothered in a winding stretch of silver mist. The outlines of the far-away hills melted into the strange blue sky.

They stood there for a moment, holding hands like children, without speaking.

"She's beautiful to-night, our dear old mother earth," said Lawrence at last.

"But she isn't old," replied Mrs. Ned, beneath her breath. "She's young—she's like a sleeping bride. Oh, how grand it is to live and to feel, and to enjoy—

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to drink it deep. Why should we have care—why sorrow—why old age—when we are given this!”

“To-night seems like a present from the gods!” Lawrence was slowly rising to her mood. “‘And every moon this glory lends—’ There, you see, I am quoting!”

“It’s worshipful!” whispered Mrs. Ned. “It’s worshipful, Orlando.”

She seemed to draw nearer to him for an instant. He could feel the cool length of her arm trembling against his side. The dark, sweetly odorous hair touched his cheek again, then swept across his temple. His blood grew riotous—but the moment passed; he had hardly dared to look. He could hear her breathing, count his own leaping pulse! But the moment passed!

Mrs. Ned dropped his hand and crossed the stone flagging to where the silver and glass shone on the little table in the corner of the ell. She sat down on the divan beneath the Turkish awning. For an instant Lawrence stood still; then he turned slowly, came nearer, and sat down beside her.

“Sillies!” said the widow. “It was the moon—I suspect!”

Her voice wavered slightly and she jingled the silver things nervously with the sugar tongs. Her composure came to her by degrees.

“Just as I told you! It is slops! I mean the coffee—cold and muddy. Why don’t you smoke?”

“Don’t you?” asked Lawrence, taking out his case.

“Seldom, except under protest—for the sake of good-fellowship; but, please, you go on. Will you have brandy, menthe, chartreuse, kümmel?”

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"Nothing just now, thanks."

He was fumbling for his matches and yet wondering at himself—wondering why? And then it came to him! It was the memory of the pressure of another hand that had held him from replying; the swift recollection of another voice—another face—the face of another man's wife!—the wife of his best friend!

"Can't you find a light?" asked the widow evenly.

"Yes; I forgot I was going to smoke."

"Let's talk," she said. "Do you know, I saw you the other day—walking with the rector of St. John's. Something strange about him, isn't there? He's the living image of Marti, the actor. You and he are old friends."

"The very best and oldest, if you mean Frank Bellwood."

"I used to know him quite well a long time ago. I quite agree with some one who said that there were three sexes in the world—'men, women, and clergymen'—one might almost include actors, too. . . . I suppose he told you he doesn't approve of me?"

Lawrence was silent.

"He isn't the only one; so that doesn't matter!" she continued. "Do you know his wife? I saw her this morning. Of course, you do; how foolish! Do you know, I think she is one of the most beautiful creatures I ever saw. What a figure! What eyes, what color! And so youthful—she must be nearly thirty. And to think she's had two children! That generally— She would be wonderful if she was only properly gowned and dressed—and had a chance. Somebody told me that she had attended a fashionable girls' school in New York; did she?"



"He turned and left her standing there."

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"She was there for three years, I think."

"Was she ever abroad?"

"Yes, six months in Europe, traveling with friends."

"Where were you then?"

"I was in college."

"They say Walter Smith, of Antioch, was awfully in love with her," insinuated Mrs. Ned.

"Indeed?"

"And he was not the only one," she mocked lightly, "was he?" She paused, but Lawrence made no reply, so she continued: "And to think of her having to spend her days in this poky place. It seems a crime! What a success she would have had! She looks *good*, too. She has that air about her that other women will not own up to envying. I'm sure she's cold. She's very good. Isn't she?"

"I hope so—I mean I'm sure of it." He was beginning to rebel at the trend of the questioning.

"I don't think I ever wanted to be good—no, no; I'm not good, Orlando!"

She leaned toward him, her hands clasped at her neck. Her eyes were searching him.

"That depends," said he.

"That's true," she replied; "it depends."

The rose fell from her hair; she picked it up, crushed it against her face, then threw it from her.

There was another pause. From the direction of Brimfield came the long, sonorous sound of the big bell in the tower, softened by the distance.

"Gracious!" cried Mrs. Ned. "Is it as late as that?"

"I'm afraid it must be."

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"There's an electric button just inside the door; press it twice, they will understand," motioned the widow. "Then come back to me."

He rose, softly crossed the flags, and returned. She was standing now, looking thoughtfully out over the moonlit garden.

"I'm going to say good night to you here," said she. "What are you doing to-morrow? I thought we might take the big car and go careering down to Maitland Springs for lunch. It's only thirty miles. Or maybe the Country Club; that's nearer."

She touched his arm softly, slightly appealing to him by word and gesture.

"I'm afraid I can't to-morrow."

"What are you doing?"

"Well; I'm going to church in the morning."

"Church!" echoed Mrs. Ned. "Well, well!"

"Don't think I'm putting on godly airs," explained Lawrence. "I'm not. In the abstract, I'd rather go automobiling; but I have an engagement afterwards."

He was going to lunch at the rectory; he was going to see her! but he did not see fit to explain further.

"Oh, I understand. Good night, Orlando."

"Good night, dear lady."

It was a firm, kindly shake of the hand she gave him, and he turned and left her standing there, the moonlight all about her, the rose still lying on the stone pavement at her feet.

On the drive home he felt grateful somehow—grateful for something, he could not exactly fathom what. And yet again—he wondered.

CHAPTER VI

A PLEA FOR CHARITY

LAWRENCE woke to see things clearly in the light of early dawn—his way lay plain in flight! But flight from what? The trite old saw about temptation came to his mind. Where was that indomitable will of his—that will that he had felt he might build upon so strongly! His faith was slightly shattered! Only the unexpected help from that intruding memory had held him the night before. In his unbiased honesty he saw it so. And in that saving memory—that in a few short hours would become a living presence, a presence growing stronger day by day—lay his sure danger. Clear-headed, he acknowledged it.

Into his mind there flashed a sudden thought—the shadow of a thought, so mean, so cowardly, that it brought him up all-standing, as it were, upon the rock of his resolve. But he had cast it from him so quickly that it left no taint.

In the swift revulsion, he decided. He almost reveled in the task he set himself. His old belief came back—the old trust in his self-command, his captaincy of soul!

Frank Bellwood must live! He was an ill man, no doubt of it; but worse-behaved hearts than his had

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been helped by science, by careful treatment, and by strict *régime*. There was Nauheim, there was Sir Claude Munson, and there was himself. When he had wished he had always dominated Bellwood's will, and there was an ally he could count upon in Amy. How much she knew of her husband's condition he had no idea. But the old compact, forever binding, was in force; the truth at all times, between them, "always, always," as she had said—and she had his promise.

As he dressed he planned and weighed matters carefully. It must be done at once—to-day! Frank must be made to see his duty; he must give in to common sense. Lawrence conjured up convincing reasons to break down that absurd prejudice against receiving further aid. He rehearsed arguments that could not be answered, and, as he walked to church later, he went over them again.

St. John's was a pretty little edifice, albeit that it was glaringly new. When the vines, that now were sprouting a foot or two above the ground, should cover the tiny buttresses and the new-sown grass seed take a firmer hold on the little lawn, it might be quite beautiful. Bellwood had persuaded the architect to copy the well-known little English church at Wryburne, and the result was pleasing. The windows were not all of stained glass—only one was in fact, the memorial to the wife of old Esterbrook, the mill owner—but the gray and red paint that covered the lozenge panes made no bad apology, and the oaken pews and the well-balanced choir and chancel lent an air of age and dignity that spelled comfort to the parishioners, even if they suggested a bit obtrusively the unpaid mortgage.

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The bells were ringing from all the churches in Brimfield—from the First Congregational, from the Baptist, the Methodist, and the Roman Catholic down the river. The streets were crowded with vehicles, and the sidewalks with people. Lawrence, as he hurried on, passed Ellery Slocum, Mrs. Slocum, the little Slocums, and the married daughter. Ellery wore his Sunday suit, and was chewing a palpable peppermint drop to conceal the strong evidence of not having forgotten his morning horn. They were all bound for St. John's.

Before the door were standing groups of young people gossiping, and a few carriages, with long-tailed horses, for Brimfield was not a fashionable place and claimed no notice in the society columns of the daily press; yet on Sundays people came from Kenton Falls, from the neighboring hotels—even from Antioch.

As Lawrence entered the vestibule, Amos Barton, the sexton, who was ringing the bell from a niche on one side of the entrance, nodded to him, and a minute later beckoned with his head to Mr. Slocum. Ellery joined him. The rest of the Slocums rustled down the aisle toward the family pew.

"Look and see who's in church!" panted Mr. Barton, as he gave a downward swing at the bell rope.

"Who?" asked Ellery, swallowing the last of the peppermint drop.

"Look and see," rejoined the sexton, this time reaching upward. "I gave her the seat she wanted—over there in the corner on the left."

Mr. Slocum entered hurriedly and stood transfixed! There sat Mrs. Ned Rice in a large and very becoming hat, fanning herself with an ordinary palm-leaf fan, like a common, everyday churchgoer, and looking quite as

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much at home—which meant betraying a lively interest in every new arrival.

Lawrence, not having been warned of the startling presence, did not notice her, and Mrs. Ned, having chosen the farthest seat in the darkest corner, was apparently unobserved by the majority of the congregation, who now poured in as the bell stopped ringing and the young organist began to play a somewhat vacuous march, evidently, from his rapt expression, of his own immediate composing.

As Lawrence appeared, Mrs. Rice had hesitated between two impulses: one was to cough and attract his attention, the other to hide behind the palm-leaf fan that she had picked out of the rack in front of her. The result was, womanlike, she did neither, but gazed fixedly at the young man at the organ who was glancing alternately from one foot to the other, as if to make sure they were properly attached to his person. Thus Mrs. Ned missed seeing the effect of her presence upon the astonished Mr. Slocum.

Kellogg's pew was on the main aisle, and from it he could watch Mrs. Bellwood and the two children who sat in front of him on the side aisle near the corner of the chancel. They were entering from the vestry room at the very moment he took his seat.

Amy was one of those women who animate their personal belongings with a particular individuality. From her simple but well-fitting gray gown to her flower-crowned hat, everything she put on seemed to suggest herself, to become her perfectly. Richer stuffs might enhance the value of what she wore; but the values, never. The unobtrusiveness of her framing, so to speak, made more striking her qualities of face and

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figure. Mrs. Rice's criticism of her gowning, Lawrence had thought not only severe but ill merited. Amy needed neither rich laces nor costly jewels, as adornments, any more than she needed rouge or powder; if she had possessed the wealth of a princess she could have disregarded them and held her own by the very distinction of her presence. She had a serene, un-studied grace, from her walk to her slightest movement. The poise of her head was exquisite.

As the two children preceded her into the pew, Lawrence feasted his eyes on the picture, and his heart leaped. He loved her children! They seemed inseparably connected with his love for Amy. In the mysterious charm of her motherhood he seemed to feel a deeper, holier affection. The spiritual domination of his soul was mingled with the natural instinct for paternity. He craved the touch of little hands, the clinging trust of childish hearts. The direct, un-voiced demand for protection, for understanding sympathy, appealed to the strongest and to the simplest part of his nature. They were beautiful children! The boy had his father's clear-cut features, only broader and less delicate, perhaps; there was a boldness in his brow, under the brown curls, that his father lacked, a sturdier set to his upright little shoulders. The girl was like her mother, even to the poise of her head and the luminous depths of her steady gray eyes. Without any overtures they had given him manifold tokens of childish trust and affection, admitting him to the freemasonry of their comradeship.

The service began. The rector was a wonderful reader. His voice was musical without singsong, level without monotony. The slight affectation of his school

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had developed into a mannerism that was rather pleasing than otherwise. It was artistic, it fitted well to the grand old English of the prayer book, it cadenced properly with the psalms and lessons. It was a pleasure to listen to him. Bellwood, who disdained the use of his glasses during service, looked well, also, in stole and surplice. He was priest all through, from his bent form at the altar steps to his gesture of benediction. He might have stepped from the cloisters of an old-time monastery, fresh from some devoted task of illumination, with his pale, ascetic face and his exalted, soulful air; or, cowed and sandaled, he might have followed with his brethren, genuflecting, in procession to some shrine. Modern he was not; the ancient forms of things became him, dignified him, as old costumes and ancient forms become and dignify some distinctive types of men. He betrayed in the pulpit none of the self-consciousness, the nervous shyness he showed in everyday surroundings. He displayed unsuspected power; he almost rose to the heights of inspiration. But it was the hectic fever, not the natural heat of zeal.

The choir was singing the offertory anthem. Kellogg was claiming the advantages of the position offered by his seat; his eyes were dwelling on Amy and his thoughts were also. He was unconscious that another pair of eyes were on him, following his look and marking his expression. Mrs. Rice was smiling to herself—a smile that changed from one of startling discovery to one of assured conviction. Perhaps the lady she had appreciated and criticised was not so “cold” as she had thought her, after all! At that moment, from the intensity of Lawrence’s gaze, perhaps, Amy

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turned and looked at him. Mrs. Rice was as excited as if at a play. She moved, leaning sideways, to see the better. Then suddenly she was sorry she had done so. Whether it was the sweep of the long-plumed hat, or the fact that she had dropped the palm-leaf fan, that had attracted attention, it made no matter. Mrs. Bellwood had seen her! Without a change in her expression she had turned back to the chancel.

Bellwood was just entering the little pulpit. He looked paler than usual; his lips were moving in prayer as he paused before he gave out his text. He unfolded no sermon, carried no notes, announced no reference.

“‘And the eyes of the blind man were opened, and he saw.’”

The words were spoken almost in a whisper; the mystery of the miracle seemed to live in them. The awed announcement of the simple fact was thrilling.

Quietly, but intensely, he went on. He described the blind; the groping hands, the death of all hope of ever greeting dawn, of feeling freedom. And from the cloud upon the mind, the body, he merged into the cloud upon the soul, the hampered, darkened soul, as pitiful, as hopeless, as constrained—but far less patient, so much more prone to suffering—so keen to feel the galling sense of the imprisonment.

He lived his words, and as he came to the awakening his own eyes opened as if he saw and welcomed life. He expanded in a burst of gratitude. His face took on a radiance of thankfulness; he praised the living moment, gloried in the awakening truth. He seemed to feel the falling chains, the release of the binding fetters; he almost leaped into the sunlight of his hope.

Lawrence had never ceased to watch him. Under-

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neath the swiftly forming words he saw the actual suffering, the torment of mind and body. The white, slender hand grasped over that throbbing, ill-tuned heart, alarmed him; the swaying of the slight figure meant much to him; the physical man would pay for the license allowed the spiritual expression. Many moments of this kind were bad for Bellwood's chances. The reaction would surely come. Lawrence almost prepared for it—he anticipated the sure collapse.

He stole a look at Amy; her face was pale; in her eyes, that were on her husband, was a note of fear.

Mrs. Rice, from her corner, was leaning forward, both elbows on the back of the empty pew before her; she was enjoying a keen sensation. Half fascinated, she looked on, as if at some drama—the delineation of some living tragedy. The emotional side of her nature was pulsating in sheer enjoyment. She saw the beautiful face, transfigured in its ecstasy, she heard that wonderful, pervading voice; a tremor almost shook her, but it was not the words that reached and touched her. Again it was the man, the suffering, living man! Once she cast a swift glance at Lawrence and at Amy, then back to Bellwood. This time a great pity for him rose within her, and, such was her peculiar nature, she felt a strange sense of coming tears.

Bellwood had stopped. His eyes, with the light still in them, swept over the silent congregation. Lawrence almost stirred at his next words, so unexpected were they, so close to his own recent thoughts. There was no sign of weakness, no hint of the dreaded prostration. His tones were firm, his accents filled with a sweet, convincing force. Almost as in relief, the words

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were quiet, well sustained; yet underneath them lay the strange, appealing power.

“The Touch will come to you, perhaps to-day—not here—you’ve felt it—to-day as you awoke! For all of us the early waking hours possess peculiar qualities; the mind seems more alert to judge the actual. The moral eye lifts to view life, uncolored, undisturbed by imagination or surroundings, to see it as it is! The nude soul, judging clearly, unerringly, hears also, in prophecy, its sentence. There has been no time for argument, excuse, extenuation; no time for self-applause. All who waste life’s chances, all who stand unforgiven, unabsolved of the living sin, burdened by the wrong unrighted, can see the dreaded debit column loom large in the pages of the Book! The choking fingers of remorse clutch at the heart, only to be relaxed by the interposing hands of new resolves; resolves strengthened by an appeal for clemency, for help and fortitude to stand the test of absolute confession! Confession to thy God, to thyself, and to thy brother, to whom belongs the restitution—the truth, the right, long, long withheld!”

His voice thrilled again, his whisper lifted in pleading tones, then sank to swift entreaty.

“Confess thy sin! Confess! And in the measure of thy newborn sight—beseech forgiveness!”

He turned for the final sentence to the cross in the big memorial window. The words were hardly audible, the upraised hand trembled slightly. As the congregation left the bent figure still knelt at the altar rail.

To his relief, when Lawrence joined Bellwood in the little vestry room, there was no sign of either reaction or collapse. The minister was yet in a strange,

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exalted mood. His eyes shone with the luster of spiritual excitement; the replies to his friend's few words of congratulation were almost incoherent. He moved slowly, as if dazed. He acted like the man he had described, the man who had regained his sight, the sentenced one who had obtained his pardon.

At the door, Amy, who had sent the children on ahead, was waiting alone. She looked from Lawrence to her husband, questioning them both with anxious eyes.

"I was afraid he had overtaxed himself," she said at last. "He was not well this morning, and he had a bad night—he sleeps so little."

She took her husband's arm, but looked at Lawrence steadily, hiding the fear that was back of her slowly spoken words.

"But I'm going to do much better now," said Bellwood, smiling faintly. "I am going to be much better. Larry, here, is going to take me in hand. Perhaps he'll make a new man of me."

"We'll see what we can do, Frank."

"Yes, yes—good, good—you know you're going to spend the day with us. Come, let's be walking on. Oh, I hope no one is going to stop me, to speak to me—I'm afraid they will."

"We can go back through the gap in the hedge," suggested Mrs. Bellwood, "and across through Barton's garden; we did it once before."

She turned and led the way about the corner of the church; Lawrence followed. They passed through the scraggly evergreens, opened a little gate and, following a path that led through lines of currant bushes and garden patches, came to a narrow lane.

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Bellwood took Kellogg's arm and walked between him and Amy silently. Somehow he had surrendered himself to the idea that they were guiding him.

No one spoke. Lawrence felt as if, by the very silence, he was being initiated into the innermost secrets of the lives of the two who walked beside him. He could not speak his thoughts just then; to launch into some commonplace would have been almost a transgression of their intimate relations. But Bellwood needed rousing; his eyes had gone lack-luster, his step was unsteady.

Amy glanced across at Lawrence as if to read his mind. Her face was pale, but again she controlled the fear that welled within her.

"Frank, Frank," she said bravely, "did you see who was in church?"

She repeated the question, shaking the minister's elbow.

"Who? Oh, yes; the people from Antioch, you mean. They were there again."

Bellwood was exerting his will, controlling himself with an effort.

"No; somebody else—somebody more surprising. Mrs. Rice, from Elmside!"

Bellwood lifted his head, his interest, for the instant, thoroughly alive.

"Mrs. Rice was there; did you ask her to come?" He turned to Lawrence suddenly.

"No, Frank; I had no idea of it. I didn't see her."

"He dined there last night," said Bellwood to his wife. "Probably you spoke about me, eh?" Again he addressed himself to Kellogg.

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“Your name was mentioned casually. I told her you were my best and oldest friend.”

Bellwood grasped his arm tightly but replied nothing. The trancelike expression returned to his face again. Amy made no further attempt to rouse him; something that had been said had turned her thoughts. Not a word was spoken until they reached the end of the grassy path. They would soon be meeting people on the road.

“Let’s wait here a minute and get our breath; we’ve been going quite a pace,” said Lawrence quietly.

As they had walked down the lane he had been forming his opinion. A new complication had risen in the last half hour. Why he had not guessed how matters stood before he could not have told. It seemed to be plain enough to read, taking it all in all. And a great deal was accounted for in his belated discovery. Before the day was over they would be on even ground; it depended upon how he approached the subject whether the handling of it would be difficult or easy. At all events he felt the relief of the surgeon, about to operate, who has been spared the danger and worry of hazardous exploration. The new complication was specific and tangible, and he was saved, also, from the delicate necessity of being secretive in a direction where it might have pained him to be so. Amy knew everything without his telling her. This was the reason! Now he understood the change in her. The mystery was explained; it was the constant air of being on her guard—on guard for another’s sake!

They had paused for a minute or so in the shade of a big apple branch that stretched from a neighbor-

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ing garden. Bellwood had removed his broad-brimmed hat and was mopping his forehead.

"Now we're quite right," he said, "and when I get home a little nap and a rest will set me on my feet again. I'm sorry to be such a bother!"

Completely himself, to every outward appearance, he started down the street, disdaining all assistance and walking strongly. Amy and Lawrence fell in beside him, neither speaking, both watching him.

Before they had gone a dozen yards, a short, thick-set figure slouched out of an alleyway near the livery stable. It was Pat Tevelin, a depressed-looking setter at his heels. He paid no attention to Bellwood, but, seeing who was with him, he lifted his cap and stood respectfully to one side as the others passed.

At last they reached the rectory. The minister did not pause to return the greeting of the two children who met them at the gate. Hurriedly he passed in first and entered the house. The little ones, now tugging at Lawrence's fingers, were dismissed to wait in the back garden until they were called; then he and Amy followed into the narrow front hall. Bellwood was already at the head of the stairs.

"I'm going to lie down," he called; "don't let me be disturbed till luncheon, please."

"But, Frank," said Lawrence, "I want to talk with you."

"Not now; later, later." There followed the shutting of a door and the sound of a key softly turning in the lock.

Alone in the study they faced each other. She waited patiently for him to speak.

"You know what the trouble is, Amy?"

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She looked at him puzzled, striving to overcome the sudden desire to hide her own knowledge behind his, to put off the bitter moment of divulgence!

"I do—and I don't; tell me."

"He has heart trouble; he has had it a long time. You know that, of course?"

"Yes."

"He is taking something—some drug. Do you know what?"

"No; you must ask him. He intends to tell you everything to-day—to confess it all. I'm sure of it."

He loved her the better for her loyalty; he loved her the better for her shielding devotion. But even at the risk of cruelty he must pursue his questions. He must be armed with facts.

"How long has this been going on?"

She winced. "Two or three years—perhaps longer. On one occasion he— At times I think he stopped—he's fought hard truly. No one knows of it."

"You did."

"I pretended not to—not to understand. There was no one I could go to. It seemed the best way to help him. You see, he would not let me suppose that it was conquering, for fear that if I knew I might lose hope with him. I wished to hope—I wished to think he still had strength! He— Oh, you must find out from him—all, everything. Oh, how I prayed for you to come; you were the only one. Mind you, I would not ask too much; but I do not want to be deceived. I would not have him feel that he—you, had to—keep it from me now."

"I would tell you everything—the truth—always; anything you might wish to know."

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She looked up at him, and gazed deep in his eyes unflinchingly a moment, her lips parting.

"I believe you might," she said slowly. "I believe you would."

"Surely you trust me."

"But of yourself, what would you tell?"

"All my hopes, my fears, my sins if you asked them."

"Your own troubles, your own sorrows?"

"Yes—but, why?"

"You are sharing mine," she murmured, still looking at him. "You are making my burden yours. I wonder if—if you would misunderstand——?"

She paused as she spoke, irresolutely, and then swiftly crossed the room. From the lower drawer of the bookcase she took an old silken bag full of odds and ends; at the bottom she found the thing she was searching for. Claspings it in both hands she brought it to him and laid it on the desk.

It was a small photograph, evidently the work of an amateur, of a group of three: a man with a little infant in his lap, and a young woman bending over him, watching. They were seated on the ground with flowers and trees about them.

Where had that picture come from? The day, the place, came back!—the old days in Vienna! The excursions along the banks of the Danube. The smiling bearded figure was himself. The woman——

"Trust me. Tell me about her, Lawrence."

Suddenly an icy chill swept over him, succeeded by a hot rush of blood from heart to brain. It was all clear! The curtain that hid the puzzling past lifted. He understood. He clutched the desk; he dared not

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raise his eyes. He must think—think! Everything was changing in this instant! Somehow his perturbation seized on Amy; she bent forward to look him in the face.

“Tell me, Lawrence; tell me—is it true? Or is it all, all——”

She stopped, her voice hoarse and weak with fright and horror. The fabric of her life seemed ready to tumble about her shoulders, the castles of her faith were tottering! The future—oh, the black future! what would it rear?

“Who told you anything of this? Who told you? How did you find it out?”

His words rang with bitterness, almost with anger.

In her great onswEEP of relief that was so evident, she could not give an answer; the sudden, killing doubt, dispelled so swiftly by his words and attitude, left her dumb and shaking. There was silence between them. A big ant scuttled across the papers on the desk; its swiftly moving legs made an audible trace of sound. A fly, wing-tied in a web among the vines at the window, buzzed despairingly; the clatter of table-setting came from the dining room beyond the hall; the old stairway creaked; the deep breathing silence seemed unending.

“What do you know of this, Amy? Where did it come from?” He had quieted his voice; it was more sad now than angry, but it quivered under his effort of self-control. He must find out more. But above all he must be strong!

“Don’t think Frank told me—no, no. Mother got the picture—some one sent it to her; some one who knew a fellow-student of yours; she showed it to me,

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and then—ah! you might have told me, Larry. I would have understood!”

“Yes, but I— Pardon me, please go on.”

“And then I wormed the story out of Frank; he was living with us then. Forgive me; mother told me to go to him; she insisted—she demanded that I should. It was just after you—you stopped writing. He denied it at first, but when he saw I knew—I mean, that I understood—he only defended you; truly he did. . . . Tell me, Lawrence; did you, did you—love her?”

“Very much.”

He spoke with closed eyes, standing erect.

“Where is she?”

“I don’t know. Don’t ask me any more.”

He bent his head this time. Amy put her hand on his shoulder. Her low voice seemed to caress, with its sweet chord of sympathy, yet it thrilled with the overtones of even deeper feeling.

“Poor Larry! I am only asking because—because I—ah, I cannot help it! I have longed so to ask; I have dreamed of asking. I felt that you might tell me—might like to. The child, is it alive? Ah, don’t—” She recoiled, drawing back, as if from bad, heart-breaking news.

“The child is alive—in Vienna.”

“I should love to see your child, Lawrence—some day; perhaps I may.” Her very soul seemed speaking in her tenderness.

He raised his hand and clasped the fingers that were still on his shoulder.

“God bless you, Amy,” he said. “God bless you, dear—good friend!”

Her grasp replied. She gazed at him—long after

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he turned away. There came the faintest quiver of a sob in her throat. Then she tried to speak, as he looked at her again; but her drawn lips only responded with the smile that holds back tears. Her eyes were shining wet, as she drew her hand from his.

Some one came down the stairway, just outside the door.

"Will Dr. Kellogg come up and see Mr. Bellwood, ma'am?" faltered the nursery maid, from the lower step.

"Go!" said Amy. "Be good to him. Let us work together to pull him through; he needs your help—we need it—both of us. God bless and help you! Save him, Lawrence."

There was no entreaty, no supplication; only a physician, in his line of duty, urged to do his best.

CHAPTER VII

CONFESSION

THE most pitiful sight in all the world is a beseeching human soul groveling for mercy, in the depths of just self-condemnation—pitiful because it excites less pity in man's breast than suffering bravely faced. Sympathy is so mingled with contempt, the forgiveness of the injured one so mingled with distrust, that it takes a lofty spirit to extend, unflinching, the merciful, uplifting hand. Confession, noble in the abstract, may be almost stultifying in its act of cowardice. The very weakness of nondefense may be its strongest plea; but after the reaping, it requires strong handling of the weakened soil to grow the crop of self-respect, strong evidence of purpose to convince belief in him who shares the unsought burden.

As Lawrence mounted the creaking stairs, all his past affection for Frank Bellwood shook off him like some foul, contaminated garment, long worn in ignorance. If it were not for the woman waiting down below, he could have burst in the door and crushed him, flaying him with reproaches! Not only because he felt he had been robbed, but because it had now been forced upon him to be a party to the robbery. Yet it was of his own free will that he had steeped himself in the

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consequence of the initial wrong; there had been no self-argument, no hesitation.

He was not so much stunned at the discovery of Bellwood's treachery, as sickened by the thought of it. His sense of injury, his anger, was swamped in his feeling of disgust; the base ingratitude revolted him. But the request she had made of him to save had sounded, unknown to her, an imperative demand to spare, not only the wretched traitor, but herself. No matter the cost; he could not disregard that unvoiced plea.

Lawrence knocked hurriedly; the door was unlocked; he entered. The minister lay on the bed, his face in the pillows. He glanced up, frightened.

"You wished to see me, Frank?"

"Larry, Larry," exclaimed the craven, stretching out both hands. "Help me; oh, help me! I am hopeless—my misery is hopeless! I am lost unless you help—unless——"

He rose and would have knelt, but Kellogg stayed him and pushed him back upon the bed, on the edge of which he sat writhing, with straining fingers clasped between his knees. The friend who had once held such undoubting faith stood above him, unbending, unpitying.

"Now, out with it, out with it! Keep quiet, don't go on that way! From the beginning—everything! And—be a man!"

He was not sure what confession might come first, or whether one would come at all; but he spoke the last words with a conscious effort, as if aware of their re-echoing mockery.

"I will not help you speak," he went on, for a

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groan was the only reply from the cowering figure. "But I will tell you simply this: I will help you live! That is my duty—that I will do—must do!"

"I do not want to live! God help—forgive me! I want to die!"

Lawrence gazed down at him.

"No more of that, I ask. Begin."

"I don't know how!" The abject voice prayed brokenly, its owner rocking from side to side.

"Come, come; we waste time."

Bellwood dropped his head lower and at last, as if in desperation, he blurted out short speeches, each following fast upon the other, with a caught breath in between.

"I have wronged you, Lawrence, robbed you. . . . I was weak. I could not resist temptation. . . . I betrayed you! I took advantage of a cursed circumstance—I slowly allowed a deception to take place—I fostered it at last. I did not build it—I swear to you—it came ready to my hand—in a moment of great weakness I lied—I worse than lied! Oh, how I've suffered——"

"That goes without saying! How did you lie?"

To save himself he could not help giving the torturing screw a turn. For the first time Bellwood looked at him.

"I loved Amy—loved her ever since she was a little girl. But I had no chance, no hope. When you and she were together——"

"Pray leave that out."

"I cannot—when she and you were together, I used to go mad, mad with jealousy. I envied you—I hated you. I felt that if you had married her, I should have

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died. You went away—you were not engaged—she was not pledged. I did not think you loved her as I did. I—” He paused and then went on hurriedly: “After my father’s death I went to live with the Winters. I saw her every day. It grew to be torture—Mrs. Winter found out. She pitied me; she liked me. She thought you would never be coming back—and I agreed. She said that you would never live here—I agreed again, although I seldom spoke of you. She implored Amy never to leave her. She was afraid that if—that if she went away, she would never see her again. . . . Do you remember a letter you wrote me describing the gay life of the students, their license, their temptations?—and how you had been tempted, once, yourself; and how—”

“Yes, I remember all that—you showed it to Amy?”

“No, I showed it to her mother—she did.”

“Well, go on.”

“I fell very ill; Amy nursed me. One day as I was recovering she brought me a photograph—of you and a woman, and a child. I don’t know what became of it—you were sitting—”

“I remember the photograph and all about it—well?”

“Some one had sent it to Mrs. Winter—I’ll tell you who—Mrs. Sprague, mother of Sprague of our class—he was with you in Vienna—he had written home a lot of gossip—”

“Damn him,” said Lawrence. “Pardon me—don’t stop.”

“Amy asked me if I knew anything. I denied any knowledge—I denied it.” Bellwood was breathing

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hard, his voice, weak and hoarse, had the thirsty rattle of a burning fever. "She pressed me, appealed to me—and then the temptation came—I could not face it. I tried to tell her how things were different over there—of how young men lived—I let her think I *knew*—I asked her not to write to you."

Lawrence was bending over him, his muscles stiffened in his folded arms; but at last he filled the long pause with a question spoken low.

"And she?" he asked, with no change in his attitude.

"She said nothing—she went away. After that I had a relapse—I was very ill—afterwards her mother fell ill, too. And——"

"You kept my letters from her?" There was a menace in the other's tone this time; his fingers flexed. The mean cowardice of the trite, age-worn expedient struck him as he repeated the question again, more slowly this time.

"No, I did not—as God is my witness as a sinner, I did not! You seemed to stop writing. When I began to get well they told me she had nursed me back. I tried to thank her and, almost forgetting—for it was like a dream—I told her that I loved her—and—and she accepted me. O God, forgive me! I know you never can!"

"Hush! How much did you know about that story, about that woman in the photograph?"

"Nothing."

"I can forgive you; what you said was true!"

The effect of the words was startling, because the words carried no effect at all! If Kellogg had expected them to clear the situation, to save the future

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of some difficulties, he was mistaken. Again Bellwood looked up at him.

"No, no," he cried. "It was not true! Don't lie! Don't make me take up a deeper shame; don't give me your honor as you would give me my life! It would not mend matters—curse me, curse me, if you like!" He drew his handkerchief across his lips.

Lawrence was cornered. The words were so sincere that, for the first time, real pity was uppermost. He softened.

"All right," he said; "there was no other woman—up to then there had been no other in my life. The woman in the picture was the mistress of a friend; although I was with them often, and people may have talked, she was nothing to me. The child belonged to some peasants out for a holiday. There is that story, the whole of it. I intended to deceive you—not for your sake, but for your wife's. But this is not all—there's something else. Don't be afraid."

"Oh, I wish I had died, died, died," reiterated Bellwood, shaking in a spasm of mental agony. "Promise me that if I do, you will marry Amy and take care of the children—promise me, Lawrence."

"You will not die; you've got to live."

"To live and suffer more! What shall I do?"

"I will tell you that—after you tell me the rest."

"What do you mean?"

"The drug you are taking—what is it?"

"Drug?"

Bellwood was on the defensive now. A new phase of the strange interview had arisen, but one that Lawrence was expecting, was well prepared for. He turned to the tall, old-fashioned chest of drawers in the cor-

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ner; from the keyhole of a little compartment hung a bunch of keys on a silver ring. The compartment was unlocked; he opened it.

"It is only some sedative, something to quiet my nerves—something to help me sleep," began Bellwood, faltering.

"So I see. You first began with this patent nostrum, eh?—and increased the dose—it was guaranteed harmless."

"Yes; it seemed to relieve me."

"Of course it did."

The matter-of-fact manner was reassuring; the tone was almost soothing. Insensibly Bellwood was influenced; his mood changed, the hunted, frightened look began to disappear.

One after another the doctor picked up empty boxes—and then some small half-empty vials. In one was a powder, in another some little pellets, a third held flat, white tabloids.

"Your heart must be stronger than I supposed; you should feel much encouraged, Frank!"

"Encouraged?"

"Yes; you intend to stop all these some day, eh, don't you? You seem to have run the gamut. When did you begin with this nerve tonic, this sedative?"

"About three years ago."

"These other things came later? You denied to Amy you were taking anything, of course? She must have asked you."

"Yes, no—but——"

"Taken one this morning? More than one, didn't you?"

"Yes; before service I felt very bad."

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"I thought so."

"Perhaps I've been taking them too frequently; you're quite right, I intend to stop to-day."

Lawrence closed the lock of the compartment quickly and tossed the keys on the bed. He was thoroughly convinced that during the last few minutes, even while he was talking, Bellwood had managed to slip something to his lips; but it made no matter, probably it was best for the moment. The minister was calm and rational now, no doubt feeling the promise of the relaxing nerves, the approach of the soothing brain waves. He sat up, smoothing back his hair.

"Some time this week or next, Frank, you and I are going off for a little trip," said Lawrence casually, leaning on the window sill and talking over his shoulder, "and when you return you won't know yourself, I take it. You won't need any more of this stuff after a while. Let me tell you, the end of it is death or the madhouse. And you must win back your wife's belief"—he had almost said "respect"—"in you. Think of her, can't you? How she must have suffered; she knows!"

"Did she tell you?"

There were signs of impatience in Kellogg's face. "No; I told *her*. About that other matter, that is an affair between you and myself—it concerns me mostly; it's past and gone—and over. Never on your life must you breathe it to a living soul!"

"That will be part of my cross," said Bellwood slowly. "I've carried it long now." The histrionic sincerity of his pulpit voice sounded there.

"Call it that if you like. I told you that if you still think you wronged me—I forgive you."

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He was wondering what he was going to say to Amy! Their relations were altered! He had broken the compact of honest outspokenness between them. For the future he would have to play a part. He knew her abhorrence of a lie, implied or spoken. But lies are things that destroy! In the deception he had practiced lay the only hope of building up her faith in her husband, a faith that he could see was wavering. The downfall of it he believed would mean the complete downfall of her hopes of happiness. Never for an instant could he bring himself to doubt her love for this man who had robbed him. He only wondered at it, with a dumb unquestioning pity, but never could he help to undermine it. God preserve him from the thought of that!

The relief the interview had afforded Bellwood was evident—he was like another man. Already he was putting his own sensations into words, balancing phrases, choosing turns of speech. The cross upon his shoulder irked him little. As his exaltation grew, he almost forgot the degradation he had just passed through. The horror of being discovered, found out, in all the squalor of his soul, was gone. The haunting dread of becoming more and more a slave to the alluring panaceas that in his self-deceiving mind he called “sedatives,” “palliatives,” “tonics,” anything but what he knew they represented—Vice! *That* dread began to dwindle! More and more he began to lean on Kellogg’s promised aid; he would have accepted anything in the rebound of his release. But he had tact enough to feel that now was not the time for a display of gratitude. And for that, although he did not know it, his mentor, guide, counselor—but friend

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no longer—thanked him from the bottom of his heart.

A knock came at the door; there had been so long a silence that both men started.

“Well?” asked the minister tremulously, hoping that it was not his wife, and wondering what he should say if it proved to be. “Who is it?”

“It’s me, sir,” returned the voice of the young maid servant. “Mr. Remsen Bache is here, sir; and lunch is ready.”

“We’ll be down in a moment,” said Lawrence, answering for him. Bellwood had gone to the glass and was examining his face as a woman might who feared showing the trace of tears.

“You go,” he said; “I’ll be with you right away.”

Lawrence left the room without a word. He was glad there was going to be an unexpected guest at luncheon—unexpected guests relieve awkward situations quite as often as they make them.

Alone, Bellwood stood for a moment irresolutely; then he picked up the bunch of keys and looked them over. One was broken short off; the other half remained in the lock where Kellogg had snapped it with a twist of his strong fingers! The minister sank down at the window in an attitude of prayer. His weakened will required the evidence of extraneous aid to help him withstand the insidious temptation. The evidence was there! Help was forthcoming! His own words in the morning’s sermon came flooding back to him. He had confessed. Confessed all that was necessary for anyone to know! What he had held back concerned no one but himself—his poor weak self—he

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could put it to one side—he could add it to that cross he had to carry and no one would be the wiser! Even to himself he was like the spendthrift, given a chance by an insistent guardian, who finds it impossible to submit an exact account of his debts. He could not be sincere.

There were three things he had not told—to the telling of which he could not have brought himself. One was that from the stairway he had overheard the talk between Amy and Lawrence in the study. He had heard the latter assume the shielding untruth that afterwards he had tried to force upon him also. The second was that he knew his wife no longer loved him—perhaps had never loved him really. She had pitied him, had tried her best, had cared for and strengthened him, had been a good mother to his children; but now, since three years—he glanced at the broken key in the lock—she had been only his helpmate, his protecting, uncomplaining friend. Lastly—and here he would have denied his own convictions, if he could—he knew one other thing that was his alone to know. But, despite everything, as he trusted in the tenets of his faith, he trusted her.

Calm and apparently collected, he descended the stairs.

The Rev. Remsen Bache was a young man some two years Bellwood's junior. He had a big nose, a long, lean face with a habit of working the muscles of his mouth when talking, a stiffening of the upper lip over his large front teeth, with accompanying contortions at the corners. He was very shortsighted and his light-blue eyes were watery. A natural tonsure,

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of which he was rather proud, adorned the back of his head, and his hollow cheeks and receding chin were ash blue from a closely shaven, heavy beard. Mr. Bache's manner differed according to his surroundings; he adopted an amusedly familiar air with his inferiors, a rapt attention with his bishop, and, with his equals—especially with laymen—a style of the anecdotal conversational that he considered extremely fetching. He believed himself, moreover, quite a wit, and would range, in his monologic efforts, from tales suited to a corner of the smoke room to those suited to the side of an old maid's tea table. He had been a year at Oxford—from the effect of which he had never entirely recovered—and bleated fervently through his services, while he leaped from everyday topics to metaphysics in his sermons which he modestly denominated "little talks."

So much nearly completes the foreword regarding Mr. Remsen Bache. He had one thing in common with Bellwood; that is, the "religiosity"—as a great English novelist has called it—that, with some types of men, supplies a large condiment in their preparation of religion. His mental attitude resembled that of a predestined, but unprepossessing, coquette—and was about as alluring.

It was a strange luncheon party. Lawrence sat with his back to the window opposite Mr. Bache; Bellwood at the head of the table; and Amy, with the children on either side of her, at the foot. From the beginning of the meal the visitor did most of the talking and all the entertaining, even condescending to do a trick with his napkin for the benefit of little Jack, who regarded him with grave and somewhat sus-

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piciously disapproving eyes. Amy was very silent, the minister *distract*, and Lawrence kept up his feigned interest by an effort of his concentrated will. On Mr. Bache ambled:

“So we hear lots of things to-day, my dear Mrs. Bellwood! I was buttonholed by your husband’s devoted parishioner, Mr. Slocum, as I stepped off the trolley. I hope the dear, good Lord” (Mr. Bache was very familiar with the Deity) “will forgive me for riding on the trolley on the Sabbath; I firmly believe it is the invention of the devil, but it was the only way I could get here, and ‘needs must,’ you know. Well, I was held up, ‘stand and deliver’ fashion, by our well-intentioned gossiper, and told that the mountain had come to Mahomet! that Mrs. Ned Rice had appeared at the service at St. Johns! Perhaps she may be there again this afternoon! The next thing, my dear rector,” turning to Bellwood, “she will be in the thrall of your eloquence and joining the ‘Willing Workers’ or, perhaps, ‘The Little Mothers’—you know *that* story, don’t you?” (this to Lawrence) “Poor Catherine, she needs some spiritual influence in her life, a woman of her——”

“Do pardon me, Mr. Bache,” interrupted Amy, “but there is a very large fly fallen into your tea; won’t you let me give you another cup?”

Mr. Bache handed it over without looking for the offending insect, and would have gone on, but this time Lawrence took a hand in stopping him, inquiring about the facilities of the new trolley line, which launched the gentlemen into a dissertation on the time-table, the public indifference to proper service, and from that to the recent labor troubles. But this momentary di-

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version could not last. Before the meal was over Mr. Bache was once more back to the subject of Mrs. Ned.

"I hope the lady—who could be most useful, by the way, a thing we must not forget—profited by your sermon this morning, my dear Bellwood. From what I hear it was—er—most eloquent and—er—*most* convincing, and preached as if at some one directly. That is what tells, Dr. Kellogg—preaching *at* people, reaching for them, grasping them. My 'little talks' fall far short of the mark, I know; but it is my earnest endeavor to make at least one of my hearers the better, the stronger, for my poor halting words. . . . By the way, I understand the committee from the Church of the Incarnation were there again. I shouldn't wonder, I shouldn't wonder! Your congregation would hate to lose you, but duty calls us often to larger fields, harder work, to greater endeavor. Should you like Antioch, Mrs. Bellwood, do you think?"

Lawrence looked at Amy almost with tears of mingled anger and sympathy in his eyes. The thought of it! She having to live in this canting, soul-warping atmosphere! She, with her brains, her capacities, her true-ringing affections, her hatred of the small and the untruthful, the false, the narrow—hiding her secret tragedy all the time behind the poise of her self-command, the dignity of her long self-repression. How could she have stood it? How could she stand it now? Then for a moment her eyes met his; it seemed as if she had spoken, as if she had implored his help.

"I don't think we shall leave Brimfield," she said evenly. "Frank needs a long vacation before he thinks of harder work." As she spoke she had risen and was pulling back the children's chairs.

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"Bellwood is going away on a trip with me," broke in Kellogg. "That's all but arranged for."

"Indeed, indeed!" quoth Mr. Bache, as he rose from the table. "I more than envy him. Ah, the delight of traveling with a sympathetic soul!—the joy of it!"

Amy was already leading the little ones out of the room. Bellwood still sat in his seat, an exalted, far-away expression on his face. He was thinking over his address for the afternoon service; he was beginning to feel the effect of his own incipient inspiration.

"Come, Frank," called Kellogg. "Come along."

Bellwood rose with a nervous assumption of briskness and joined Mr. Bache. The two clergymen walked arm in arm into the study, but Lawrence, seeing Amy outside on the veranda, turned at the door and hastened out to join her.

They were beyond the view of the library windows; the children were down in the garden out of sight. Again, bravely, her glance met his; she almost leaned toward him. His spirit seemed to flow from him to meet hers halfway. Neither spoke.

With all the determination he could command he called that spirit back—controlled the impulse to voice the surging, clamoring cry of his swiftly beating heart. He lowered his eyes; almost he hated himself for the discovery he half feared he might have made—for the very suspicion of it! But the pause was quite as dangerous; the spell must be broken. He looked up again.

Amy had turned and was gazing out through the vines on which the leaves were crinkling under the touch of the early autumn. Her gray eyes were glistening with unshed tears, her marvelous beauty seemed

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enhanced by the outward signs of the shrouded, haunting trouble she would have hidden if she could.

"Did he tell you everything?" she asked, not moving.

"All, everything—he kept back nothing."

"What will you do?" She brought out the question quietly, as if she believed already in the efficacy of any suggestion he might make.

"Do the best I can—take him away with me at once; I'll save him—trust me."

"Trust you?" she repeated. "Yes, as long as I live I'll trust you. Thank you for helping me, to trust in—other things."

"Oh, here you are! We wondered where you had gone to," called the voice of Remsen Bache, from the doorway. "Bellwood went back into the garden to look. I don't think anybody would see us if we smoked out here, eh?" He dragged up a chair.

Once more, as Amy passed him, Lawrence felt the reaching of that invisible hand, but the danger in touching it was over. The second warning, he believed, had made him doubly strong.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE PATH OF FATE

JUDGE HOLLINS sat at his ink-bespattered desk in his dingy private office, poring over some papers, when the telephone on the wall near the window rang shrilly. He rose and, putting his pen behind his ear, crossed over and took up the receiver. Like some people of most amiable dispositions his manner at the telephone was gruffly discouraging to prolonged conversation.

"Well?" he half grumbled, his voice rising. "Hello! hello! who is it? . . . I say, who is it? . . . What! My stars! this you, Lawrence? . . . Speaking from Three Ponds! . . . Yes, I hear you! . . . What! you don't say so? Good Lord! you don't think that—" A long pause. "Oh, you have. . . . Well! well! . . . Believe he took the train, eh? . . . No! they have no telephone. . . . Yes, I'll have her here in half an hour. . . . Yes, I understand. I hear you plainly now. Probably started for home; where else would he go to? . . . All right! I'll call you up in half an hour if I can't find her. . . . Perhaps you'd better come on here. . . . Good-by."

The judge hung up the instrument and stood looking at it over his glasses with an expression that was a mixture of awe and astonishment. "Well, well!" ex-

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claimed he to himself. "I wonder what has happened? There has been something going on that I don't understand."

He went back to the desk, picked up the big gold watch with the heavy fob, noted the time, compared it with the clock in the tower, and then, pulling on his cuffs and putting on his hat, walked out of the door with the pen still behind his ear.

A few minutes later he was at the gate of the rectory. He stood there irresolutely, gazing up and down the street for a full minute. Very often it had come to him, in the line of his profession, to be the bearer of tidings, good or bad, and he had found it better policy to begin with the shortest possible preamble. But here was a difficult case! He had absolutely no knowledge of how matters stood, and his friendship with Amy had been that of an old man with a woman he had known from childhood, whose beauty and character he had admired, but whose personality he had never come in contact with, and women were such erratic creatures that he could never tell what would be the best manner of approach—an explanation perhaps of his being still a bachelor. However, he had come for a purpose that must have a definite result. Swinging open the gate, he marched up the gravel path and knocked loudly on the front door, that was open, for the day was warm.

It was Amy who appeared from the little study on the right. She welcomed him with a smile and extended hand; but anxiety—that thinly spread out fear—showed plainly in her eyes.

"I was just going by," the judge began, looking beyond her into the hall, "and I thought— Are you alone this morning?" He removed his hat and the pen

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fell on the door sill. He was bending to pick it up, somewhat confused, when Amy reached swiftly and was before him.

"Come in, judge," she said. "I'm so glad—" Then suddenly her tone changed. "You have something to tell me." Her face had grown pale, but the words were spoken evenly. "There is no bad news, I hope. . . . No matter what it is—tell it your own way."

"No," said the judge, taking the pen from her fingers. "Lawrence called me up on the 'long distance' and wants to speak to you later. He thinks that Frank is on his way home. Seems to have left him—perhaps a little misunderstanding—or something."

"They've been away almost two weeks now. I expected he would soon grow tired of roughing it," Amy rejoined, her pallor showing that she was still keeping herself under strong control. "You say Lawrence wishes to speak to me? Tell me, so far as you know, what has happened."

They were still standing in the study. Hearing some one moving outside the door, Amy softly closed it.

"Now, please go on." Her gray eyes studied the judge's face. "When did he leave?"

"I know very little. It seems that last night, some time, Frank took one of the boats and rowed away from the camp without saying anything to Lawrence. Of course, at first, he was frightened, but soon found he had taken the trail to Three Ponds, and that there somebody answering his description had boarded the morning train. But if you will come over to my office he will call me up at 12.30."

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"We'd better be going, then," said Amy. "But first I must tell you that Lawrence induced Frank to go with him much against his will. He has not been well—has not been himself. It was I who really persuaded him."

"I hope it has been nothing serious," said the judge.

Again he was surprised at Amy's reply.

"Yes, it is quite serious. I intend to ask Lawrence to tell you. Perhaps we may need your help."

"You may call upon me, my dear." The judge, in a fatherly manner, put his hand on Amy's that rested on the desk.

"That I knew without your telling me," she replied quietly.

The judge noticed that tears were in her eyes as she walked beside him down the street. Before they had reached the corner a big red automobile flashed by through the dust. He recognized Mrs. Rice and, sitting beside her, his enemy, Mr. Murger, so he took out his watch and looked at it fixedly as an excuse for not bowing. It lacked but a few minutes of the half hour.

Lawrence Kellogg sat waiting in the central office at Three Ponds, his eyes following the hands of the clock. The disappointment at the total failure of his efforts to reclaim Frank Bellwood rankled him. It had been as he partly suspected! The case was one of a complex character. He had known of such before. Absolute seclusion, constant watching, every minute, would be the only means of breaking the hold of the insidious vice. Bellwood, despite his promises, had deceived him—bitterly had he regretted that soul-wither-

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ing confession! Only two days before Lawrence had found and confiscated his hidden supply of morphine, and since then the minister's conduct had been that of a sick and sulky child. There was no use of appealing to his moral forces, they were absolutely dead.

That he would attempt to throw off the scent anyone who tried to follow him, was evident. But where was he going? Lawrence could not answer the self-asked question.

Suddenly the manager of the office informed him that he had Brimfield on the wire.

Lawrence closed the door of the booth behind him. How he should open the conversation he did not know. He doubted if Amy had said much in the way of explanation to the judge, and he was wondering what he would soon be thinking of the whole affair, not knowing that the old gentleman, after handing her the receiver, had left Amy alone—when all at once he heard her voice. It was clear and firm. As usual she asked him to tell her everything. So he started simply with the facts. He told her at what time he had first discovered Frank's disappearance, and the hour that the express had left the Three Ponds Station with him as a passenger.

In response to his questions she had replied that once, two years previously, Bellwood had disappeared for a week, an absence that she had explained to his friends and parishioners in some way of her own. She had ever maintained it as a secret. What had happened between her husband and herself on that occasion she did not vouchsafe to say, but she gave Lawrence the name of a hotel in Albany, the letter head of which she had found in the rectory study shortly

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after his return. Undoubtedly Bellwood would go there again; at least the clew was worth following. So he told her that he would go on to Albany—probably the mysterious source from which Bellwood received his drug supply—by the next train and report from there by telegraph. The words that prefaced the perfunctory “good-by” were almost a repetition of words she had used once before, upon an occasion that he never should forget: “God bless you, Lawrence—find him and save him if you can!”

He could hear the slight tremble in the clear, even voice; he could imagine how she looked as she spoke! How brave she was—how loyal! There was hardly an hour of the day that he did not think of her, never a night but his dreams were filled with her presence. His one comfort was that he was serving—the mere feeling that she had trusted him—was his sole reward. Her blessing was the unseen scarf he wore upon his arm. The nobility of her character, the loftiness of her soul inspired him—guarded him, ennobled him also, in a strangely youthful, unworld-touched way. Yet he knew that it would grow harder for him to maintain the false position that he had assumed; that ever-reaching, invisible hand that he seemed to feel even in his slightest thoughts— How often he had held it and caressed it in his dreaming!—the tumult of his heart when near her, that unvoiced cry that suffered so in its stifling—what would be the end of it? In his great love for her he was grateful that in his deception he had raised that barrier even higher against himself. But the deception rankled none the less. That fictitious entanglement revolted him; the other woman who had never lived! the child, that the one woman had so longed to see, that

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had never been born! Could he look in the eyes that haunted him and lie again? Could the gray eyes look in his and not read the truth?

Yet for him, just now, there was nothing but a clearly defined task; he could not step aside. He must keep his purpose straight. As he walked up and down the platform of the straggling station and thought of all these strangely mingled thoughts, he tried to bring himself down to the problem: How best to find Frank Bellwood, and how to treat the future so far as he was concerned. His contempt was tinged with anger and disgust; but to abandon him now would be like leaving a man blindfolded on the brink of a precipice. Find him he must—save him if he could. He halted in the sentry-go he had made of the platform and looked at his watch—nearly three hours to wait!

There was a sawmill screeching and snarling at the end of a big lumber yard across the way, a panting switch engine drilling flat cars up and down the labyrinth of tracks. Lawrence stood and watched the scene. He almost envied the grimy-faced engineer whom he had just seen receive a dinner pail from a slip of a girl in a gingham dress, he almost envied the smart young station master who lived with his wife and babies in the second story of the station. How simple life was to some people; how little they appreciated their happiness!

Suddenly there was a commotion down the platform. The telegraph operator, followed by the baggageman and a waiting-room lounge, ran out and called to the station agent who was talking with a lumber checker at the freight house on the opposite side. What he said Lawrence could not hear; but the agent

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made a jump over the tracks and the checker, calling to two or three freight handlers, followed him, joining the excited group at the station door.

Lawrence walked toward them. The agent was listening to the operator with staring, frightened eyes; the rest, with dropped jaws and pale faces, stood about him.

“What is the matter?”

“Matter? My God, sir! number thirty-four—that’s the express—jumped the track and piled up at the bridge, just below Beaver Junction! She was delayed at the junction over forty minutes—something wrong with the engine—and started to make up time— They say it’s an awful wreck, sir. It’s burning now!”

The horror, the unreality, of the situation seemed to strike all dumb. One of the freight handlers broke the silence with a slow mutter of incoherent profanity.

“When did it happen?” Lawrence was surprised at the sound of his own voice.

“About fifteen minutes ago, I guess,” put in the operator. “They can’t get much help at the junction. There is nothin’ but the station and two or three houses. They’re telegraphin’ all along the line for help. My God! it’ll take two hours to get a wrecking train made up at Buskirk, but the Fulton local will soon come along. She’s due here in about three minutes.”

“How far is the wreck from here?”

The station master answered this time. “It’s twenty miles to the junction and about a mile to the bridge. Ain’t it, Jim?”

“About a mile,” answered the baggageman hoarsely.

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"Are there any doctors here?" Lawrence looked at the little main street with its two or three stores and forty or fifty dwellings ranging out toward the scrub pines and the lake.

"One, sir, lives with the druggist over yonder. Guess he's the only one."

"Go fetch him, and get the druggist, too. . . . Tell him what has happened. Get all the bandages and clean linen you can! . . . Here, Mr. Station Master, send one of these men to the sawmill. Call for volunteers with axes. We'll go down on the local when she comes."

"The west-bound through train will be due on the other line at the junction just about when we'll get there," said the station master. "I'll wire them to hold her and give us right of way." He ran into the waiting room.

Lawrence hardly heard him. In his mind there was growing, into hideous shape, a thought that had only flitted across it heretofore: *Frank Bellwood was on that train!* Supposing that—! He fought the insidious suggestion, and the whispering tempting devil of the moment left him. Soon there sounded the whistle of the approaching local; it roused him to a sense of the present.

It was a fearful sight! On the bank was a white-faced, helpless crowd; some were bending over figures on the ground. Every car had left the rails! Long masses of ironwork and overturned trucks were piled high in hideous shapes. Driven back by the heat, the train crew and the volunteer rescuers could only work about the edges. A heavy Pullman sleeper had crawled

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over the baggage car. The flames were licking its brightly painted sides, the black smoke sifting away into the woods. The engine, its wheels in the air, lay in the deep borrow pit, like a huge tumblebug on its back. The steam was yet roaring from the boiler, and the fuel in the tender that covered the cab was glowing fiercely. A few minutes before there had been groans and cries from the twisted and broken mass, but now they had almost ceased, except from one place, where a colored porter, his clothes singed and smoking, stood wielding an ax. Some men, toiling up the bank from the stream, were throwing water on him from their hats.

"There's a man in there!" some one shouted hoarsely in Lawrence's ear.

But there is no use of going farther! The papers the next morning told the story—a story that only swelled the list of all the others soon to be forgotten. There were the descriptions of survivors and eyewitnesses; there was the list of casualties, the dead and maimed, the missing and unidentified. Before the wrecking train arrived, after the wounded had been taken away and the charred remains examined, a man with white face and staring eyes made his way on foot up the track to the junction. Another west-bound train pulled in as he reached the station. The passengers descended and listened with horror to the story told by the junction people; but in a few minutes the engineer clambered back to his cab and the train started on its way. The man with the staring eyes swung himself on to the last car and huddled down into a seat.

He had not found Frank Bellwood!—unless—unless!—he shuddered at the recollection of the awful

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sight—he was among them. He had searched carefully there, too—a frightful, sickening search, as one might probe amid the warm embers of a *ghat*. No clew! and yet from his questions among the passengers, and his oft-repeated description, Bellwood *had been on the second car!* In the reaction that followed the strenuous work of the last two hours Lawrence's senses were benumbed. He could not bring himself to think of what it all might mean. There had been no use of telegraphing, or sending word. Before long he would be telling her, and then—and then! He closed his eyes and clinched his hands. What was before him? A thousand thoughts, as the numbness of his mind wore off, thronged and crowded his brain. He would get away, away from it all—it was over! He saw himself in England again, he pictured the little place on the wild Cornish coast—he still owned it, it had never been rented—and he was walking there, but not alone. It was *she*—she was with him! Now he could feel for the reaching hand and have the right to take it in his own! The path of fate led by strange turnings to goals that could not have been foreseen. And then, the picture changed. Poor Frank Bellwood! harassed and weakened by the last pitiful surrender, fighting in that stifling, crushing holocaust—the awful end! And yet through it—and again he almost groaned in the conflict that rose within him—shone the hope star of his happiness! Leaning his head forward on the back of the empty seat before him, he drew his breath in long, convulsive sobs.

The news of the wreck arrived at Brimfield as the local evening paper had just gone to press, but before

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long the casual rumor of it had reached the ears of a few, coming through Antioch. It had created little stir, however; such things happened almost daily, and it was miles away, on another road, a fact that made the occurrence have little moment for the town.

Judge Hollins leaving his office late that evening had not heard of it. He walked across the square, lit by the sputtering incandescent light, just as the trolley, with a few passengers on board, came in on the line from Antioch. A figure passed him at the corner. The judge had just stepped into the shadow of one of the elm trunks as it went by. He turned an instant and watched it. Under the sort of brakeman's cap he caught a glimpse of the face a little down between the shoulders. Whether it was from the thoughts that were in his mind, or because of the dimness of the light, he could not make out the reason, but what he had seen of the face had somehow reminded him of Bellwood. But, no, the walk was entirely different! He cast the idea aside and crossed the street to the hotel.

Mr. Slocum met him at the door.

"Been a big wreck over on the main trunk line," he volunteered. "Montreal and Albany Express. . . . Nineteen killed and thirty wounded."

Ellery gave out the figures as if they were a score from a ball game, triumphant in the fact that he was detailing news.

"Too bad! too bad!" said the judge, without turning his head. "Life is uncertain; 'stay at home' is good policy."

He passed on his way and climbed the stairs. The judge had lived at the old hotel in the days of Ellery's father. He was as much at home, and as much of a

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fixture there as the old, polished wooden chairs. Many a law case had been discussed and planned on the wide veranda. He had brought some legal papers to his room with him, but after reading them over absent-mindedly and sleepily, he tossed them aside, yawned, and went to bed.

About midnight he was awakened by a sudden, imperative knocking; going to the door, after hurriedly turning up the light, he opened it.

"My stars!" he exclaimed, "Lawrence, boy! what ails you? Come in! Come in! . . . Why, look at you! Where have you been?" He pushed him into the rocking chair. "Quick! tell me!" he ran on. "You're not ill? . . . Where's Frank?"

Lawrence raised his head. "Frank Bellwood," he said, steadying his voice with difficulty, "he's killed—killed in that wreck this afternoon. . . . I've just come from there."

"Lord! Lord!" exclaimed the judge, with a little sound of horror and commiseration made by tongue and teeth. "Lord! Lord!" he repeated. "Poor Amy! poor girl! poor girl!"

"I must tell her. . . . She does not know."

"I'll go over with you," said the judge. "Tell me about it while I put on my clothes."

Before he had finished dressing there was another knock on the door. It was the night porter. He seemed astonished at finding the judge up, and at his having some one with him.

"A little boy's downstairs, judge," said he, "who wants you to come over to Mrs. Bellwood's on Deane Street, soon's you can."

"My God! She's heard, then!" exclaimed the

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judge, lifting himself into his coat. He turned to the porter who had just given Lawrence a nod of belated recognition.

"We'll be over, right away."

Then he hesitated, half closed the door, and spoke in a low, awed whisper: "You know the very strangest thing—this evening—" For some reason he stopped short, said nothing more, and put out the light.

When they had reached the street the messenger had gone. The judge took Lawrence's arm.

"It must have been horrible, horrible!" he said. And then, as if to close the dreadful picture out by a sudden change of thought, he asked a question that had been in his mind ever since Lawrence had begun the story.

"What was he doing on that train—if he was coming home?"

"He wasn't coming home, that is—not directly—at least, that is my idea."

"Perhaps he thought the train stopped at the junction, where he could make connections for Antioch."

"Perhaps."

Again the judge changed the subject.

"But how could Amy have heard the news?" He halted. "Good Lord! perhaps she doesn't know at all—! But she wouldn't be sending for me at this hour, unless it was something of great importance. Poor child! she's gone through so many troubles."

Lawrence did not reply. Despite himself his thoughts had flown on ahead. He was glad the judge was with him, and yet he hoped that he might see her alone. Never before did he feel the desire so strong within him to take that hand in his.

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True friends are those who understand our silence. The judge had pressed his arm closely and they walked on through the darkness.

"Here we are, at last! Perhaps I had better go in first and let her know that you've come. You'll wait. Eh, Larry?"

They had gone through the gate that was open and were standing at the steps. The lights were lit within the house and the shadow of a figure crossed the window of a room in the second story.

"I'll wait." His voice sounded dry and harsh.

The judge knocked. The door was opened immediately as if some one was expected. It was the maid-servant. Her attitude showed perturbation. Her voice was shaking and frightened.

"Come in, sir," she said. "Mrs. Bellwood wants to see you. Come right upstairs."

Lawrence followed into the hall. The judge whispered something to him that he did not hear, and then, preceded by the maid, the old gentleman climbed the creaky stairs.

An overpoweringly strange feeling came over Lawrence as he stood there. He was weak and dizzy; his knees began to waver. He grasped the newel post for support. It had not occurred to him that he had not touched any food since the evening before. He had never fainted in his life, but for an instant he feared it and calling upon his will with all his might he drew himself erect.

The stairs creaked again. He looked up. Judge Hollins was coming down, one hand on the banister as if to soften his footsteps.

CHAPTER IX

THE NEW WOOF ON THE LOOM

STEADY, now steady," said the judge. He had taken him by both elbows and was standing in front of him in the little study. "Steady," he repeated; "is anything the matter with you, Larry?"

"No fear, sir; I am all right—just a bit shaky for a moment."

The reply was with an effort. When he had come in from the hallway he could not remember. "I'm all right," he went on. "Is she coming down? Does she know?"

The judge's grasp tightened.

"There has been a mistake," he panted. "Listen—he's alive! He was not killed! He's up there now!"

The room swam. Something flashed and tingled in Lawrence's brain. He got an echo of the judge's following words as if they came from a far distance.

"He's very ill. He's been through something awful—some terrible ordeal in his escape. She wants you to come up to him. She's waiting there at the head of the stairs. Do you need my arm?"

"No—thank you; no, sir."

He was in the hall again. The stairway seemed to rock and sway before him. He was ascending it slowly. He found some difficulty in lifting his eyes. But she

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was there on the landing. An instant later and he had taken the outstretched hand. He paused—faltered—another step—and her other hand was on his shoulder. It was all he could do to prevent that heavy head from falling forward on her bosom. But again his will came to the fore; he leaned to one side against the wall, then straightened slowly.

“Larry! Larry!” exclaimed Amy, half supporting him.

Her voice trembled in his ear, her figure quivered against him. It was only for an instant, but their souls seemed to sway together. He broke the spell of the breathless, laden silence.

“How is he?” he asked.

She did not remove her arm from his, never resenting that he had drawn her closer.

“He’s very ill, delirious. . . . But you, too—you have suffered. You are not injured? . . . Oh, I have been so afraid! so fearful! Were you with him?” Her eyes sought his face, and for an instant he could not make reply, but his strength was returning.

The judge, standing a step or two below them, remained silent drawing deep breaths.

“No, no—there is nothing wrong with me. . . . Come! Let us go to him.” Lawrence found voice at last. “He has had a terrible experience—there was an accident—I was not with him. . . . I’m all right now.”

He stepped past her and turned at the door of the bedroom. No sooner had he entered than he smelled the pungent odor of stale smoke that will cling to clothing after a conflagration. A Norfolk jacket the minister had been wearing and the rest of his clothes were flung upon a chair, and on the bed, swaying his

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head to and fro, his face flushed, muttering incoherent words, lay Bellwood. Lawrence bent over him, placed one hand on the hot head, from which a wet towel had just fallen, and turning gave some directions.

"It is the reflex of the shock," he said. "Has anyone seen him?"

"I came home only an hour or so ago," Amy replied. "I had been at my mother's—she had sent for me at two o'clock—and when I returned I found him here—like this. I sent Jack for Dr. Rublee and then to the other doctor. Both were out, although they expected Dr. Rublee back soon; Porter they thought had gone to Antioch. And then I sent for Judge Hollins. He had been in some dreadful accident, that I knew, but I could not make out much from what he said. Oh! I feared, perhaps, that you—" She paused and touched Lawrence's arm again and let her fingers rest there a moment. "I could not tell what might have happened—"

"It was a wreck on the railway. He was in it; I will tell you all later."

He turned and drew back the shade. A dim light filtered through the evergreens from a window of the neighboring house but a few feet away. He spoke softly to the judge, still standing in the hall at the bedroom entrance.

"They have a telephone here next door at the Browsers'; some one is still awake. Ring up my number, won't you, please? They'll answer. Have my man bring down the large case from my office desk."

He gave some more directions quickly, but calmly, and turned once more to the moaning, muttering figure. Bending down he began an examination. There

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were no bones broken; but the minister was bruised and badly shaken. There was a great contusion on the left side of the head. But the fever meant more than these, and the heart was fluttering and uneven. Lawrence looked grave as he rose and straightened out the coverlet.

How quickly he had sunk all feelings other than those of his profession! And yet it afforded him a merciful relief from his own complex sensations.

"Is it his brain?"

It was Amy speaking. She stood at the head of the bed, apparently calm, suggesting in her word and bearing the strangely reliant attitude that is the gift of women called upon to face the great emergencies.

"Yes, I fear some brain trouble, and he has a fever; but it may pass off. You were doing the right thing."

He noticed the cracked ice in the bowl.

"I did not know but what it might have been——"

He understood her before she had finished the sentence.

"No; not that. Maybe the lack of it has augmented the trouble; he was in a bad condition to withstand a strain. But there is nothing immediate to be feared—I am convinced."

The professional tone was unconscious. He watched her as she placed the cool bandage on the sufferer's head. She had done it as deftly as a hospital nurse might perform a perfunctory duty.

"There is nothing more for us to do?"

"Nothing more, until my medicine case, or one of the other doctors, comes."

They stood there silently facing one another, as if neither knew just what to say. Then, at last, she

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pointed to a chair and, drawing up another close to it, sat down. Suddenly she took his hand. He moved and, very slowly, took both hers in his. The situation appeared to lose its unreality; their mutual attitude seemed strangely natural, despite the near presence of the moaning figure on the bed!

In a low voice he began to tell her of the day. But he left out much, and when it came to the relating of the search, when he could find no trace, he faltered. "I could not help but fear—" he said, "I could not help but fear—and I thought of you, and so I came at once."

He was unprepared for the sudden movement; but before he knew it Amy had bent toward him, her forehead on his hand. He felt her hot tears, he almost felt her lips. He lifted her gently, but lowered his own head until her soft hair was pressed against his brow. His tongue seemed to be crying her name over and over. Wild whispered words of endearment seemed to be clamoring in his own voice in his ears! But had he spoken? Never could he tell!

There was a gasp and sudden cessation of the muttering from the pillows; neither noticed it or moved; then it began again. There sounded a sharp, hurried knocking on the door downstairs. Both rose.

"You have been so good, Lawrence—so kind to me—so thoughtful always."

She was very close to him, her fingers were still clasped in his, her beautiful lips were quivering, her eyes searching his face. He could find no reply; he dared not speak. The moment was not meant for words. The guarded portals of his understanding had opened wide!

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The stairway was creaking again. A strange voice was talking to the maidservant almost outside the door, and at this moment the sound of wheels and horse's hoofs came from the roadway. They stopped quickly and the gate clicked.

The first comer was Dr. Rublee. The second was the man from Lawrence's house, and with him was the judge, who stated as an excuse for his not returning that he had walked there in order to see that the message had been properly understood.

The doctor had entered the room with a nod of professional salutation and a whispered greeting to Mrs. Bellwood; he seemed somewhat surprised and disappointed at finding Kellogg there, and forthwith began a short explanation of his delay. He was a fat, pursy man, with a thinly straggled and unkempt gray beard, but a finely shaped head like an antique bust. His breath was heavy with the dead fumes of brandy. Lawrence drew him out into the hall; they talked there, softly, out of earshot of the others.

In an hour Dr. Rublee had left and the judge had returned to the hotel. But Lawrence still stayed on, sitting alone in the sick-room. The maidservant had brought him some food and, after eating, his dizziness had left him. His mind was clear, he could reason calmly; but he could arrive at no decision. With him was the lingering touch of that slender hand; the secret the gray eyes had confided. He endeavored to keep his thoughts away from the thrilling truth he had been so long in discerning. How blind he had been! It changed everything, filling the future with unforeseen perplexities, new dangers and doubts, fresh trials. He tried, as if to gain relief from the dear

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torment of his discovery, to dwell on other things. He forced himself at last to go over the events of the day, the crowded moments, the swiftly changing scenes! He kept wondering how it was that Frank had escaped from the wreck without having been seen by the others. The hour that he had arrived at home was a mystery; he had let himself into the house, and the first sign of his presence was when the frightened servant had discovered him moaning in his weakness and delirium. She had gone immediately to find Amy. But the latter had arrived at the rectory during her absence and, afraid to leave, she had roused little Jack out of bed to send him to the doctors' homes again and to the hotel. All this Lawrence had learned; but how Bellwood had reached Brimfield so long before him he could not imagine. Then all at once there occurred to him the earlier train that they had just missed meeting at the junction. Bellwood might have come on that; there was no other way to account for it! He tried to think of the man on the bed as an abstract personality—a human theorem, something to be worked out, considered, apart from his own existence. That was the only way.

The patient was resting more quietly, the fever had somewhat abated, but his face and limbs contracted every now and then nervously, and his breath faltered. Despite the fact that the clothing had been removed, the odor of smoke still clung to the room.

Not a word had Lawrence and Amy had together since Dr. Rublee had departed. She had appeared so pale and tired that he, together with the judge and Lawrence, had insisted on her going to her own room and resting. Strange to say, she had seemed noth-

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ing loath and had made a pretense, at least, of obeying.

But there was no rest for her that night. She lay fully dressed on her bed with wide-open eyes looking into the darkness, never moving. She was not struggling against her thoughts, she had abandoned herself to them, in a complete, unqualified succumbing.

Nothing that had happened could change her sense of duty, nothing would alter her manner of living; she would face life on the morrow exactly as it came to her, living for the day, as it became her. But she had gone through more than the trials that the night suggested; the last ten hours had been hours of bitter heart conflict. The tottering castle of her faith—the small faith that had been left to her, and that she so wanted to preserve, had fallen—and she could look calmly at the ruins. Her eyes were opened, unappalled, unfrightened, filled with dumb suffering. She had spent the afternoon and evening with her mother at Meadow Farm. Mrs. Winter had had a very bad turn in the morning and had hardly slept the night before; but Amy had not told Lawrence of this, nor of how she had sat with and quieted her mother all that afternoon. They had talked long. No one would ever know what passed between them! But when her aunt, the tired, thin-faced little woman, had come back from her duties at the Atheneum, she had found Mrs. Winter resting more peacefully and quietly than she had for some time past.

As she lay there Amy would have given a great deal if she could have found relief in weeping. But the tears would not come. Never, or at least very seldom, had she wept alone about herself. The quick sympa-

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thy that she felt for others had often dimmed her eyes, but self-pity was a luxury she would not allow. She had deliberately chosen her road, and of her own will had followed it. Although she had gone on from a false start, she would follow it still and, as long as her strength held out, she would not groan at her burden or complain of the steepness of the path. But she saw things so clearly now! Many abstruse passages were translated until she understood the meaning, the import, of much she had passed over in her perplexity. The past seemed to lapse into the present with perfect reason for things as they existed; no effort of hers could change them. There was no use in looking back! She tried to face the future, but the plan of it all was indistinct; she could not penetrate the blinding mists. "It must be from day to day," she thought, "from hour to hour."

There was no feeling of disloyalty in the self-acknowledgment of her love; she would, long before this, have owned to it purely in her prayers, with never a thought of sin. But now, mingled with this great love, was a gratitude founded on her sense of justice, her love for truth. It had been all for *her*—always all for her! Whether what she had found out that day could be kept a secret from him—from either—she did not know. She made no vows; she trusted in him, believed in his strength. It was not necessary to count on her own, although, as yet, she did not fear its test at all.

So far as her husband was concerned, except for the fact that he needed her care and nursing, his position had hardly changed. The haunting fears and doubts that she had so hated to harbor and had fought

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against had become just dead, unthreatening embers, never to be disturbed, impossible to be fanned into a flame. She knew everything: his base disloyalty, his deception, his weakness! But then she knew his suffering; she pitied him without a shred of hatred, without a twinge of revengeful feeling. In her great bravery she almost forgave him, as she had already forgiven her mother, but without telling her of the hope-devastating extent of the conspiracy.

All at once her mind turned to Lawrence, sitting alone there in the sick-room. She would go to him! It was not fair that after all he had gone through he should still be called upon to give out more! As this thought came to her, her arms extended into the darkness; her heart forced up unspoken words from the depths of unsounded passions. With a sense of sudden danger that frightened her with its deliciousness, its nearness, its freedom from all shame, she turned and buried her face in the pillows. A long sob, part of thankfulness for the warning, part a bitterly sweet surrender to her own self-knowledge, shook her from head to foot.

The door opened softly; she looked up startled. There stood the children in their white nightgowns, hand in hand. Without a cry or a sound they ran to her, and she gathered them close in the soft embrace of a great gratitude and mighty love. Here would she always find her refuge! Here were her guardians; here the safe guides along the hard road and through the mists!

She comforted them with caresses and low-spoken sentences, lip to cheek, and after a few minutes led them to their nursery and tucked them once more in

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their cots. She sat down between them as she had done so often, waiting until they were asleep. At last after bending low over each little figure to make sure, she went back to the sick-room.

Her husband was resting quietly; Lawrence had fallen into a tired, motionless slumber on the sofa. She stood there a moment, looking from one to the other. Then, moving softly over to the armchair by the bed, she sank slowly into it, stilling her breath for fear of awakening them.

One thing bore upon her with a growing certainty: everything was known to all three in that hushed room. Their mutual relations, with a few differences, were absolutely understood!

Suddenly she gave a start. Her husband was awake. He had raised himself on his elbow, and his trembling finger was pointed at the man he hated; pushing back the covers he strove to reach the floor.

"Tell him to go!" his voice shrilled loudly. "Tell him to go. He'd like to see me dead!"

Lawrence jumped to his feet and reached him quickly, bending over him, paying no attention to his words. But Bellwood would not be quieted; he raved on incoherently. . . .

At last she had stilled him! As Lawrence pressed back the fluid from the merciful needle into his arm his voice faded slowly and he sank once more into unconsciousness.

They both were panting as if the scene and the struggle they had just passed through had taxed them beyond the limit of their strength. Still they did not sit down, they stood there facing each other without stirring from the bedside.

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"He will rest now?"

"Yes." He stepped toward her.

"O Larry! will you help me?" She leaned back against the wall.

"What is it?" He strove to take her hand; he would have drawn her close.

"Leave me—you must go now."

"But, Amy——"

"Please go—wait till I send for you—wait till you hear from me. Please go."

CHAPTER X

THE DECISION

LAWRENCE had been away almost a fortnight. He had written from New York that he expected to return to Brimfield on the express that arrived Saturday afternoon, and Judge Hollins, who early in the day had received a telegram from him, met him by appointment at the station. It had been arranged that they were to dine together at the big house back of the wide lawn and the evergreens.

"My stars! but I'm glad to see you, Larry," cried the old gentleman, grasping his hand as he descended to the platform. "You could not have returned more opportunely. I needed you. . . . You got my reply to your wire? Of course, you must have."

"Yes, it was handed me on the train at Rochester. We'll have a long evening together, judge."

They climbed into the two-seated buckboard and drove down the quiet village street. The judge's silence now appeared rather strange after the enthusiasm of his greeting; but his companion did not seek to interrupt it; his face, usually full of healthy color, seemed drawn and pale. Soon they reached the big white house and drew up at the portico. Lawrence Kellogg looked about him with a sigh.

The declining day was full of October, but warm

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and sunny. There was a haze in the air and a pleasantly pungent odor of burning leaves. The front doors were ajar and the wide hall, with the book-crowded library opening from it, looked hospitably inviting. It suggested peace and comfort, freedom from care and worry. In fact, the fine old house inside and out smiled invitation; it seemed to say: "Live here, take thy ease and rest." Yes, that was what he had come there for—"rest"—and now! It seemed cruel to think of closing it all up again, letting the dust and dead flies litter the old mahogany furniture, and the birds nest behind the closed shutters, and the grass grow tall on the lawn. But he had reached a decision; he had done what seemed to him wisest. He was going.

"You ran away rather unexpectedly, Larry," remarked the judge, as they stood in the doorway. "But as I said, I'm mighty glad you came back just now. You won't be starting off again soon, will you?"

"That depends," rejoined Lawrence; "I mean we'll go over the question later. I won't run away without any warning, if you mean that."

"And you left no address; you know that won't do. I didn't know where to get hold of you."

"It was an oversight; forgive me. I tried to find you, but you were away. . . . Come into the library and we'll talk."

The light was dim in the recesses of the big room, but the glow from the sunset came through the small-paned windows and lit up the gold lettering on the handsome books in the tall cases and softened the features of the portrait of Amandus Kellogg, who, in an impossible stock, and inhumanly sloping shoulders, gazed out of the narrow gilt framing. The set of the

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strong jaw reminded the judge of Larry, somehow. He had never noticed it before.

"Now, fire your guns. You speak first, judge."

The old gentleman settled down in an armchair and took out a big notebook. "It's generally the custom, in consultation, for the youngest—to have that privilege, isn't it?"

"Yes, sometimes; but we'll waive it." Lawrence seated himself on the window sill. "Now, please—"

"All right, then." The judge looked over his glasses. "There has come up out of a clear sky, Lawrence, the most unsuspected situation here; a situation that I don't exactly know how to handle—that is, how to meet. Catch the point? A—er—man came here from New York this afternoon and, after making some inquiries at the hotel, where he, of course, ran afoul of Ellery and got the history of the county back to the Indian wars, he asked where Mrs. Winter lived."

"Yes?"

Lawrence moved quickly from the window and drew up another big chair fronting the judge, who continued:

"His name was Louis A. Gunsberg, and when I met him I found he'd been out to Meadow Farm, and although, of course, he couldn't see Mrs. Winter—the old lady is pretty low—he saw Mrs. Blatchford, and she, of course, referred him to Amy and to me."

"Well; go on, sir."

"You remember my telling you that Colonel Winter left a lot of stock in a Mexican mine named the 'El Cintura,' and that I thought it was worthless, eh?" The judge paused to make sure his hearer took in the full import of this. "You remember?"

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"Certainly." Lawrence looked at him curiously.

"Well, sir, it turns out I was mistaken! Larry, my boy"—the old lawyer had paused and was speaking with slow deliberation—"this fellow, Gunsberg, has made me such an offer for that stock that it makes me feel funny all down my spine to think of it! He beat about the bush at first and then came out with a bid of—what d'ye think?"

"I don't think at all; what?" Again his eye sought the judge's; a strange smile was on his lips, but he was not aware of it.

"One hundred thousand dollars!" Judge Hollins leaned back in the big chair gasping; he repeated the sum to himself beneath his breath.

"What did you do? Did you talk it over with anybody?" His lack of astonishment the judge passed over in his eagerness to proceed.

"With Amy—yes. She was all for accepting it at once, and then I told her I thought I'd better wait till I'd seen you, and that gave her an idea, apparently, and she said—er—something that I took to mean to 'do nothing' till *she'd* seen you, too. I can tell you, son, never did anything happen that means so much to so many of the salt of the earth—I mean the two old ladies and Amy and the children; not him—the text-quoting skunk! If Bellwood should lose his position—he gets a good salary—he'd never get another. I know what's the matter. It's all bound to come out. They haven't saved a dollar. The mortgage on the farm would be foreclosed, Mrs. Winter and Mrs. Blatchford would go to the poorhouse, and Amy and the boy and girl—good Lord! what would become of 'em!"

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"She wished to see me—did she? I mean did she say so?"

"Well—er—yes, Larry; you've—er—got to see her. I don't know what's happened altogether, of course; but she told me some things that clear up much that puzzled me. I know what's been the matter with Frank—what's the matter with him now."

"There's a good deal I intend to tell you, too, old friend; but let's get back to the mining stock. You're the trustee of the property, aren't you?"

"Yes, and I'll tell you now what I did"—the judge was panting in excitement—"I told him that if he'd make an offer of one hundred and twenty-five thousand we'd *talk* about it. You see, he said that he had to know to-night. There was no way of my finding out anything about the value of it; may be worth more, for all that I know. I believed it best to be cautious."

Lawrence raised his eyebrows slightly. "You did right in getting all you could, of course; how does the matter stand?"

"He's to let me know before eight o'clock; he's going to leave at midnight—must accept or refuse my offer before he goes. I don't know much about these sorter things; my tendency is to hold over and investigate. You know I have a right, under the terms of the will, to dispose of this property without consulting anybody, but Amy, too, she says—er—just as much as says—'wait' till she sees you."

"I don't think that is necessary," replied Lawrence hastily. "You see there has been a newly awakened interest in these Mexican mines; but it is mostly speculative. My advice to you and to her is to get as much

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as you can, of course, but close up the deal as quickly as possible. I'd do it to-night, if I were you."

"I'd better be going back, then."

"No; stay to supper, judge; there will be plenty of time after; it will be ready in a minute." And then slowly as if to collect his friend's wits for him: "Whom did you say this Gunsberg represented?"

The judge walked to the window and drew out the notebook; he could just read the name in the failing light: "Kahn, Davis & Co., Broad Street; ever heard of 'em?"

"Oh, yes; good firm; they've been my— Hullo, here's Mary to tell us supper is ready!"

Arm in arm Lawrence and his old friend walked into the dining room. At the door Judge Hollins paused.

"Do you know—I think we take this good news in a mighty unenthusiastic way, Larry—don't we?"

Lawrence smiled: "I tell you what we'll do, then, to make up," he proposed; "we'll open a bottle of that Lone Star Madeira my father prized so and drink a health to Mr. Gunsberg and the—what did you call it?"

"The 'El Cintura,'" replied the judge.

"Right," said Lawrence. "'El Cintura.'"

It was done in proper form but with rather a thankful gravity on the part of Lawrence and a forced exuberance on the judge's. One might have thought that neither appreciated the full meaning of the situation embodied in the lifting of their glasses. The fact was that it seemed to oppress them with its weight of suggested promise.

"You know, Larry," half meditated the old lawyer,

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speaking very slowly, "that this news has so dwelt upon me that it has discounted other things that I wanted to tell you, and has rather put out of my mind some questions that I wished to ask. I have been a man of one idea for the last few hours; but now, if you will forgive me, my boy, I am going to be very frank, and if I ask anything that you don't care to answer just put in an objection and it will be sustained."

"Go ahead, judge! Mind you, nothing you might ask me can offend."

"You're going to leave Brimfield, are you? I believe I can read your mind."

"Yes, I expect to be in London in about three weeks."

"London! You won't come back here, boy?"

Lawrence looked at the judge and slowly shook his head. "I don't think so, sir. It has been a great failure. I can see no reason for returning."

His friend did not pursue the line of reasoning suggested by the interpolation. Instead he returned the gaze for a moment, then lowered his eyes. A look of sadness came over his handsome old face.

"Things often go wrong in the world," he said slowly. "There is no use of railing at fate, of course—no sense in repining. It is often better to swim with the current than to fight for a far shore." He paused, slightly hesitating, then resumed, smiling kindly: "But the tide turns, my boy, and if we keep afloat and save our strength, we may reach it after all."

The understanding sympathy was so plain that no comment was required. Lawrence sat in silence, and the judge poured himself out another glass of Lone

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Star. He sipped it slowly, and then, putting down the glass, leaned an elbow on the table.

"I want you to tell me," said he, "the actual state and condition of Franklin Bellwood's health; that is, if there is no objection."

"None in the least, judge. . . . I'm not attending him any more, you know. Dr. Smith, from Antioch, has taken hold with old Rublee here. But there's nothing much to be done. He won't submit to restraint or treatment; and the law can't touch him. He has heart trouble, but it is one of those remarkable cases about which nothing definite can be predicted. As to the other matter; he will probably live longer if he continues the use of morphine or opiates under proper direction, than if he stopped them. He may go on this way for years. Of course, there may come a breakdown of the faculties preceded by slow retrogression, or it may come suddenly. In either case, of course, it would mean putting him away in some place where he can be taken care of. That *you* will have to look out for. Amy understands. It is needless for me to tell you that he and I no longer occupy the positions that we once did—the relations, I should say. My hand must not be felt by him in the attempted control or suggested management of any of his affairs. That is all."

"He's up and about now, Larry—going strong, it appears, the contemptible canting sneak! Just think of the fine men in the ministry who haven't a tenth of his talents! How a——"

"Yes; Smith says that the case is one that is most unusual; he never met with one like it, nor did I."

"I heard a strange bit of gossip to-day," began

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the judge, smiling slightly; "but, considering the source, I don't think it worth repeating; still——"

He paused. His hearer was evidently paying no attention; he had risen and had gone to the window, standing there with his back turned. The old gentleman seemed to catch his mood; he settled deeper into his chair, a frown of preoccupation took the place of his half-amused smile.

Then followed a long silence.

Lawrence was recalling the awful scene that night at the rectory, when Franklin Bellwood had been on the verge of an accusation, so terrible that even in his half-delirious fury he had left it unpronounced. And how bravely she had spoken when she had stilled his words! It was as if her personality, the aroma of her character, filled the air like some peace-bringing spirit breath. Her husband had looked at her and hushed, his wide, dilated pupils searching her face. There was no suggestion of the understanding of any accusation that concerned her conduct. In the tremendously dramatic situation she had been as calm and sure as if she was only trying to comfort a sick person disturbed by the illusions—the *ægri somnia* of a dream. And that strange parting, when she had besought his help—so pathetic in her weakness—her words still lingered: "Wait till I send for you—wait till you hear from me."

And so he had left them together! But Franklin Bellwood's words had wounded him like a knife thrust.

"Tell him to go—tell him to go! He knows he'd like to see me dead! Yes; those were his words: 'He'd like to see me dead!'"

"Heavens, Larry!" cried the judge, awakening

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from his reverie, "it's nearly eight! I must hasten back. Mr. Gunsberg will think it strange. . . . Good Lord, if I should lose this chance I'd blow out my poor old apology for brains! Just think; that money, properly invested, would give Amy and the children enough to live on for the rest of their lives, in more than comfort—no matter what might happen. . . . I have an idea! Suppose you come down with me to the hotel and meet him; will you?"

"I don't think I'd better appear in the matter, had I? I couldn't offer you any advice, but of course I'd like to know the results. . . . I tell you what: come into the study and use the telephone. That's not half a bad idea—and then I'll know, you see, just what terms you arrive at."

As Lawrence was speaking he had turned; taking the judge by the arm he half led him from the dining room.

It did not take long to get into communication with the hotel; Mr. Gunsberg appeared to be within calling, for he quickly responded. The judge, as usual, was gruff.

"This is Judge Hollins—yes—yes. I'm now at Dr. Lawrence Kellogg's. . . . What?—hold the wire." The speaker faltered, a look of consternation on his face; at the same time he closed the transmitter with his hand and placed the mouth of the receiver against his cheek. "He wants to know if I have spoken to you about the matter; he didn't ask me not to. . . . But, good Lord!"

"Better tell him that you have talked it over with me. It can't do any harm."

The judge nodded. "Yes," said he aggressively,

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into the instrument, "I've talked it over with the doctor; he's an old friend of all the parties concerned—I beg your pardon, you exacted no secrecy in the affair, Mr. Gunsberg. . . . All right—I'll take *one hundred and fifty thousand dollars* for that stock—not a cent less!"

The judge made a gesture with his foot in Lawrence's direction, accompanied by a glance of the eye. His face was flushed with excitement. All at once his jaw dropped and he swung about.

"Good Lord!" he whispered loudly. "He wants to know if you could overhear what I was saying!" This time the judge forgot to cover the transmitter.

"Better say that I'm here in the room. I don't see what harm it can do, either." Lawrence spoke clearly. "Let him know that we have advised together. I agree in anything you say."

Mr. Gunsberg was doing the talking now, the judge signifying that he was listening by grunts of assent.

"All right, I'll be there in twenty minutes."

He hung up the telephone. "Phew!" he exclaimed, patting his brow loudly with the palm of his hand. "I don't know what to make of it! . . . Good idea—my tacking on that other twenty-five thousand—eh?"

"Yes, I told you to get all you thought you could get."

"By the golden harp! Larry, I might have got a million for all that I know!"

Lawrence laughed oddly. "I hardly think that," he said quietly. "A million is a large sum of money. Will I call a trap for you?"

"No, I think I'll walk. It will do me good. Just think a hundred"—the judge shook his head with an

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excited chuckle and slapped Lawrence on the back—"and *fifty* thousand, my boy! Where in the devil is my hat? I am going to do the fastest bit of walking I have done in many a year. . . . Tiddly dum te dido! feel gay as a lark on the dew-spangled grass! Tum ti, tiddly dum"—he made a strangely youthful jig step.

As they reached the hallway he took down his soft black sombrero from the elk antlers that served for a rack, and quieted himself. Then the smile of amusement once more crossed his face.

"By the way, Larry," he said, "I think I *will* tell you that bit of gossip I heard: That old gas bag Ellery told me he'd seen Frank Bellwood with Mrs. Rice in her automobile to-day, and that he'd been out at Elmside. Hardly believe it, do you?"

Lawrence did not return the smile, merely dismissing the news and the question with a shrug of his shoulders that suggested a volume of comment on Ellery's character. He had opened the front door and was about to start the judge on his way, with a promise of a meeting on the morrow, when all at once there sounded from the road beyond the pines the sound of loud, carousing cries and the jabber of angry drunken voices in broken English.

"Those confounded strikers from the waterworks," said the judge, pausing on the veranda. "There's going to be trouble, they have been drinking now for days. They assaulted one of the contractors and nearly killed him Thursday; they're a menace to the neighborhood. I hear that they're going to import new laborers this week and drive this lot out of their filthy camp up there. If we only had decent county officers, most of this murdering, chicken-stealing gang would

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be in the lockup! . . . Well, good night, Larry; come to my office in the morning. I'm going to try and persuade you to change some of your plans—but not now. I say, that's rather funny about Bellwood and Mrs. Ned, eh? I don't suppose you're going to church, are you?" He had changed the subject suddenly at Lawrence's shake of the head.

"No, not to-morrow. Good night, judge."

He followed his friend's retreating figure until it had disappeared in the gloom, behind the evergreens, and then, closing the door, he went back to the lonely library. Once more Mr. Gunsberg was called to the telephone for a few minutes' earnest conversation. The short talk concluded, Lawrence took out some papers. Before seating himself, however, or looking them over, he straightened up and folding his arms—his habit—remained there standing deep in thought. Franklin Bellwood and Mrs. Rice! Here was a strange mixing! Of course he knew, and Amy knew, of the widow's contribution to the church; it could not be otherwise. During the first week of Bellwood's illness Mrs. Ned had "kindly inquired" almost every day and once or twice sent flowers. But supposing this gossip was true? His wide experience taught him much as he reasoned it over. It might be another phase of the minister's retrogression—the sudden diversion in a new direction of a partly dethroned moral sense, meeting the whim of an unbridled nonmoral instinct. Both unbalanced from different causes leading to the same effect. And Amy! How would she meet this? The rankling, poisoned words that her husband had muttered that night of their parting sang in his ears over and over: "He'd like to see me dead!" Why had not

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the wreck on the road claimed him? Oh! the temptation of dwelling on that thought! He leaned forward on the desk, his eyes closed; his shoulders rose and fell with the force of his deep breathing. At last he calmed himself. The words of the note she had sent him that had begged for no answer drove out again the whispering devil. "We must not see each other, we must not even write—it must be never again. I see it all now. We must be brave. Always you will be in my thoughts, always in my prayers. God bless and keep you, Lawrence, knight of mine! The thought of you will keep me away from you—the thought of me, I trust, and know, will make you understand."

Oh! the sweetness and purity of the soul that gleamed through every word! the wonder of it! Who could doubt now that there existed on the earth the essence of the teaching of the Greatly Good? How small and unworthy he was in his groaning, tempted spirit; and yet how rich in the knowledge of such a purity of love! The ancient man in him would have possessed her, would hold her, clasp her close, fight—kill for her! And yet it was his soul that knew her, infolded her—and kept her safe.

The tempest was over! His eyes and throat pained and choked him, but he forced himself to concrete thought: Yes, he was doing everything he could—and yet as he had once lied to shield and save her; he was deceiving her now—because he saw no other way!

All at once what the judge had said came to him like a flash—she wished to see him! After all that had happened—she wished to see him! Could the old lawyer have been mistaken? Perhaps in his kindly way, and in his generous, chivalric interpretation of his

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knowledge of how things were between them, he had invented the suggested bidding. How odd it was he had not suspected anything in the purchase of the mining stock! Perhaps it was better that he had not. At all events, it was rather late in the day to tell him now.

But Amy! He must be sure before he made a move. The relief of feeling that, come what might, she would at least be placed beyond the grip of want and distress warmed him with a glow of comfort.

He sat long into the night writing and arranging his papers. It was only the lowering of the oil in the lamp that sent him to bed before daylight.

CHAPTER XI

THE BREAKING

IT was Sunday, but not bright and warm as the day before had been—a cold morning with the wind blowing and the sun slipping occasionally from behind fast-moving clouds.

Amy stood at the window of her room in the rectory, looking out at the leaves as they drifted from the branches of the elm trees. She had finished her breakfast and had sent the children off to Meadow Farm with a note to her aunt, Mrs. Blatchford. All at once she turned from the window and listened. She heard her husband steal down the stairs and make his way back to the dining room. She had not seen him to speak to since the morning before, when he started out for a walk. She had lunched and dined at her mother's, and part of the afternoon she had spent at Judge Hollins's office, going over the important news concerning the "El Cintura." At nine o'clock at night she had received a late visit from the old lawyer, who had told her that the bargain was concluded, and that as trustee he would deposit on the morrow in the bank at Antioch the check of Kahn, Davis & Co. for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, to be subsequently divided between her mother and herself, according to the terms of the will.

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The news, that seemed to her to be impossible at first, incapable of being understood, she had not yet communicated to Franklin Bellwood, for the reason that his whereabouts had been unknown to her during the day—a fact that had occasioned her no little anxiety. Upon his return, in her absence, he had gone to his room, and at the hour of the judge's call he was lying in a deep stupor, from which she deemed it best not to attempt to rouse him. For an hour, now, she had been waiting for him. All night she had lain awake thinking.

Her horizon had changed most wonderfully between the last sunrise and the one that greeted her this Sunday morning. She could see beyond the four walls of this room, beyond the rectory hedge and the hills that surrounded Brimfield—and these had been her boundary and her rounds for long, heavy-trudging years, during which, the day just gone was like the day to follow. Now all was to change! The country into which she looked was strange to her; it gleamed for a minute bright with promise and then clouded dark with threatening shadows—the roads and the valleys, clear for a certain length, ended in the ever-present mists. But as she had seen her duty under the dead weight of things as they were, she now saw it under the altered motive power given to her will and thoughts. It had taken a new direction, that was all. Lawrence Kellogg was in town; and he was going! She would never see him again, but he knew of the sudden change in her fortunes. That only gave her added reason for abiding by her decisions. The judge had given full rein to his imagination in describing Lawrence's joy at the tidings. Somehow the picture did not seem to fit into