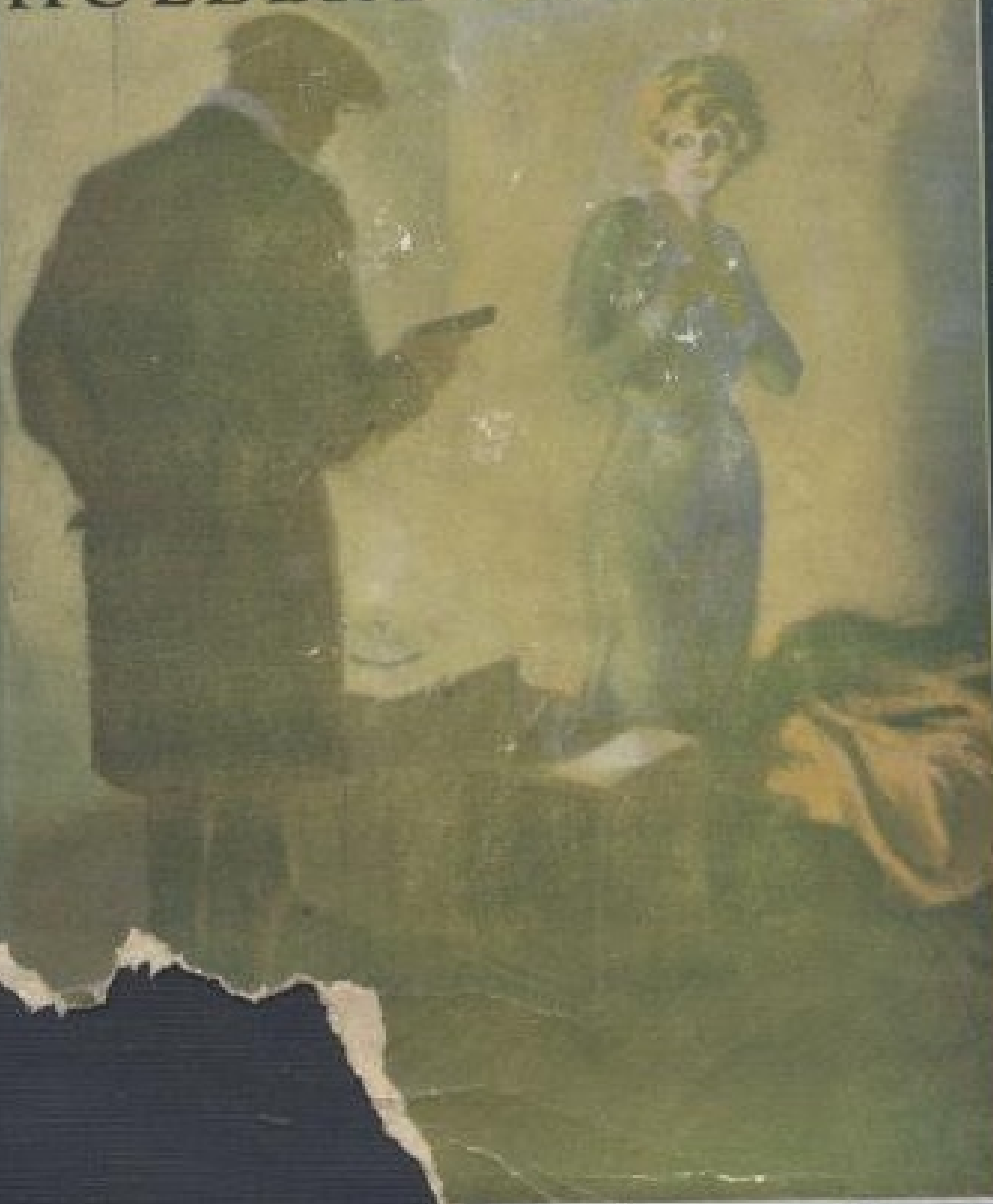


The
DEAVES AFFAIR

HULBERT FOOTNER



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THE DEAVES AFFAIR

By HULBERT FOOTNER

AUTHOR OF

*"The Owl Taxi," "The Substitute Millionaire,"
"The Fur Bringers," "The Woman from Outside,"
"Thieves' Wit," etc.*

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**TO
THE NOANKERS
KATHERINE FOREST
RUTH GREEN HARRIS
AND THE CHERUB WHO SITS UP ALOFT
W. SHERMAN POTTS**

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THE DEAVES AFFAIR

CHAPTER I

A PENNY CHANGE

Evan Weir's pipe was foul; he threw it down with an exclamation of disgust. Its foulness was symbolic; everything was out of kilter. He looked at the picture he had been painting for a week—rotten! It was a still life; a broken jar and three books on a rag of Persian embroidery. Picking up his pen-knife he deliberately cut the canvas out of the stretcher, and setting a match to a corner of it, tossed it in the empty stove. He paced up and down the room wondering what the devil was the matter with him; he couldn't work; he couldn't read; his friends bored him; life was as flat as beer dregs.

His attic studio was lighted by a dormer window at a height convenient to receive his elbows on the sill. He came to a pause in that position morosely staring out on Washington Square basking in the summer morning sunshine. In some occult way the gilding on the green leaves stabbed at his breast and accused him of futility.

"What the deuce am I doing up here in this dusty garret painting bad pictures while the whole world is alive!" he thought.

He picked up his hat and went slowly down the three flights to the street. At the corner of the square he turned down Macdougall street into the Italian quarter.

This intimate thoroughfare was as crowded as a bee-hive. Happy, dirty, big-eyed children played in the gutters while their obese mothers squatted untidily on the stoops. No lack of the zest of life here. It shamed the pedestrian without cheering him.

"They haven't much to live for," he thought, "and they're not complaining. Why can't I take things as they come, as they do, without searching my soul?"

It was a point of pride with Evan not to look like a denizen of Washington Square. So his hair was cut, and his clothes like anybody's else. He even went so far as to keep his hat brushed, his trousers creased and his shoes polished. For the rest he was a vigorous, deep-chested youth of middle height with rugged features and glowing dark eyes. He had a self-contained, even a dogged look. Like all men susceptible of deep feeling, he did not choose to wear his heart upon his sleeve.

Half an hour later found him in that quaint corner of the island bounded by Liberty street, Greenwich street and the river. It is generally called the Syrian quarter, though shared by the Syrians with immigrants of all nations, whose boarding-houses abound there, convenient to the landing station. A feature of the neighbourhood is the cheap clothing stores where the immigrants buy their first United States suits. These suits hang swinging from the awnings like wasted gallows birds. A hawk-eyed salesman lurks beneath; in other words the "puller-in."

As Evan approached such a place in darkest Greenwich street a customer issued forth of aspect so comical and strange that Evan was drawn out of himself to regard him. It was a tall, lean old man who moved with a factitious sprightliness. He was clearly no immigrant but a native of these United States. He was wearing a hand-me-down which hung in weird folds on his bones. The trousers lacked a good four inches of the ground, and the sleeves revealed an inch of skinny wrist. The wearer looked like a gawky school-boy with an old, old face. Yet he bore himself with the conscious pride of one who wears a new suit. On his head he wore a brownish straw hat which was a little too small for him, and had seen three summers. As he walked along with his sprightly shuffle, which did not get him over the ground very fast, his head ceaselessly turned from side to side, and he continually looked over his shoulder without seeming to see anything. His mouth was fixed in the lines of a sly smile, which had nothing to do with the expression of his eyes. This was furtive and anxious. His little grey eyes searched in all the corners of the pavement like a rag-picker's eyes. To Evan there was something familiar about the face, but he couldn't quite place

it.

The old man turned a corner into one of the little streets leading to the river. Evan, bound nowhere in particular, and full of curiosity, followed. There was something notable about the old figure in its ridiculous habiliments; this was no common character. Under his arm he carried a bundle wrapped in crumpled paper, which presumably contained his discarded suit.

He stopped at a fruit-stand, and as Evan overtook him, was engaged in scanning a tray of apples as if the fate of nations depended upon his picking the best one at the price. The fruit-vendor regarded him with a disgusted sneer. Evan loitered, and as the little comedy developed, stopped outright to see it out.

The old man after an anxious period of indecision finally made his choice. After having satisfied himself that there was no concealed blemish in his apple he proffered a nickel in payment and extended a trembling hand for the change. The Syrian dropped a penny in it, and turned away with a suspiciously casual manner.

"Where's my other penny?" demanded the old man in a high-pitched, creaking voice.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the vendor with a wholly disproportionate display of passion. "That's all you get."

The old man pointed an indignant forefinger to the ticket on the tray. "Two for five!" he shrilled.

"That's right. Or four cents a piece," was the rejoinder.

"No you don't! Half of five is two and a half. You make half a cent on the deal anyhow."

"Well, if y'ain't satisfied, gimme the penny and take another!" With an unerring eye the vendor pounced on the smallest and knobbiest apple in the tray and offered that.

The old man would have none of it. "Give me my other penny!" said he.

"That's all you get!"

"Give me my other penny or I'll call the police!"

"Yah! For a penny would you! You're a big man of business you are! Call a cop, go on, and see what he'll say for a penny!" The vendor passionately searched under a shelf, and producing a ticket marked "4¢" defiantly stuck that alongside the "2 for 5."

"No you don't!" cried the old man. "You can't raise the price on me after I've bought!"

"One for four, two for five! I guess I charge what I like! I don't have to charge half the price for one!"

"You're a robber!"

The vendor appealed to Heaven to witness that he was maligned. He brandished a fist before the old man's nose. "You lie! You lie!" he cried. "Get out of here. I don't want you by my stand!"

"Give me my penny!"

"Ain't no penny comin' to yeh!"

Evan was not the only grinning on-looker. A crowd collected out of nowhere as crowds do. The anxious vendor had now not only to keep up his end of the argument, but to watch his exposed stock as well. But he showed no signs of giving in.

"Get out of here! I don't want you round me!" he cried.

"Give me my penny!"

"Ain't no penny comin' to yeh!"

They repeated it with incredible passion, over and over.

The crowd at first egged on both parties impartially:

"Go to it, men! A penny's a penny at that!"

"Don't let him jew you, old man. All them dagoes is robbers!"

"Soak him one, Tony, the tight-wad!"

"Sue him for the penny, Grandpa. I'll go witness for you."

"Aw, give him his penny, Mike. He needs a new lid." And so on.

"Gimme my penny!"

"Ain't no penny comin' to yeh!"

Finally the old man threw the apple back on the tray. "I won't deal with you at all!" he cried. "You're a robber! Gimme my money back!"

"You bruised it!" cried the Syrian tragically. "I don't take back no spoiled goods. Leave it lay at your own risk!"

"Gimme back my money!" cried the old man undaunted.

A grimy little hand slid out from the crowd and closed over the disputed apple. In the flick of a whip it was gone, and no man could say where. The crowd rocked with laughter.

The vendor shrugged. "Ain't my loss. It's his apple."

"Gimme my money back!" demanded the old man.

"Ah, what do you want, the apple and the money and the change too?"

The old man snapped the penny down on the glass top of the candy case. "Gimme my nickel," he said like a bird with one note.

The vendor passionately snatched up the penny and cast it at his feet. "Go to Hell with your penny!" he cried.

Someone put a foot on it and that likewise was seen no more.

"Gimme my nickel!" said the old man.

Suddenly a voice in the crowd was heard to say: "Gee! it's Simeon Deaves!"

"Simeon Deaves, of course!" thought Evan. That old face was continually in the newspapers.

Instantly the temper of the crowd changed. There was nobody who could read English that was not acquainted with this man's reputation. A chorus of imprecations was heard:

"Miser! Skinflint! Tight-wad! Robber!"

The sallies of the sidewalk wits were almost drowned in the mere cries of rage:

"Tight-wad, did you say? His wad is ossified to him!"

"He wants to put that penny out at interest!"

"Say, the Jews go to school to him."

"He'd skin the cream off a baby's bottle, he would."

The old man looked down and back at them snarling. Like a cowed animal's, his gaze was fixed upon their feet. Fearful of blows to follow, he turned around, and edging away from the stand got his back against the wall of the building. His face was ashy, yet oddly the mouth was still fixed in the unvarying lines of the sly smile. The fruit vendor made haste to shut up his stand.

A flushed and burly Irishwoman stepped in advance of the crowd. She looked Deaves up and down insultingly. "What kind of a man do you call yourself?" she cried. "With all your millions locked up in the bank, and dressed in a suit that my old man wouldn't sweep up manure in! What are you doing down here anyhow? Go back up town where you belong!" She shook a fist like a ham in his face. "Do you see that? That's an honest hand that never filched a penny. For a word I'd plant it in your ugly face, you Shylock! You penny-parer!"

A youth's voice cried out: "Come on, fellows, let him have it!"

The crowd suddenly swayed forward. No one could tell exactly what happened. A raised clenched fist smashed the old man's hat over his eyes. Deaves went down out of sight.

This was too much for Evan. After all the man was old and it was fifty to one against him. His blood boiled, and the megrims were forgotten. He rushed in on the old man's side, swinging his arms and shouting:

"Get back, you cowards! Give the old man a chance!"

The passionately indignant voice was more effective than the blows against so many. The crowd drew back shamefacedly, revealing the old man prone on the sidewalk, but not visibly injured. He was able to scramble to his hands and knees as soon as they gave him room. Evan helped him to his feet.

"Come on, I'll get you out of this," he said peremptorily. With his flashing eyes he searched the faces of the crowd for eyes that dared to withstand his, but none cared to.

He started to march the dazed old man smartly towards West street. It was an uncomfortable moment when they were obliged to turn their backs on the crowd. Evan expected another rush. But it did not come.

They had not taken ten steps when the old man pulled back. "M-my bundle," he stammered. "I've lost my bundle."

Evan could not tell what the crowd might do. There was of course no policeman to be expected in that forgotten little street. "Let your bundle go!" he warned him. "Come on."

But the old man planted himself like a child with immovable obstinacy. "My old clothes!" he said. "They're worth money! I'm not going to give them up!"

Evan with an exasperated laugh went back. The crowd which had started to follow backed off. The bundle lay where the old man had fallen. It had come unwrapped and the deplorable garments were fully revealed. Evan, gritting his teeth, stooped over and rolled them up. He knew what a chance he was providing to the wits of the crowd.

"Old clo! Old clo!"

"Rags, bones, bottles! Any rags, bones, bottles!"

"Say, fella, what do you think you'll get out of it?"

"Aw, Simeon Deaves 'll give him his old clothes."

The envious note was clearly audible. Individuals in the crowd were beginning to ask themselves now, why

they hadn't had the wit to take the old man's part, and earn his gratitude. Evan held himself in from reply.

"What's the use," he thought. "Scum!"

Rejoining the old man he led him to the West street corner. Deaves had had a bad shock, and he was still trembling all over, and stumbling slightly in his walk. He betrayed no consciousness of gratitude towards his rescuer. His mind was still running on the lost nickel.

"Robber! Outrage! Thieving scoundrel!" he was muttering.

They waited for a Belt line car. Another man waited alongside of them, a quiet little youth in a grey suit whom Evan had seen as an onlooker in the crowd.

When the car came the old man was still so shaky that it seemed to Evan only the part of common humanity to accompany him. But on the step Deaves turned sharply.

"You needn't come," he said. "I can take care of myself."

"That's all right," said Evan politely. "It's no inconvenience."

"I won't pay your fare," said Deaves.

Evan laughed. "I'll pay the fares," he said. To himself he thought: "It's not often one has a chance of standing treat to a millionaire."

Deaves did allow Evan to pay the fares, and indeed seemed quite pleased as if he had got the better of him in a deal. But something about Evan disconcerted him. He continued to glance at him sideways out of his restless, furtive little grey eyes. Finally he said:

"I'm not going to give you anything for coming with me."

"Don't expect it," said Evan.

"What are you coming for then?" Deaves demanded.

Evan laughed in an annoyed way. "Well, now that you put it to me, I don't exactly know. I suppose I owe it to myself not to let an old man fall down in the street."

Deaves thought over this quite a long while. Along with his shrewdness there was something childish in the old man. "You're a good boy!" he announced at last.

Evan appreciated that this was an immense concession. "Much obliged," he said dryly.

"Just the same, you needn't think you're going to get anything out of me," the old man quickly added.

"I don't."

Having established this point to his satisfaction Deaves seemed disposed to become friendly. "What are you doing out on the street in the middle of the morning?" he asked.

"I might ask the same of you," returned Evan good-naturedly.

"I'm retired. I've a right to take my ease. But all young fellows ought to be at work. Haven't you got any work to do?"

"I'm an artist."

"Pooh! Waste of time!"

Evan laughed. It was useless to get angry at the old boy.

"Why aren't you working at it now?" Deaves demanded to know.

"It wouldn't come to-day," said Evan.

"Stuff and nonsense! You'll never get on that way! Look at me!"

Evan did so, thinking: "I wouldn't be like you for all your millions!"

Deaves went on: "Keep everlastingly at it! That's my motto. That's what's brought me to where I am to-day. I've retired now—though I still have my irons in the fire—but when I was your age I worked early and late. I didn't waste *my* time fooling round like young men do. No, sir! My only thought was how to turn everything to advantage. I denied myself everything; lived on two bits a day, I did, and put my savings to work. The cents and the dollars are good and willing little servants if you make them work for you. I watched 'em grow and grow. That was my young man's fun."

Evan looking at him thought: "You are an object-lesson all right, old man, but not just the way you think."

The current of Deaves' thoughts changed. "You're a strong boy," he said, with a glance at Evan's stout frame. He felt of his biceps through the thin coat. "Hm!" he said scornfully. "I suppose you're proud of your strength. I suppose you spend the best part of your days exercising. Waste of time! Waste of time! A strong man never comes to anything. They're simple, mostly. It's the head that counts! How many of those ruffians did you knock down?"

"Not any," said Evan carelessly. "They ducked."

"Well, you're a good boy. You stick to me, and I'll show you something better than messing in colours. I'll show you how to make money!"

CHAPTER II

A RICH MAN'S HOUSE

They rode up to Fifty-Ninth street, and transferring to a cross-town car, got off at the Plaza. Evan's subconsciousness registered the fact that the little fellow in grey was still travelling their way, but he took no particular notice of him. Deaves led the way to one of the magnificent mansions that embellish the neighbourhood. He handed his bundle to Evan.

"You carry it," he said. "Maud always makes a fuss when I bring bundles home."

"Who is Maud?" asked Evan.

"My son's wife; a great society woman."

"You want me to come in with you then?" said Evan.

"Yes, you're a good boy. I want to give you something."

Evan was surprised. "A dime, or even a quarter!" he thought, smiling to himself. Nevertheless he went willingly enough, filled with a great curiosity.

The house was a showy affair of grey sandstone built in the style of a French château. But Evan's trained eye perceived many lapses of taste; it was not even well-built; the window-casings were of wood when they should have been of stone; the side of the house, plainly visible from the street, was of common yellow brick. It looked like a jerry-built palace for a parvenu. Evan wondered how the old money-lender had come to be stuck with it.

"My son's house," said Deaves with a queer mixture of pride and scorn. "I live with them. Sinful waste!"

He avoided the front door with its grand grill of polished steel. The street widening had shorn off the original areaway of the house, and the service entrance was now a mere slit in the sidewalk with a steep stair swallowed up in blackness below. Down this stair old Simeon Deaves made his way. Evan followed, grinning to himself. It was certainly an odd way for a man to enter his own home.

"We won't meet Maud this way," Deaves said over his shoulder.

The remark called up a picture of Maud before Evan's mind's eye.

In the basement of the great house they met many servants passing to and fro, before whom the old man cringed a little. These superior menials turned an indifferent shoulder to him, but stared hard at Evan. Evan flushed. Insolence in servants galled his pride. "If I paid their wages I'd teach them better manners!" he thought.

Somewhere in the bowels of the house, which was full of passages like all ill-planned dwellings, the old man unlocked a door and led Evan into a vaultlike chamber without a window. Carefully closing the door behind them he turned on a light.

"This is where I keep all my things," he said innocently. "Maud never comes down here."

Evan looked around. A strange collection of objects met his view; old clothes, old newspapers, old hardware, in extraordinary disorder. It was like the junk room in an old farmhouse. The walls were covered with shelves heaped with objects; old clocks, broken china ornaments, empty cans, pieces of rope, bundles of rags. On the floor besides, were boxes and trunks, some with covers, some without; the latter overflowing with rubbish. Evan wondered whimsically if the closed boxes were filled with shining gold eagles. It would be quite in keeping, he thought. But on second thoughts, no. Your modern miser is too sensible of the advantages of safe deposit vaults.

Deaves found a place for his bundle of old clothes, and seeing Evan looking around, he said with his noiseless

laugh, which was no more than a facial contortion:

"You never can tell when a thing will be wanted."

Turning his back on Evan he rummaged for a long time among his shelves. Evan was somewhat at a loss, for his host appeared to have forgotten him. He was considering quietly leaving the place when the old man finally turned around. He had a small object in his hand which he made as if to offer Evan, but drew it back suddenly and examined it lovingly. It was a pen-knife out of his collection.

"Almost new," said Deaves. "The little blade is missing, but the big blade is perfectly good if you sharpen it. Here," he said, suddenly thrusting it at Evan as if in fear of repenting of his generosity. "For you."

Evan resisted the impulse to laugh. After all the value of a gift is its value to the giver. He pocketed it with thanks. It would make an interesting souvenir. To produce it would cap the climax of the funny story he meant to make out of this adventure. He turned to go.

"Don't be in a hurry," said Deaves. "Sit down and let's talk."

He evidently had something on his mind. Evan, curious to learn what it could be, sat down on a trunk.

"You're a good boy, and a strong boy," said the old man. "I'd like to do something for you."

"Don't mention it," said Evan grinning.

"Why don't you come every day and go out with me. I like to walk about. I can't stay cooped up here. I like the streets. But people recognise me."

"And make rude remarks," said Evan to himself.

"But with you I could go anywhere."

"Ah, a body-guard," thought Evan. The idea was not without its attractions. It would be an amusing job. He said:

"If you want to hire me I'm willing. I need the money."

"Hire you!" said the old man in a panic. "I never said anything about hiring you. I just mean a friendly arrangement. You have plenty of time on your hands. I'll give you good advice. Show you how to become a successful man."

"Thanks," said Evan dryly. "But the labels I paint bring in ready money."

"Many a young man would be glad of the chance to go around with Simeon Deaves," he went on cunningly. "It would be a liberal education for you."

Evan got up. It was the best argument he knew.

"You could have your meals here," Deaves said quickly. "They eat well. There's enough wasted in this house to feed an orphanage."

"Sorry," said Evan. "It doesn't appeal to me."

"Well, you could have a room on the top floor. You look pretty good; Maud wouldn't mind you. Your living wouldn't cost you a cent."

Evan thought of the supercilious servants. Not for a bank president's salary would he have lived in that house. He said: "I'm open for an offer as I told you, but only during specified hours. I'd eat and sleep at home."

"You're a fool!" said the old man testily. "Free board and lodging! I haven't any money."

"All right," said Evan moving towards the door. "No harm done."

"Wait a minute. Maybe my son would lend me the money to pay you a small salary. He says I oughtn't to go out alone."

"A small salary doesn't interest me," said Evan boldly. "Fifty dollars a week is my figure."

Simeon Deaves gasped. "You're crazy. It's a fortune. At your age I wasn't making a third of that!"

"Very likely. But times have changed."

The old man now opened the door for Evan. As he did so there was a scuttle in the passage and a figure whisked out of sight. "Snoopers!" thought Evan.

"Will you show me the way up-stairs?" he said. "I don't care to use the servants' entrance."

"Sure, that's right," said Deaves soothingly. "I hope we won't meet Maud. Always picking on me."

As they headed for the stairs he said cajolingly: "Fifteen dollars a week; that's plenty to live on. Youngsters ought to live simply. It's good for their health."

"But how about putting something by?" said Evan slyly.

"Well, I think my son might go as high as seventeen-fifty if I asked him. Because you're a good boy and a strong boy."

"Thanks. Nothing doing."

As Evan resolutely mounted the stairs, the old man hobbling after said: "Well, I'll add two and a half to that myself. But that's my last word! Not another cent!"

"Nothing doing," said Evan again.

At the head of the stairs Deaves said nervously: "Better let me take a look to see if Maud's around." He peeped out. "All right, the coast is clear."

They were now in a square entrance hall of goodly size, very showily finished like a hotel with veneered panels, which already showed signs of wear. Imitation antique chairs stood about, and in front of the fireplace, which was certainly never intended to contain a fire, was spread a somewhat moth-eaten polar bear skin. Still it was grand after a fashion, and the old man in his hand-me-downs looked oddly out of place.

"Better think it over!" he said. "Twenty dollars a week! It's a splendid salary!"

"Nothing doing," said Evan, grinning. In a way he liked the old scoundrel.

Deaves affected to lose his temper. "Oh, you're too big for your shoes!" he cried. "Your demands are preposterous!"

Evan continued calmly to make his way towards the front door.

Just before they reached it the old man made one last appeal. "Twenty dollars!" he said plaintively.

A door at the back of the hall opened and an old-young man came out; that is to say he was young in years, but he seemed to bear the weight of an empire on his shoulders, and looked very, very sorry for himself. He was dressed as if he had to be a pall-bearer that day, but that was his ordinary attire. He looked sharply from the old man to Evan.

"Who is this, Papa?" he demanded with the air of a school-master catching a boy red-handed.

The old man cringed. "This—this is a young man."

"So I see."

"Well, I—I didn't exactly ask him his name."

"Evan Weir," spoke up the young man for himself.

"He came home with me," said Deaves. "There was a little trouble."

The younger Deaves was horrified. "Another disgraceful street scene!" he cried. Addressing Evan he said: "Please tell me exactly what happened." He glanced nervously over his shoulder. "But not here. Come up to my library."

He led the way up-stairs, across another and a loftier hall with an imitation groined ceiling, and into a large room at the back of the house, which by virtue of a case of morocco bound books, clearly not often disturbed, was the library. The young man flung himself into a chair behind an immense flat-topped desk and waved his hand to Evan with an air that seemed to say: "Now tell me the worst!" Between the two, Evan's sympathies were with the father.

He was not invited to sit. He told his story briefly, making out the best case that he could for the old man. The latter was not insensible to the favour. His little eyes twinkled. The young man became gloomier and gloomier as the story progressed.

"We shall hear more of this!" he said tragically.

The old man pished and pshawed. "I offered him a steady job," he said, "to go round with me. But his notions are too grand."

"Why, that would be a very suitable arrangement," his son said pompously. "How much do you want?" he asked of Evan.

"Fifty dollars a week."

"That's ridiculous!" young Deaves said loftily. "I'll give you twenty-five."

The scene of down-stairs was continued, with this difference that the son was not so naïve as the father. Evan kept up his end with firmness and good-humour. After all there was some fun in contending with such passionate bargainers, and he saw that for some reason the son was more anxious to get hold of him than the father. They finally compromised on forty dollars a week, provided Evan's references were satisfactory. Simeon Deaves was scandalised.

"It's too much! too much!" he repeated. "It will turn his head completely!"

CHAPTER III

SNOOPING

Young Deaves (his father addressed him as George) passed out through a small door on the left presumably to telephone to Evan's references. His father followed him, still protesting tearfully that the salary he purposed paying Evan would ruin them both. Evan was left standing in the middle of the room. Before he had time to take a further survey of his surroundings the door from the hall was softly opened, and a smug, pale young man in a sober suit sidled into the room, a servant. Evan learned later that "Second man" was his official title. "Spy" was writ large on him. The house seemed to be swarming with them. This fellow had undoubtedly been listening at the door.

"Good God! who would be rich!" thought Evan.

The servant with a sly, meaning look in Evan's direction went to a console at the left of the room, and affected to busy himself in arranging the objects upon it. In reality his long ears were stretched for sounds coming through the little door. Having satisfied himself that the Deaves' were good for several minutes in there, he came towards Evan with an ingratiating leer.

"Nice day," he said.

Evan's impulse was to call the fellow down, but he reflected that if he was to become an inmate of the house, it would be just as well for his own protection to learn what this snooping and eavesdropping signified.

"Fine," he said non-committally.

"Are you going to be one of us?"

"I don't know yet."

"It's a rummy joint."

"So I gather," said Evan dryly.

"Have you seen the Missus yet?"

"No."

The lackey cast up his eyes and whistled softly. "Oh boy! You've got something to see!"

This was Evan's first experience of the below-stairs point of view. It was a revelation.

"Were you planted here?" the servant asked with a mysterious air.

"What do you mean?" asked Evan.

The other quickly turned it off. "Oh nothing." He glanced towards the little door. "When you work for a bunch like this you don't feel like you owed them anything. It's every man for himself."

"I suppose so," said Evan.

"But there's a square bunch down-stairs. Come down to the butler's room when you can and get acquainted."

"Thanks."

"Take it from me you won't find it such a bad house if you stand in with the crowd down-stairs. There's money to be made on the side if you're smart enough."

"How?" asked Evan.

The second man winked at him knowingly. "Let's you and I get better acquainted before we get confidential."

"Sure," said Evan. "I see you're a wise guy."

"Wise!" said the other. "Solomon wasn't one two three with me."

"What do they call you?"

"Alfred. I'll make you acquainted with the bunch down-stairs. The women——" He suddenly broke off, and stiffened into the blank-faced, deferential servant.

Young Deaves and old Deaves returned through the little door.

"If you please, sir," said Alfred quickly, "Mr. Hilton sent me to ask what wines you would have for dinner."

"I'm busy!" snapped George Deaves. "Tell Hilton when I want wine I'll let him know."

"Yes, sir, very good, sir." The rubber-shod one wafted out of the room, shutting the door behind him as softly as a flower closes. George Deaves looked sharply to see that it was closed, then looked as sharply at Evan.

"Was he talking to you?" he demanded.

Evan quickly decided that the only safe hand to play in this strange house was a lone hand; he would take no one into his confidence. "Nothing in particular," he said.

"Why don't you fire him, George?" asked his father.

The younger man shrugged wearily. "What's the use? The next one would be no better." He turned his attention to Evan. "Your references were satisfactory," he said. "You may consider yourself engaged. Thirty-five dollars was the sum we agreed on, I believe."

"No, sir, forty dollars," said Evan firmly.

"Ah, my mistake. It's a great deal of money. I hope you'll be worth it. You will be at my father's call whenever he wants you."

"I will come at nine o'clock every morning and stay until five. Sundays are my own of course."

George Deaves turned to his father. "On your part, if I pay out all this money, you must promise me that you will not go out except with this young man."

The old man gave an ungracious assent.

"I will report at nine to-morrow," Evan said.

"But I want to go out now," the old man said like a child.

"You've had quite enough outing for to-day, Papa," George Deaves said severely.

Simeon Deaves said to Evan spitefully like a balked child: "Well, your wages won't begin until to-morrow, then. To-day doesn't count."

As Evan had his hand on the door he became aware that George Deaves was making signals to him to remain. He lingered, wondering what was in the wind now. George said to his father:

"Lunch is ready. You'd better go down."

Forgetting all about Evan, the old man hastened out of the room with an expectant air.

When he had gone George Deaves hemmed and hawed, gazed at the ceiling, made scratches on his desk pad and beat all around the bush. The gist of it as finally extracted by Evan was something as follows:

"I am not paying you all this money as a simple attendant for papa. I could get two at the price. The fact is papa has an unfortunate faculty for getting involved in street disputes. On account of his prominence a certain publicity is attached to it. Very distressing to the family. I shall expect you to keep him out of such troubles. You will have to be firm. He is very obstinate. But I authorise you to take any measures, any measures to save him from his own folly."

Evan was tempted to ask: "Even to cracking him on the bean?" But instead he said demurely: "I quite understand."

Evan made his way home down the Avenue ruminating upon what had happened. "In the words of Alfred it's a rummy joint," he said to himself. "Father and son are a pair of birds. What do I care? I'm not going to let them get under my skin. I'll give them their money's worth for a month or so, then bid them ta-ta and hike to the blessed country on my savings. Meanwhile the affair has its humorous side. Mystery, too. Like a play."

If Evan had not recollected when he got to Thirtieth street that he needed certain small articles of apparel to make himself presentable in his new job, he would probably not have discovered that he was being followed. But as he retraced his steps to the shops his attention was caught by a man's back, a narrow back clad in grey. The owner of the back was looking in a shop window. It was the little youth that Evan had seen before that morning. The inference was that he had stopped merely to give Evan time to pass him.

"By God! another snooper!" thought Evan. "This one dogged our foot-steps all the way up-town from the fruit-stand. Well, I'll give him a little run for his money."

Entering one of the big stores Evan made his purchases. He then hastened up one aisle and down another. It could have been no easy task to follow him through the crowded store, but his little grey shadow never lost the scent. In their gyrations Evan had an opportunity to get a good look at his tracker. He was not like Alfred; he had a decent look, or rather he looked neither decent nor mean, but simply watchful. An impenetrable mask was drawn over his face, out of which his eyes looked quietly, giving nothing away. In years he was no more than a lad.

"Not a very dangerous customer, anyway," thought Evan.

Issuing from the store Evan jumped on a moving bus bound up-town. He took a seat on top; the youth got in below. At Forty-Second street Evan changed to a cross-town car; his pursuer rode on the platform. At Third avenue he changed again—but without shaking the other. Half an hour later making his way through Waverly place towards Washington Square, he was well aware that the grey figure was still behind him, though pride forbade him turning his head to see.

Reaching the Square, Evan dropped on a bench and waited to see what would happen. The slender figure passed him, eyes calmly bent ahead, and sat down on a bench fifty feet farther on. Evan rose again, and retracing his steps, walked down the east side of the Square, and entering from the Fourth street corner, sat down again. Once more the youth passed him and sat down beyond. There were but few people around; it was hardly possible that he thought his movements had not been perceived by the man he was following. "As a sleuth you're an amateur," thought Evan. "You don't care whether I'm on to you or not. But I must say you have your nerve with you. I'm considerably bigger than you."

He got up and approached the other. The stripling looked straight ahead, affecting to be unconscious of his coming. Evan came to a stand before him and said abruptly:

"What's the idea, kid?"

The youth looked up startled, then quickly drew the mask over his face. "I don't understand you," he said.

"Come off," said Evan mockingly. "Do you think I'm a blind man not to notice the particular interest you are taking in my doings? What's the idea?"

The boy's eyes held to Evan's steadily; they were the eyes of a fanatic rather than a crook. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

"You've been trailing me for the last two hours."

"You're mistaken. I never saw you before."

Evan laughed in exasperation. "That's childish! Do you mean to say you didn't pick me up in Troy street two hours ago, after that row with the fruit vendor?"

"I don't know where Troy street is," was the answer.

Evan changed his tactics. Dropping into the seat beside the boy he said: "Look here, I'm a regular fellow. Loosen up, kid. Give me the dope. What's it all about?"

The other was silent.

"God knows why anybody should take after me," Evan went on. "I haven't committed any crime that I know of. And I don't own a thing in the world anybody could covet. Who hired you to trail me?"

"Nobody," said the boy. "You're mistaken."

Evan began to get hot under the collar. He got up.

"By God——!" he began, clenching his fist. Then he stopped, because his anger rang false to him. In fact he couldn't work up a genuine anger against the strange-eyed boy who neither cringed before him nor defied him but simply looked.

"It would be a shame to hit you," he went on, "you're too little. But I warn you to keep away from me hereafter. The next time I stumble over you I won't be so gentle, see? You keep out of my way, that's all."

He strode off across the Square in the direction of his own place. He felt exasperated and helpless. He was clearly the injured party, yet he had come off second best in an encounter with a mere child. To make matters worse he was perfectly sure that the youth was still trotting after him like a little dog that refuses to be sent home. He would not look around to see. As he passed in the door of 45A he did look around, and there sure enough was his little sleuth across the street. Evan slammed the door and went up-stairs swearing.

The next time he had occasion to leave the house, the youth had gone. He saw him no more—that day. "Perhaps his game was to learn where I lived," thought Evan.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW LODGER

Evan's pal Charley Straker occupied the adjoining room on the top floor of 45A and the two pooled their household arrangements. It was Evan's week to cook the dinners, consequently when dinner was eaten his was the privilege of occupying the easy chair with the stuffing coming out and cock his feet on the cold stove while Evan washed up.

During the afternoon Evan had painted and delivered a label that had been ordered of him, and had cleaned up generally as if in preparation for a journey. But he had not yet said a word to Charley of the events of the morning. As a matter of fact Evan had a prudent tongue, which Charley most decidedly had not, and it had occurred to Evan that he had better find out where he was at, before entrusting the tale to his garrulous partner.

Evan drew at his pipe and gloomed at the wall. Now that the mild excitement induced by the morning's events was over, a heaviness had returned to his spirit. Meanwhile Charley ran on like a brook.

Charley was a lean and sprawling youth with lank blonde hair, a long nose, and an incorrigible smile that spread to the furthest confines of his face. To quote himself, he was a bum artist and a squarehead. He took people at their own valuation and was consequently a universal favourite.

"Carmen rented her back parlour this afternoon," he was saying—Carmen being their own moniker for their landlady Miss Carmelita Sisson. "To a female. What do you know about it? Carmen hates 'em round the house. Too nose-y, she says. But the room's been vacant since spring, and roomers in summertime are as scarce as snowballs. So she succumbed.

"Haven't seen her yet—I mean the new roomer, but my hope and my prayer is that she's a looker. I think she is because Carmen sniffed. Does our Carmen love the beautiful of her sex? She does—not! She's a singing-teacher, Madame Squallerina, Carmen called her, with the rare wit for which she is famed. Already moved in with her piano and all. I heard her moving round, but the door was closed. I'm afraid she's not going to be sociable. Hell! the parlor floor always looks down on the attic! That's a joke in case you don't know it; parlor floor looking down on the attic!

"Wish I could think of a good excuse to knock on her door. It 'ud be a stunt, wouldn't it, to raise an alarm of fire in this old tinder-box. Say, if there's ever a fire I bags the new roomer to save—that is until I get a look at her. If it's over a hundred and fifty, I'll give the job to you, Strong-arm."

This failed to draw a smile from Evan.

"Say, you're as lively as the dressing-room of a defeated team. Wot th' hell's the matter? Come on out and see a movie. I'll blow."

"I'm off pictures," said Evan. "Go on yourself. Maybe you'll meet Squallerina on the stairs. Take her."

"You've said it," said Charley. "I'm off."

The gas made the room hot, and Evan turned it out. The instant he did so, he became aware of the moonlight outside, and he went and rested his elbows on the sill in his customary attitude.

The moon herself was behind the house, but the Square beneath his window was mantled in a tender bloom of light. As every painter knows, moonlight is most beautiful when the moon herself is out of the picture. By moonlight the dejected old trees of the Square were shapes of perfect beauty, the grass was overlaid with a delicate scarf of light; the very figures on the benches were as strangely still as if the moon had laid a spell on them.

But all this beauty only had the effect of putting an edge on Evan's dissatisfaction. The gnawing inside him was a hundred times worse by moonlight. "What's the matter with me?" he thought querulously. "I wished for something to happen. Well, something did happen, but there's no fun in it. There's no fun in anything any more. Moonlight

makes me hate myself. Oh, damn moonlight anyhow! It turns a man inside out!"

He flung away from the window and planted himself in his chair with his back to it.

Presently he became aware of a sound new in that house. His door stood open for ventilation and it came floating up the old stairs. He was aware of a vague pleasure before he localised the sound. It was music; a piano—but not the usual rooming-house instrument; a piano in tune, softly played. It drew him to the door and to the banisters outside, a poignant, haunting melody rippling in a minor treble, a melody that queerly sharpened the knife that stabbed him, yet drew him on irresistibly.

He stole down the dark stairs, guiding himself with a hand on the rail, his eyes as abstracted as a sleep walker's. The sounds were issuing from the back parlour of course. The door was partly open—so she was not as unsociable as Charley had feared, or perhaps it was only that it was hot. The room was dark inside. Evan leaned against the banisters with bent head, scarcely daring to breathe for fear of breaking the lovely spell.

The music came to an end and his spirit dropped back to earth. He lingered, silently praying for it to resume and give him wings again. Instead, the door was suddenly opened wider and he saw the tenant of the room on the threshold. All he could see of her was that she was a little woman with a lot of hair. The moonlight shimmering through the edges of her hair made a halo around her head. Moonlight made two square patches on the floor of the room.

It was too late for him to escape. "I—I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I couldn't help listening."

"Oh!" she said. "Who are you?"

"Evan Weir. I live up-stairs."

"Oh!" she said again, but with a different inflection.

By her voice Evan knew she was young and adorable. It was a low-pitched voice for so little a woman, low and thrilling; a mezzo-soprano. His spirit went to meet that voice.

For a moment or two they stood silently facing each other in the dark. Evan was not conscious of any embarrassment; he was too deeply moved. His conscious self was in abeyance. Moonlight, music and woman had bewitched him. He was in the grip of forces that played on him like an instrument. But someone had to speak in the end. It was Evan.

"What was that you were playing?" he asked simply.

"The moonlight sonata," she answered.

"Of course! That's why it sounded so exactly right. Won't you play again—please?"

She could not but have been aware how genuinely moved he was, but however it may have pleased her, womanlike, she sought to pull down the conversation to a safer plane.

"Oh, I can't!" she said. "I have unpacking to do. I was coming out to get a match to light the gas. I can't find any."

"I'll light the gas for you," he said eagerly. She stood aside to let him enter. The simple act thrilled him anew; she was not afraid of him; her spirit greeted his. When she turned around he could see her face etherealised in the moonlight, a lovely pale oval with two dark pools. There was a subtle perfume in the room that made him a little dizzy. In the act of striking a match he paused.

"Oh, it's a shame!" he said involuntarily.

"What is?" she asked.

"To light the gas on such a night."

She laughed. It was a delicious little sound. It seemed to bid him be at home there. "One must!" she said. "What would the landlady say?"

But the tone of the denial encouraged him to insist. "A little more music," he begged. "I never heard anything so lovely."

She went to the piano bench obediently. "Sit down if you can find a place," she said over her shoulder.

Instead he came and leaned his elbows on the edge of the piano case. Once more her fingers rippled over the keys, and another delicate minor air ravished his soul. She did not seem to strike the keys, but to draw out the sounds with the magical waving of her pale hands. She kept her head down, and he could not see into her face. Nor could he be sure of the colour of her hair, but only that it was shining.

In the middle of the piece the flying fingers began to falter. No doubt the intense gaze he was bending on the top of her head confused her. At any rate she broke off abruptly and jumped up.

A cry broke from Evan: "Oh, please go on!"

"I cannot! I cannot!" she said. "Light the gas." As he still hesitated she stamped her foot with delightful imperiousness. "You *must* light the gas!"

With a sigh he struck the match. The gas flared up with a plop. Their curious eyes flew to each other's faces. Evan saw—well, he was not disappointed. His instinct had rightly told him in the dark that she was adorable. Not regularly beautiful; the most charming women are not. There were fascinating contradictions. The bright hair was gloriously red: the eyes too large for her face and brown, extraordinary eyes revealing a strong soul. They were capable both of melting and of flashing, but especially of flashing; the soul was imperious. As for the rest of her, the dear straight little nose was non-committal, the mouth fresh and childlike, with a slight, appealing droop in the corners. In short, Nature the great experimentalist had in this case endowed a most sweet and kissable little body with the soul of a warrior.

Evan could not have argued this all out, but his inner self perceived it. His feelings as he gazed at her were mixed. The dear little thing! the enchanting playmate; his arms fairly ached to gather her in. At the same time the deeper sight was whispering to him that this was no playmate for a man's idleness, but a soul as strong as his own—or stronger, to whom he must yield all or nothing, and he was afraid.

As for her, she simply looked at him inscrutably. He could not tell if she were pleased with what she saw.

Finally self-consciousness returned to both with a rush. They blushed and turned from each other.

"You must go now," the girl said gently.

He understood from her tone that she did not greatly desire him to go, but that it was up to him to find a reason for staying.

"Let me help you get your things in order," he said eagerly. "You can't shove trunks and furniture around."

She hesitated, thinking perhaps of the censorious landlady.

Evan made haste to follow up his advantage. "This trunk. Where will you have it put?"

She gave in to him with the ghost of a shrug. "It has nothing in it that I shall want," she said. "Shove it as far back in the closet as it will go."

In the closet her dresses were already hanging. The delicate perfume he had already remarked made his head swim again. As he bent down to shove the trunk back, her skirts brushed his cheek like a caress. They were burning when he came out. Perhaps she guessed; at any rate she quickly turned her head.

"You don't want the sofa in the middle of the room," Evan said to create a diversion.

"Put it with its back against the fireplace, please. I shall not be having a fire for months to come. That will leave the space by the window for my writing-table."

While they discussed such safe matters as the disposal of the furniture they never ceased secretly to take stock of each other. What people say to each other at any time only represents a fraction of the intercourse that is taking place. Under cover of the most trifling conversation there may be exciting reconnaissances going on, scout-work and even pitched battles of the spirit.

Evan could not make her out at all. She seemed to single him out, to encourage him as far as a self-respecting woman might, yet an instinct warned him not to bank on it. There was an unflattering impersonal quality in her encouragement; behind it one glimpsed formidable reserves. She was wrapped in reticence like a mantle. Evan had a feeling that if she had been really drawn to him she would not have been so nice to him. On the other hand "coquette" did not fit her at all; not with those eyes. Evan thought he knew a coquette when he saw one; their blandishments were not such as hers.

So for a while all went swimmingly, and the moments flew. Evan managed to make the business of arranging the furniture last out the greater part of the evening. To save her face she bade him go at intervals, but he always contrived to find an excuse to delay his departure.

There was no reticence in Evan. He loved her at sight and his instinct was to open his heart. Of course he was not quite guileless; the portrait of himself that he drew for her was not exactly an unflattering one, but it was a pretty honest one under the circumstances. He was careful not to bore her, and to grace his tale with humour.

Oddly enough the more of himself that he offered her, the less pleased she seemed to be. As the evening wore on she developed a tartness that was inexplicable to Evan. He cast back in his mind in vain to discover the cause of his offense. Yet she would not let him stop talking about himself either, but drew him on with many questions, interested in his tale it would seem, merely for the sake of making sarcastic comments. As for talking about herself, nothing would induce her to do so.

It was a more unamiable side of her character that she revealed, but the enamoured Evan, even while she flouted him, forgave her. "Something is the matter," he said to himself. "This is not her true self." He told her of the black dog that had been on his back all day.

"But now I'm cured," he said, looking at her full.

She chose to ignore the implication.

Evan began leading up to a desire that he had not yet dared to express. "My partner said you were a singer," he said.

"Have you been discussing me?" she said with an affronted air.

"Why, yes. Nothing so exciting as your coming ever happened in this old house."

"I teach singing," she said carelessly.

"Won't you sing me a song?"

She decisively shook her head. "Not to-night."

"But why?"

"Dozens of reasons. One is enough; I don't feel like it."

"To-morrow night, then?"

"Aren't you taking a good deal for granted?"

"But you said not to-night. That suggests another night."

"Oh, one doesn't weigh every word."

"Well, I'll be listening out to-morrow night on the chance."

For some reason this annoyed her excessively. A bright little spot appeared on each cheek-bone. "Then you'll force me to keep silent however I feel."

"Why—what's the matter?" said Evan blankly.

"You imply that if I happen to sing you will regard it as an invitation to come down here."

"Why, I never thought of such a thing," he said in dismay.

His honesty was so unquestionable that she got angry all over again, because she had made the mistake of imputing such a thought to him. Indeed a disinterested observer could not but have seen that some perverse little imp was playing the devil with this charming girl. Angry at him or angry at herself—or both, she had ceased to be mistress of the situation and her forces were thrown into confusion. Whatever she said, it instantly occurred to her that it was the wrong thing to say.

"You're spoiled like all the rest," she said. "A woman cannot be decently civil to you, but you immediately begin to presume upon it." This was said with a smile that was supposed to be tolerant, but she was angry clear through, and of course it showed.

It was all a mystery to Evan. With a hand on the table he had just moved, he was staring down at it as if he had discovered something of absorbing interest in the grain of the wood. He knew she was unreasonable, but he did not blame her; he was merely trying to think how to accommodate himself to her unreasonableness; he was pretty sure that whatever he might say would only make matters worse, so he kept silent.

But no red-haired woman can endure silences either. "If you've nothing further to say you'd better go," she said at last.

"I was wondering what I had done to offend you," said Evan.

She laughed, but it had not a mirthful sound. "How funny you are! Strangers don't quarrel. They've nothing to quarrel about!"

"But you are angry."

"Nonsense!" she said languidly. "I'm very much obliged to you for your help. But there's nothing else you can do."

"Meaning I'd better beat it."

She was magnificently silent.

"I'm going. But it's hard to go, not knowing what's the matter."

She had the air of one dealing with a trying child. "How often must I tell you that there's nothing in the world the matter?"

"You are not the same as you were when I came."

For some reason this flicked her on the raw. She flushed. She stamped her foot. "You're—you're impossible!" she cried. "*Will* you go!"

As Evan backed out she all but shut the door in his face. How astonished would he have been could he have seen through the door how she flung herself face down on the sofa and wept. That was the softer girlish part of her. But not for long. She sat up and digging her chin into her palm thought long and hard. That was the warrior.

"I will not give in to him—and spoil everything," she whispered. "I will not!"

Meanwhile, out in the dark hall Evan was leaning against the banisters trying to puzzle out what had happened. At first only a blank dismay faced him. Women were inexplicable. But presently a slow smile began to spread across his face. He said to himself:

"Well, whatever it is, she's not exactly indifferent to me. I've made an impression. That's something for the first meeting. And she's in the house. And to-morrow's another night!"

He went up-stairs with a better heart.

He went straight to his window-sill and cooled his hot cheeks in the night air. The old trees still stood sentry duty in the moonlight, the people sat still as dolls left out all night, the noises of the town were reduced to a pleasant murmur.

"God! what a good old world it is!" thought Evan, unconscious of his perfect inconsistency. "How good it is to be young and alive; to see; to feel; to laugh; to love; to know things! I guess I'm a little drunk on it now, but I want more, more! I shall never have my fill!"

As he lay in bed it suddenly occurred to him that he was head over heels in love with a woman whose name he did not know.

CHAPTER V

THE HAPPY LITTLE FAMILY

At the Deaves mansion next morning it was Alfred who opened the massive steel grill to admit Evan. The second man favoured him with a sly wink.

"Cheese it, kid," he murmured out of the corner of his mouth. "They're layin' for you."

This meant nothing to Evan.

In the centre of the house where the hall opened up he found George Deaves walking up and down with his head bowed and his hands clasped behind his back, the very picture of a harassed man of affairs. There was a histrionic quality in all young Deaves' attitudes. The old man in slippers was hunched in a pseudo-mediaeval chair, while a fat servant, Hilton, the butler Evan guessed, was standing at the foot of the stairs. Another man in chauffeur's livery was beside him.

It all had the look of a set scene, and from the way their faces changed at the sight of him, the inference was inescapable that it had been set for Evan. He wondered greatly what it was all about, but felt no particular uneasiness.

George Deaves bent a venomous glance on him. "Follow me," he said hollowly.

The whole procession wended its way up the winding, shallow stairs; first George Deaves, grasping the hand rail and planting his feet virtuously, then old Deaves, his heels coming out of his slippers at every step, then Evan, then the three servants. Evan heard them sniggering behind him.

At the door of the library George Deaves said: "You come in, Papa. Hilton, Wilson and Alfred, you wait outside in case I call you."

"Does he expect me to assault him?" thought Evan.

In the library young Deaves flung himself back in his chair, and placing the tips of his fingers together said pompously: "Now, my man, I advise you to tell the truth."

Evan began to get hot. "That is my custom," he said quietly.

Notwithstanding his pompous air the younger Deaves was visibly nervous; he had not his father's force of character. "It is useless for you to feign innocence," he said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Evan.

Deaves said: "I may as well let you know I have a policeman waiting down-stairs."

There is no man however sure of himself that would not be to some degree disconcerted by this announcement. Evan changed colour. Deaves, quick to notice it, smiled disagreeably, and Evan's cheeks grew hot indeed.

"Have him up-stairs," said Evan. "I don't know what this flummery is all about. Hand me over to the police and maybe I'll find out."

"Give me a specimen of your handwriting," said Deaves, shoving writing materials towards him.

"Certainly," said Evan. "I have no reason to be ashamed of it."

"Write five thousand dollars, first in figures, then spelled out."

Evan did so, and shoved the paper back. Deaves compared it with a letter which lay in front of him, the old man

peering over his shoulder.

"Nothing like," the latter said disappointed.

"That doesn't prove anything!" snapped the son. "I didn't suppose that he worked this single-handed. He has confederates."

Evan's momentary discomfiture had subsided. The situation was becoming too absurd. Was he accused of forgery or blackmail? He began to grin.

"You said you were an artist," said George Deaves with a sapient air. "Can you prove it?"

"Certainly," said Evan. "If you'll come to my studio. There are dozens of my canvases there."

"But how would I know you painted them?"

"Oh, I'll do you one while you wait."

"Facetiousness won't do you any good," said Deaves severely. "This is a serious matter. Please explain how you came to be in that little obscure street where you met Papa yesterday?"

"There is no explanation," said Evan. "I was just walking about."

The young man sneered. He tossed over the letter that lay before him. "Read that," he said.

Evan applied himself to it with no little curiosity. Meanwhile he was aware that the two were watching him like lynxes. The letter was written in a neatly-formed, highly characteristic hand on a sheet of cheap note-paper without any distinguishing marks. Evan read:

"Mr. George Deaves:

Dear Sir:

We take pleasure in enclosing copy of a humorous little story that has been prepared for the press. None will appreciate it better than you and 'Poppa' we are sure. If you think it is too good to be offered to the public it will cost you five thousand dollars for the exclusive rights, including motion pictures and dramatic. But unless we hear from you before the day is out we will take it that you don't want to buy, and it will be offered to the *Clarion* for to-morrow's edition. The *Clarion* is always delighted to get hold of these human interest tales. Copies will be mailed to everybody in the social register, and especially to Mrs. George Deaves.

But if you want to reserve the fun to yourself bring five one-thousand-dollar bills to the reading-room of the New York Public Library this morning. Call for Lockhart's History of the Crimean War in two folio volumes and insert the bills in volume one at the following pages: 19, 69, 119, 169, 219. Then return the books to the desk.

With kindest regards,

Yours very sincerely,
THE IKUNAHKATSI."

A noiseless whistle escaped from Evan's lips; his eyes were bright. For the moment he forgot that he was the accused. His sole feeling was one of the keenest curiosity. A fascinating mystery was suggested. The impudent letter was like a challenge.

"May I see the enclosure?" he asked.

"No," said Deaves stiffly.

Evan shrugged. "What's the nature of it?"

"It's a would-be humorous account of the events in that little street down-town."

"Is it a true story?"

Young Deaves turned to his elder. "Is it true, Papa?"

"In a way it's true," was the snarling reply. "From a certain point of view. But it's blackguardly just the same."

Evan stroked his lip to hide a smile. "What makes you think I wrote it?" he asked.

"Nobody else could have known all the circumstances."

"But we were watched and followed every step of the way."

"So you say."

"Why, you're surrounded by spies. I expect every servant in the house is in the pay of this gang. I hadn't been in the house half an hour before they approached me."

"What did I tell you?" the old man snarled to his son. "Why don't you fire them?"

"How many times have I fired them? What good did it do? As fast as we get a new lot they're corrupted from the outside."

"Then it's been going on for some time," said Evan. "I never had any connection with Mr. Deaves until yesterday."

"How do we know that?"

"That's why you were so eager to get a job here," added the old man. "To have a better chance of spying on me."

"Never thought of such a thing. The offer came from you."

"You paid your own fare on the trolley-car, didn't you? Mine, too!"

Evan laughed in exasperation. "Well, if that's an incriminating circumstance I'm guilty!" he said.

"Don't be a fool, Papa," muttered George Deaves.

Evan went on: "If I was a member of the gang would I show my hand so clearly? Would I betray the sources of my information? I tell you Alfred told me yesterday there was good money to be made on the side in this house."

"Why didn't you tell me that yesterday?" demanded Deaves.

"I wanted to find out what was up first. I know now."

George Deaves began to look impressed.

Evan made haste to follow up his advantage. "Have up the policeman. I can tell him no more than I've told you. But the whole affair must be well aired, I suppose."

George Deaves winced. He and his father exchanged a glance. "There's no hurry," he said. "We may have been mistaken. At any rate we don't want any unnecessary publicity."

"You don't mean to say you're going to *pay!*" cried Evan involuntarily.

"Wouldn't you advise it?" asked the old man craftily.

"No! Fight! Call their bluff! The nervy blackguards! Oh, to give up to them would be too tame!"

"I guess he isn't one of them, George," Simeon Deaves said dryly.

George apparently agreed with him, though he made no direct acknowledgment.

Evan struck while the iron was hot. "Look here, here's a proposition for you. This thing interests me a whole lot. That letter was written by a damn clever crook, humorous too. I'd like to match my wits against his. Let me have a try at running them down. Won't cost you a cent more than my salary, and you won't have to let in any outsiders on the affair. Of course I've had no experience, but if I fail you'll be no worse off than you are now. If you go to the police it will be the newspaper sensation of the year."

Father and son looked at each other again. Evan had given them two potent reasons for listening to his proposal. But before they had time to express themselves there was an interruption.

A lady swept into the room like a northwest gale, one whose attire put the rose and the lily to shame; comely in her own person too after a somewhat hard and glassy style. Evan guessed this was Mrs. George Deaves, otherwise Maud. At the sight of her stormy brows father and son looked like two schoolboys caught in the act.

"What's going on?" she peremptorily demanded. "What are all the men servants waiting in the hall for?"

"Nothing, my dear," said George Deaves in a casual tone belied by his anxious eye. "They are merely waiting for their orders."

"My maid told me there was a policeman sitting in the housekeeper's room."

"Must be a friend of Mrs. Liffey's," her husband said with feeble humour.

"Friend nothing!" was the contemptuous reply. She marched up to her father-in-law, who silently snarled and gave ground like a cat. "You've been up to your old tricks!" she cried. "Another disgraceful street scene! I see it in both your faces. Another blackmailing letter, I suppose!"

Young Deaves unobtrusively sought to turn over the letter on his desk, but she caught the movement out of the tail of her eye, and, whirling round, snatched it up.

"Let me see that!"

Her husband looked as helpless as a sheep. He had lost his pomposity. "Happy little family!" thought Evan.

Having read it, she threw back her head and laughed in bitter chagrin. "I thought so!" she cried. "The third time this summer! When is this going to end? Where's the story?"

"My dear, what's the use?" said her husband tremblingly. "It would only anger you."

"Be quiet!" she cried. "I will see it. Where is it?" Her eye picked it out from among the papers on his desk, and she pounced on it. More harsh and bitter laughter accompanied the reading of it.

"Bought a new suit at an immigrant outfitters! I see he has it on. Got into a row with a fruit-vendor over a penny change. Rescued by a young man and taken home. Made his rescuer pay the fares on the trolley. Oh, this is rich, rich!" she cried, trembling with anger. "This is the best story yet. This will be meat and drink to the populace! And this is what they're going to send to the *Social Register*, to everybody I know. It's enough to make me wish I'd died before I took the name of Deaves!"

"My dear, we are not alone!" cried George Deaves in a panic.

She threw an indifferent glance at Evan. She thought he was a servant, and she was of that arrogant type which acts as if servants were something less than human. "Do you think anything can be hidden in this house?" she said. "The men-servants are listening at the door."

George Deaves had forgotten about them. He hastened to the door and sent them downstairs.

Mrs. Deaves addressed her father-in-law. "Well, if you can't control your avaricious tendencies you'll have to pay," she said. "Send to the bank and get the money so George can take it to them."

"Pay! Pay! Pay! That's all anybody asks of me!" cried the old man in a passion. "Five thousand dollars! None of you know what that means. Money to you is like the winds of Heaven that come and go. But *I* know what five thousand dollars is. For I have saved it up dollar by dollar at the cost of my sweat and self-denial. And will I give it up to these scoundrels, these sewer rats who threaten me? No! I'd as lief give them my blood!"

Mrs. Deaves' face turned crimson. "You'll pay!" she cried, "or I leave this house!"

"And where will you go?" sneered the old man. "Back to share your father's genteel poverty?"

"Who made him poor?" she cried. "Who robbed him?"

George Deaves, with the tail of his eye on Evan, was sweating with terror. "Maud, I beg of you—!" he whispered.

It did seem to occur to her then that she had gone too far. She glared at Evan as if defying him to judge her, and marching up to him said bluntly: "Who are you?" This woman was magnificent in her insolence if in nothing else.

Evan coolly met her eye. "I'm the young man who paid the fares," he said, smiling.

She scowled at him. Clearly she had no humour.

Evan explained further: "I have been engaged to accompany Mr. Deaves on his walks hereafter."

"Oh, locking the stable door after the horse is stolen," she sneered. "He needs a keeper." She indicated the typewritten sheets. "Then you were present at this affair?"

"I was."

"Is this story true?"

"I have not seen it."

She handed him the pages. Evan skimmed over it hastily. Since the incidents have already been related, the opening paragraph will be sufficient to convey the style of the whole:

"Our esteemed fellow-citizen, Simeon Deaves, is known as a great dandy among his friends. He has always refused to divulge the identity of the creator of the svelte garments that grace his manly form, but yesterday the secret came out. Not in the fashionable purlieus of Fifth Avenue or Madison does Mr. Deaves' tailor hang out his sign. No; it is in Greenwich Street near the Battery where the unwary immigrant makes his first acquaintance with American business methods, that Mr. Deaves buys his clothes. He was seen to buy an elegant mustard coloured suit there yesterday for \$4.49. Of course not everybody could afford this sum, but the goods were worth it. Take it from us, high-water pants will be all the rage the coming Fall."

And so on. And so on. Evan bit his lip to keep from smiling, and handed the sheets back. It was easy to understand how the story affected these people like salt in a wound.

"Is it true?" Mrs. Deaves again demanded of Evan.

"The facts are true so far as I know," he replied. "Of course, the humour was supplied by the author."

"This young man has offered to help us," began George Deaves.

The remark was unfortunate; Mrs. Deaves exploded again. "I won't have any bungling amateur detective work here!" she cried. "There's too much at stake. If the story is true there's only one thing to be done, pay!" She

addressed the old man. "You understand; you have disgraced us, and you shall pay."

But Simeon Deaves' dander was up and he refused to be intimidated. "What for?" he snarled. "I stand by my own acts. I ain't ashamed of them. If people don't like it they can lump it. What do I care what they say about me? They're only envious. They'd give their eyes to have what I've got. Let them publish their story. Who's hurt by it? Nobody but your feelings. Am I going to pay through the nose to soothe your feelings? Not five thousand dollars' worth! I'll be damned if I'll pay!"

He went out through the smaller door, slamming it behind him.

Mrs. Deaves turned hard inimical eyes on her husband. "Then it's up to you to find the money," she said.

"But, my dear," he whined, "you know my circumstances. How can I? Where? It is out of the question!"

"I don't care where you get it; you get it," she returned callously. "If that story is published I leave this house. You know what that means."

She marched out by the main door.

Evan could not but feel for the poor, crushed, flabby creature at the desk. In Evan's own phrase George got it coming *and* going. He was like a pricked bladder; all his pomposity had escaped like gas.

"What am I to do?" he murmured.

"Get the money together," said Evan, "and pay it over according to their orders. Then let me see if I can't get it back again—and get them, too."

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE FELLOW IN GREY

It turned out that George Deaves could lay his hands on the money, though perhaps it was not easy for him to do so. George's principal fortune consisted in being the son of his father; he could get almost unlimited credit on the strength of that connection. When Simeon Deaves saw that he was determined to pay the money to the blackmailers, he urged him to accept Evan's offer to run them down, and in the end, notwithstanding his terror of Maud Deaves, George gave in. Father and son, who had begun the day by accusing Evan of the crime, ended by depending on Evan to run down the criminals.

At ten o'clock George Deaves and Evan set out for the bank. It was not far and they proceeded on foot down the Avenue. Evan kept his eyes open about him, and before they had gone more than a block or two he spotted the well-remembered little figure in the grey suit still dogging their footsteps. Drawing George Deaves up to a shop window as if to show him something inside, he called his attention to the stripling with the pale and watchful face. Deaves shivered.

"Do you suppose he means us personal harm?" he said.

Evan smiled to himself, seeing the size of their enemy. "Well, I hardly think so," he said. "At least not as long as we seem disposed to pay up."

Deaves was received at the bank with extreme deference. He was not obliged to apply at the teller's window like a common customer, but was shown directly into the manager's office which looked on the pavement of the Avenue. A fine-meshed screen protected the occupants of the room from the vulgar gaze of the populace, but those inside could see out, and as soon as they entered the room Evan discovered the youth in the grey suit hanging about the door of the bank, unaware of the nearness of his victims.

Deaves introduced Evan to the manager as "My father's secretary." "I'm coming up in the world," thought Evan. Five crisp one-thousand-dollar bills were produced, and Evan perceived strong curiosity in the bank manager's eye. It had been agreed between Evan and Deaves that this man was to be taken partly into their confidence, but Deaves now seemed disposed to balk at it, and Evan ventured to take matters into his own hands.

"You were going to tell this gentleman what the money was for."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Deaves nervously. "You will of course appreciate the necessity of absolute secrecy, sir."

"That is part of my business," said the manager.

But Deaves still boggled at the horrid word, and it was Evan who said: "Somebody is trying to blackmail Mr. Deaves."

"Good gracious!" cried the horrified manager. "Mr. Simeon Deaves or Mr. George Deaves?"

"Either," said Evan dryly. "They don't care as long as they get the money."

"Have you notified the police?"

"Not yet. We're going to take a try first at catching them ourselves. There is one of them outside, the thin youth in the grey suit."

The manager half arose from his chair. "What! So close! Perhaps he's armed!"

"He can't see us."

The manager sank back only partly reassured. "Can I be of any assistance?" he asked.

"Yes," said Evan. "I want to mark these bills in your presence." Deaves handed them over, and the manager supplied a blue pencil. "See! A tiny dot following the serial number in each case. In case they get the money, and get away in spite of me, will you please see that all the banks in town are supplied with the numbers of these bills, and are instructed to have anyone arrested who presents them to be changed?"

"I certainly will," said the manager, making a note of the numbers.

They left a much startled banker peering through his window-screen.

The public library was but a few blocks from the bank. George Deaves wished to take a taxicab, but Evan advised against it. Their little grey shadow followed them to the door of the great building but did not enter. Having satisfied themselves of this, they got in touch with one of the assistant librarians, and put their case up to him.

The magic name of Deaves acted like a talisman. The plan was carefully laid. George Deaves proceeded to the reading-room and, calling for Lockhart's "History of the Crimean War," retired to a corner and placed the bills between the leaves as specified. The books were then returned to the desk, and Deaves with the connivance of the librarian was spirited out of the building by the delivery entrance. This was to prevent the watcher outside from remarking that, whereas two entered, only one came out. When neither returned he would naturally suppose that both had slipped past him.

Meanwhile Evan waited in the librarian's private office, arrangements having been made to notify him by phone when the books were called for again. They would hold up the books at the delivery desk long enough to allow Evan to reach the reading-room. It was a long wait. The librarian offered him books, but he could not apply his mind.

"You're sure there's no chance of a slip-up among so many clerks?" he said anxiously. "One may forget."

"We're not trusting to their memories. The librarian in charge of delivery is a friend of mine. Lockhart's History is in his desk, and in its place on the shelf is pinned a ticket, 'apply to the librarian.'"

At last the message came over the phone: "Lockhart's 'History of the Crimean War' called for from seat 433."

Evan's heart accelerated its pace a little. "Whereabouts in the room is that seat?"

"The last table in the south end on the right-hand side."

"Ha! He wants to get in the corner! Can I get there without marching down the whole length of the room?"

"Yes, you can approach from the other side through the American History room."

Hastening through various corridors of the vast building, they found themselves among the American History collections gathered in the smaller room adjoining the great hall on the south. This room was completely lined with books, and lighted by a skylight. It communicated with the main reading-room by an arched opening.

Taking care not to show themselves in this opening, the librarian described to Evan the exact location of seat 433 outside, and pointed out a spot where Evan could command a view of seat 433 through the archway. Evan proceeded to the spot, and, taking down a book at random, affected to be lost in studying its pages. Then, half turning and letting his eyes rise carelessly, he glanced into the great room.

It took him an instant or two to focus his eyes. The line of tables seemed endless, the hundreds of figures reading, scribbling or snoozing seemed indistinguishable from one another. Then Evan remembered the librarian had said: "433 is the fourth seat from the passageway between the tables; the person sitting there will have his back to you." Evan's eyes found the spot: he saw a familiar pair of thin, high shoulders under a grey coat.

His first feeling was one of surprise. Somehow he had not expected one so young and insignificant to be given so important a part in the game. For a moment he wondered if the strange-eyed, wary little youth could be their sole antagonist. That would indeed be a humorous situation. But he did not believe it possible. Certainly the letter had

been written by one older and more experienced.

Evan remained where he was, making believe to be absorbed in his book, and letting his eyes rise from time to time as if in contemplation. He was about sixty feet from the youth in an oblique line. Once the little fellow looked around, but Evan saw the beginning of the movement and was deep in study in plenty of time. The sober background of filled bookshelves afforded Evan good protective colouring. Across the smaller room the librarian was likewise affecting to be reading, while he nervously watched Evan and awaited the outcome.

Finally Evan perceived the library attendant coming down the long room bearing the two big volumes in their faded purple calf binding. He speculated whimsically on what a sensation would be caused should he drop one and a thousand-dollar bill flutter out. But library attendants know better than to drop books.

He laid the books on the table beside the youth, and went back. The grey-clad one, with another casual, sharp glance around him, took up volume one, the thicker of the two, and, slouching down in his chair, stood the tall, open book on his lap in such a way that no one either in front or behind him could see exactly what he was doing. "Not badly managed," thought Evan. Evan could only guess that he was turning to the specified pages and slipping out the bills. There was one action that Evan recognised from the movement of the shoulders. He had slipped his hand in his inner breast pocket.

"He's got them now," thought Evan.

Sure enough the youth presently let the book fall on the table and wiped his face with his handkerchief.

"I bet his little heart is beating," thought Evan. Evan's was.

The youth wasted no further time in making believe to read his books. Letting them lie on the table he got up and started to walk out at a leisurely pace. Evan followed him, knowing of course that the first time the youth turned his head he must discover him, but it did not matter much now. Their footsteps fell noiselessly on the thick rubber matting of the reading-room.

Half-way down the great room the youth did turn, and saw Evan behind him. A spasm passed over the thin little face and his teeth showed momentarily. One could fancy how sharply he caught his breath. He increased his pace a little, but by no means ran out of the room. He had his nerves under pretty good control. Evan made no effort to overtake him in the reading-room. He hated to make an uproar there.

The youth went soberly down the two flights of the great stairway with Evan as soberly at his heels. He did not look around again. To have refrained from doing so indicated no little strength of will. Crossing the entrance hall, they passed out the main entrance and down the sweeping steps to Fifth Avenue.

"He'll make a break to escape in the crowd," thought Evan.

On the little esplanade between the two flights of steps Evan sprang across the space that separated them and laid a heavy hand on the youth's shoulder.

He shrank away with a terrified gasp. "What do you want?" he demanded.

"You come with me," said Evan, sternly.

"I won't! You've no right to lay hands on me!"

"You come along," said Evan, "or I'll call the policeman yonder."

He marched him down the remaining steps. The boy offered no resistance. For that matter he would have stood but a small chance against the muscular Evan. The passers-by began to stop and stare and shove and ask what was the matter.

Evan greatly desired to avoid a street disturbance. Steering his captive across the pavement to the curb, he hailed the first passing taxicab and bundled the unresisting youth inside. In low tones he ordered the chauffeur to

drive to the nearest police station. It was all over in half a minute. They left the curiosity seekers goggling from the pavement.

During the drive the two exchanged no word. The youth shrank back in his corner, staring straight ahead of him out of his pale and impenetrable mask. Occasionally he moistened his lips. Clearly he was terrified, but a determined spirit held him to the line he had chosen.

Evan made no attempt to search him for the money, for he wished to have a witness present when the marked bills were taken from him. But he watched him throughout with lynx eyes, prepared to forestall any attempt to make away with the bills.

Arriving at the station house the chauffeur, full of curiosity, was for helping Evan take his prisoner in. But Evan paid him off and told him he needn't wait. The man lingered, joining the little crowd that always hangs around the station house steps when a prisoner is brought in.

By this time the youth seemed to have recovered from the worst of his fears. He went up the steps quite willingly in front of Evan. Within, a bored and lordly police lieutenant sat enthroned at his high desk. Evan, who had been holding himself in all this time, burst out:

"This man is a blackmailer. I want you to search him. You'll find the money he extorted in the inside breast pocket of his coat. The bills are marked."

The Lieutenant declined to become excited. Such dramatic entrances were part of his daily routine. "Hold on a minute," he said, opening his book. "Proceed in order." He addressed the prisoner: "What is your name?"

"I decline to give it," said the youth—his voice was breathless but determined still. "I have done nothing wrong. This man suddenly seized me on the street. I think he's crazy. Search me. If you find anything, then let him make a charge."

The Lieutenant spoke to a patrolman across the room: "Ratigan, search him."

The youth spread his arms wide to facilitate the search. Evan, taken aback by his assurance, waited the result anxiously. The patrolman thrust his hand in his breast pocket.

"Nothing here," he said indifferently.

Evan's heart sank. "Are you sure?" he said.

"Look for yourself if you want."

"Search him thoroughly," commanded the Lieutenant.

But Evan already guessed that he had been tricked.

No money was found except a dollar bill and some change.

"Is this it?" asked the patrolman solemnly.

The youth smiled.

Evan waved it away.

"Well, what are the circumstances?" asked the Lieutenant. "Will you make a charge?"

"I've been fooled!" Evan said bitterly. Suddenly a light broke on him; he struck his forehead. "I see it now! This man's job was simply to lead me away while another came and got the money!"

"Well, will you make a charge?"

Evan quickly reflected. There was not much use airing the case in court if the principal evidence was gone. "Let him go," he said. "He's not the one I want."

Without more ado Evan hastened out. The youth presumably was allowed to follow. The taxicab was at the curb. Evan flung himself in.

"Back to the library!" he ordered.

He sought out his friend the librarian. A hasty investigation showed that Lockhart's History had been collected in due course from the table and returned to the shelves. It had not been called for since. The money was gone, of course.

"His confederate was waiting there in the reading-room, perhaps at the same table," Evan said gloomily. "As soon as I was out of the way he got the money. What a fool I was!"

"But how could you have foreseen that?" said the librarian.

Evan then had the pleasant task of returning to the Deaves house and telling them what had happened. Father and son were waiting for him in the library. They instantly saw by his face that things had not gone well, and each snarled according to his nature. When he heard that the money was gone the old man broke into piteous lamentations.

"Five thousand dollars! Five thousand dollars! All that money! Flung to the rats of the city to gnaw!"

"What's the matter with you?" snapped his son. "It was my money."

"I earned it, didn't I? You have nothing but what I gave you!"

"We may get them yet through the banks," suggested Evan.

"Yah! We'll never get them now!"

But however they might quarrel with each other, father and son united in blaming Evan.

"Look at him!" cried the old man, beside himself. "He knows where the money's gone! Of course he didn't catch them. I believe he engineered the whole thing!"

"Be quiet, Papa," said George Deaves in a panic. He turned to Evan with an anxiety almost obsequious. "Don't mind him," he said. "He's excited. You'd better go now. But I'll see you later."

Evan was not deceived. It was clear that George no less than his father believed that he was a party to the crime, but was afraid to say so outright.

"I live at 45A South Washington Square," he said curtly. "You'll find me there any time you want me."

CHAPTER VII

PLATONIC FRIENDSHIP

Charley Straiker came in to dinner that night in a highly effervescent state. This was not at all unusual.

"Listen, Ev!" he cried. "I've seen her! Oh, a peach! a little queen! Her name is Corinna Playfair. Isn't that mellifluous? Corinna Playfair! Corinna Playfair! Like honey on the tongue! Listen, when I came in a while ago I heard a woman's voice talking to Carmen in her room on the ground floor. So I went back, making out I wanted to see Carmen. And there she was! Bowled me over completely. Red hair, you old misogynist! Piles and piles of it like autumn foliage. It's the colour of a horse chestnut fresh out of the bur—and her skin's like the inside of the bur—you know—creamy! Oh, ye gods!

"Well, she was telling old Carmen this and that; her blinds wouldn't work, and the gas-jet in the dressing-room was out of order, and your Uncle Dudley sees his chance and speaks up. 'I'll fix the gas-jet and the blinds,' says I. There was nothing free and easy about her, though. Made her eyebrows go up like two little crescent moons. Looked at me as much as to say: 'What is this that the cat has brought in?' 'Oh, thank you very much,' says she in a voice as friendly as a marble headstone. 'I couldn't think of troubling you. Miss Sisson will attend to it.'

"But of course old Carmen wasn't going to miss the chance of getting her odd jobs done for nothing. She took my part. 'Mr. Straiker, Miss Playfair,' says she, grinning like the cat who's turned over the goldfish bowl. 'He will fix you up, I'm sure. I wouldn't be able to get a man in before next week.'

"Well, to make a long story short, I fixed the blinds so's they'd roll up, and cleaned out the gas burners. She didn't unbend any. Discouraged all my efforts to make conversation. Thanked me all over the place, and gave me to understand that I needn't build on it, you know. But I swear I'll make her thaw out. I've thought of a scheme. I tried all her burners—to gain time, you understand—and the one she mostly uses whistles like a peanut stand. So I'm going out to get her a swell gas mantle to-night, and say Carmen sent it, see? Trust I'll Charley to find a way!"

Evan, of course, had his own ideas as to entertaining Miss Playfair this evening. "How about the life class at the League?" he suggested casually—too casually.

This was a sore subject with Charley. Evan had him there. "Oh, blow the class!" he said, scowling. "A fellow doesn't get a chance like this once in a lifetime." He boiled over again. "I say, I didn't mention her eyes, did I? Lord! They're like immense brown stars!—Oh, that's rotten! I mean velvety, glowing—oh, words fail me! You'll have to take her eyes on trust!"

Evan refused to be diverted. "You cut the class last time," he said. "What do you expect to get out of it?"

"Lord! One would think you wanted to get me out of the way so you could make up to her yourself!" said Charley, frowning.

Evan glanced at him sharply. This, however, was a random hit. Charley was quite unsuspecting.

"Only I know you're a hermit-crab, a woman-hater!" he went on.

"It's only last week you were chasing after a blonde," Evan persisted remorselessly. "When she threw you down you swore you'd go to work."

"Oh, well, I'll go to the old class," muttered Charley. "I'll get the gas mantle to-morrow."

Evan breathed freely again.

When Charley was safely out of the way Evan made haste to array himself in the best that their joint wardrobes afforded. They shared everything. His conscience troubled him a little over his treatment of Charley, but he salved it with the thought: "Well, anyway, I saw her first. I quarrelled with her before he even laid eyes on her." Evan gave

anxious thought to the matching of ties and socks, and spent many minutes in vigorously brushing out a slight tendency to curl in his hair. He despised curly hair in a man.

But when he was all ready a sudden fit of indecision attacked him, and he flung himself into the old chair, glooming. She had all but driven him out of her room the night before. Well, if he presented himself at her door now, it would be simply inviting her to insult him. Even though she didn't mean it, even though she might want him to come (Evan had that possibility in mind, though his ideas as to the psychology of girls were chaotic), how could he give her the chance to put it all over him? Surely she would despise him. On the other hand, he could hardly expect her to make the first overtures. Evan sighed in perplexity.

It was not that he liked her any the worse for being so difficult; on the contrary. But he had to think out the best thing to do under the circumstances, and the trouble was he wanted to go down so badly he couldn't think at all.

He made up his mind he wouldn't go down—not that night anyway. He lighted his pipe in defiance of the whole sex. But somehow he couldn't keep it going. He only smoked matches. Nor keep his legs from twitching; nor his brain from suggesting vain pretexts to knock at her door. He might go out and buy her a gas mantle—but that *would* be a low trick on Charley. He flung down the pipe, he walked up and down, he looked out of the window; a score of times he swore to himself that he would not go down, yet his perambulations left him ever nearer the door.

Finally with a great effort of the will he closed it. But almost instantly he flew to open it again, bent his head to listen, then threw it back with a note of deep laughter. He commenced to run downstairs. She was singing, the witch! She *had* made the first overture. Let her make believe as much as she liked, she must have calculated that the song would bring him. Outside her door—it was closed to-night—he pulled himself up short. "Easy! Easy!" he said to himself. "If you're in such a rush to come when you're called she'll have the laugh on you anyhow. Let her sing for a while, the darling! You won't miss anything here."

It was a jolly little song, full of enchanting runs and changes; old English, he guessed:

"Oh, the pretty, pretty creature;
When I next do meet her,
No more like a clown will I face her frown
But gallantly will I treat her."

"A hint for me," thought Evan, smiling delightedly.

When she came to the end of the song, Evan, fearful that she might open the door and find him there, hastened on downstairs. Miss Sisson was in her room at the back with the door open, and Evan stepped in for a chat, flattering the lady not a little thereby, for Mr. Weir was the most stand-offish of her gentleman roomers—and the comeliest.

But it is to be feared she didn't get much profit out of this conversation, for Mr. Weir was strangely absent-minded. His thoughts were in the room overhead where the heart-disquieting mezzo-soprano was now singing a wistfuller song and no less sweet:

"Phyllis has such charming graces
I must love her or I die."

Miss Sisson remarked in her most elegant and acid tones: "It's such an annoyance to have a singer in the house. I already regret that I yielded to her importunities."

"You fool!" thought Evan. "She makes a paradise of your old rookery!"

At the end of the second song he was sure he heard the singer's light footsteps travel to the door overhead, linger there, then return more slowly. The heart in his breast waxed big with gladness. "You blessed little darling!" he thought. "If it's true you want me, God knows you can have me for a gift!"

Yet he let her sing another song before he stirred. He bade Miss Sisson good-night and went deliberately upstairs. She had stopped singing now. He knocked on the door.

She took her time about opening it. "Oh, it's you!" she said.

"Good evening," said Evan.

"Good evening," she returned with a rising inflection that suggested: "Well, what do you want?"

Evan was a bit dashed. His instinct told him, though, that he must put his fate to the test. In other words, he must find out for sure whether she detested him, or was simply being maidenly. She had not thrown the door open to its fullest extent, but Evan, gauging the space, figured that he could just slip in without actually pushing her out of the way. He did so.

She faced about in high indignation. "Well! You might at least wait until you are invited!" she said.

Evan had no wish to anger her too far. "Oh, I'm sorry," he said innocently. "I thought you meant me to come in." He turned towards the door again.

"Oh, well, as long as you're here I'm not going to turn you out," she said casually. "But your manners aren't much." She closed the door.

"It's all right!" thought Evan happily.

"I heard you singing," he said, by way of opening the conversation.

"Yes, I have to sing every night for practice," she said quickly. She wished him to understand clearly that she had not been singing to bring him.

She sat on the piano bench, but with her back to the piano and her hands in her lap. Her expression was not encouraging. Evan sat on the sofa.

"Please go on," he said. "Don't mind me."

"No," she said, with her funny little downright way. "I shan't sing any more."

"But why?"

"You have provoked me. I can't sing when I am provoked."

"What have I done?"

"The mere sight of you provokes me," she said with more frankness, probably, than she intended.

"I'm sorry," said Evan. "You're so different, so unusual, I don't know how to handle you."

The first part of this pleased her, the last outraged her afresh. "Handle me!" she cried. "I like that!"

Evan saw his mistake. "That's not the word," he said quickly. "I mean I study how to please you, and only seem to get in wrong."

"Don't 'study'," she said with a superior air. "Just be yourself."

"But I am myself, and it only provokes you."

The brown eyes flashed. "Oh, you're too conceited for words!"

This was a new thought to Evan. He considered it. "No," he said at last, "I don't think I am. At least not offensively conceited. But it seems to me you are so accustomed to having men bow down before you that the

mildest independence in a man strikes you as something outrageous."

This was near enough the truth to be an added cause for offense. She received it in an ultra-dignified silence.

"I'd like to bow down before you too," Evan went on smiling. "But something tells me if I did it would be the end of me. You would despise me."

Her mood changed abruptly. "I feel better now," she said. "One really cannot take you seriously. I'll sing."

Her hands drifted over the keys, and she dropped into "Mighty lak' a Rose." The air was admirably suited to the deeper notes of her voice. The listener's heart was drawn right out of his breast; he forgot at once his fear of being mastered, and his great desire to master her.

When she came to the end he murmured, deeply moved: "I can't say anything."

She could have asked no finer tribute. "You needn't," she murmured.

The pleasure she took in his applause was evidenced in the warmth she imparted to the next song. She made it intolerably plaintive: "Just a Wearyin' for You."

Evan held his breath in delight. "If the words were true!" he thought. But though she sang with abandon, she never looked at him. He was artist enough to know better than to take an artistic performance literally.

Nothing more was said for a long time. She passed from one song to another, singing from memory; dreamily improvising on the piano between. She chose only simple songs in English which pleased Evan well—could she read his heart?—the "Shoogy-Shoo"; "Little Boy Blue"; the "Sands o' Dee."

Evan was incapable of criticising her voice. Some might have objected that it lacked that bell-like clearness so much to be desired; that it had a dusky quality, but Evan was not quarrelling because it was the voice of a woman instead of an angel. One thing she had beyond peradventure, temperament; her heart was in her singing, and so it played on his heartstrings as she willed.

While he listened enraptured, he saw the moon peek over the buildings in the next street. He softly got up and turned off the impertinent gas. Beyond a startled glance over her shoulder she made no objection. He was utterly fascinated by the movements of the bright head, now raised, now lowered, now turned towards the window in the changing moods of the songs.

Moonlight completed the working of the spell that was laid upon him. For the moment he ceased to be a rational being. He was exalted by emotion far out of himself. He experienced the sweetness of losing his own identity. It was as if a great wind had snatched him up into the universal ether, a region of warmth of colour and perfume. But he was conscious of a pull on him like that of the magnet for the iron, a pull that was neither to be questioned nor resisted.

At the last she turned around on the bench again, and her hands dropped in her lap. "That is all. I'm tired," she said like a child.

With a single movement the rapt youth was at her feet, weaving his arms about her waist. Unpremeditated words poured from him; words out of deeps in him of which up to that moment he was unconscious.

"Oh, you woman! You are the first in the world for me! I know you now! I feel your power! It's too much for me. And I'm glad of it! I have waited for you. I looked for you in so many girls' faces only to find emptiness. I began to doubt. Love was just a poetic fancy, I thought. But I have found it. Let me love you."

She was not surprised, nor angry. She gently tried to detach his arms. "Oh, hush! hush!" she murmured. "It is not me! It is just the music!"

"It is you! It is you!" he protested. "I knew it when I first saw you. You or none!"

"But how silly!" she said in a warm, low voice. "You have seen me twice."

"What difference does that make?" he said impatiently. "One cannot be mistaken about a thing like this. I love you with all my heart. It only takes a second to happen, but it can never be undone while I live. You have entered into me and taken possession. If you left me I should be no more than a shell of a man!"

"Ah, but be sensible!" she begged him. He thought he felt her fingertips brush his hair. "Try to be sensible. Think of me."

"I wish to think only of you. What do you want me to do?"

"Get up and sit beside me. Let us talk."

He sat beside her on the bench. He did not offer to touch her again. The moonlight was in her face; the lifted, shadowy oval seemed angelic to him, he was full of awe.

"You're so beautiful!" he groaned, "so beautiful it hurts me!"

"Hush!" she said, "you mustn't talk like that."

"Is it wrong?"

"Yes—no! I don't know. I can't bear it!"

"You can do what you like with me."

"You don't mean that really."

"I do. I have longed to be able to give myself up wholly."

"Then be my brother, my dear brother."

Evan frowned. "You mean——?"

"Be my brother," she repeated. "I need your help."

"But—but how can I?" said Evan. "I am only a man."

"The other thing only frightens me," she said quickly. "I like you—but I cannot return that. This is not just the feeling of a moment. It will never change. I know myself. But be my friend. Take what I can give you. Do not force me to be on my guard. I wish to let myself go with you."

"That is what I wish," he said quickly. Poor Evan felt hollow inside: hollow and a little dazed. The cloud-piercing tower of his happiness had collapsed. A sure instinct told him that what she proposed was impossible, and what was more, absurd. But he clutched at straws. The idea of giving her up altogether was unthinkable. Moreover he was incapable of resisting her at that moment. It was easy enough to silence that inner voice. He said nothing, but merely raised her hand to his lips.

"Swear it," she murmured.

"You dictate the oath."

"Swear that you will be my friend, and nothing but my friend."

"I swear it."

Suddenly leaning forward she kissed his cheek as a sister might have done—but the spot glowed long afterwards. Then she jumped up.

"You must go now."

"Not quite yet," he pleaded, "Corinna."

"Oh!" she rebuked him.

"But you're my sister now."

"Very well, you may call me Corinna, but you must go. What will the landlady say?"

"But you said you needed my help. How can I rest not knowing——"

"But that's too long a story to begin now. There's no immediate danger threatening me. There will be other nights."

"How can I wait twenty-four hours?"

"How would you like to get up early and go walking in the country before the day's work?"

"I'd like it above all things."

"Then call for me at eight. We'll have breakfast at the French pastry shop. My first lesson's at eleven."

"Great!"

"Now go."

"Say good-night, Evan."

"I will when I am more accustomed to you."

"But try it just for an experiment."

"Well—good-night, Evan."

His name was so sweet on her tongue it required all his self-control to remember his oath. He turned away with a groan.

"Good-night, Corinna."

CHAPTER VIII

EVAN IS RE-ENGAGED

He dreamed of her all night—but not as a sister it is to be feared. In his dream she was running through the springtime woods with the glorious hair flying, and he was running after her, an endless race without his ever drawing nearer, while the sun shone and the little young leaves twinkled as if in laughter.

He was awake at six and sprang out of bed to see what kind of day it was. The sun was already high over the tops of the buildings to the east, the sky was fleckless, and the empty Park was beaming. His anxiety was relieved. He dressed as slowly as possible in order to kill time, taking care to make no sound that might awaken Charley in the next room.

He was not prepared to make explanations just then.

Notwithstanding all his care he was ready a whole hour too soon, an hour that promised to be endless, for he was completely at a loss what to do with himself; couldn't apply his mind to anything; couldn't sit still. Finally he stole down-stairs, sending his love silently through her door as he passed, and started circumnavigating the Park.

He was subconsciously aware of the splendour of the morning, but saw little of what actually met his eyes. He was too busy with the happenings of the night before. A nasty little doubt tormented him. He knew he was slightly insane; it was not that; he gloried in his state and pitied the dull clods who had not fire in their breasts to drive them mad. But here was the rub; would not these same clods have laughed at him had they known of the oath he had taken—would not he have laughed himself yesterday?

It was carried on inside him like an argument; on the one hand the enamoured young man who insisted that the relationship between brother and sister was a holy and beautiful one, on the other hand the matter-of-fact one who said it was all damn nonsense; that a man and woman, free, unattached and not bound by the ties of consanguinity were not intended to be brother and sister. Such arguments have no end. The thought of Charley troubled him most; he had always taken a slightly superior attitude towards Charley's sentimentality. What a chance for Charley to get back at him if he learned of this!

At five minutes to eight, having looked at his watch fifty times or so, he ventured back into the house, and tapped at Corinna's door. "She's bound to be late anyhow," he thought, "no harm to hurry her up a little."

But no, she was hatted, gloved and waiting just inside the door. This little fact won his gratitude surprisingly; a man does not expect it of a woman. In the sunlight they took in each other anew. What Corinna thought did not appear, but Evan was freshly delighted. She was an out-of-doors girl it appeared; the morning became her like a shining garment. He forgot the argument; it was sufficient to be with her, to laugh with her, to be ravished by the dusky, velvety tones of her voice.

Of the hours that followed it is unnecessary to speak in detail. It was one long rhapsody, and rhapsodies are apt to be a little tiresome to those other than the rhapsodists. Everybody has known such hours for themselves—or if they have not they are unfortunate. They breakfasted frugally—there is a delicious intimacy in breakfast no other meal knows, and then decided on Staten Island. Half an hour later they were voyaging down the bay, and in an hour were in the woods.

Corinna was inexorable on the question of eleven o'clock, and to Evan it seemed as if they had no sooner got there than they had to turn back again. Evan got sore, and the pleasure of the return journey was a little dimmed, though there is a kind of sweetness in these little tiffs too. Anybody seeing their eyes on each other, Corinna's as well as Evan's, would have known they were no brother and sister, but they still kept up the fiction.

As they neared home she said: "Do you mind if I go in alone?"

"Are you ashamed to be seen with me?" demanded Evan scowling.

"Silly! Didn't I propose this trip? The reason is very simple. Your ridiculous landlady looks on every man in the house as her property. I don't want to excite her ill-will, that's all."

Evan could not deny the truth of this characterisation of Carmen. "Go on ahead," he said. "I'll hang around in the Park for a while. See you to-night."

She stopped, and gave him an inscrutable look. "Oh, I'm sorry, I shan't be home to-night."

With this the ugly head of Corinna's mystery popped up again. It had been tormenting Evan all morning, but with a lover's pride he would not question her, and she volunteered no information.

"Oh!" said Evan flatly, and waited for her to say more.

But she seemed not to be aware that anything more was required and his brow darkened. "If it was me," he thought, "how eager I would be to explain what was taking me away from her, but she is mum!"

"Come to-morrow night," she said.

He bowed stiffly.

She hesitated a moment as if about to explain, then thought better of it, and hurried away, leaving Evan inwardly fuming.

He plumped down on a bench across the square from 45A, and thrusting his hands deep in his pockets, stretched out his legs and scowled at the pavement. A "platonic friendship" had no charms for him then. "I'm a fool!" he said to himself. "Her brother!"—a bitter note of laughter escaped him, "when I'm out of my mind with wanting her! What a fool I was to stand for it! She's just playing the regular girl's game—no blame to her of course, it's their instinct to keep a man at arm's length as long as they can. It pleases them to have us on the grill. And I fell for it! I'm on my way to make a precious fool of myself. If I can't find out where she's going to-night, I'll be clean off my nut before morning. But I wouldn't ask her! And if she's going out with another man—! Lord! which is worse, to know or not to know?"

When he let himself in the door of 45A, Miss Sisson, according to her custom, poked her head out into the hall to see who it was. She came out.

"Oh, Mr. Weir," she said importantly, "where have you been?"

"Out," said Evan stiffly.

She was too much excited to perceive the snub. "There's been a man here for you half a dozen times I guess."

"What did he want?"

"I don't know. Says it's most important."

"Who was he?"

"Wouldn't give his name. Acted most mysterious."

"What sort of looking man?"

"A young fellow about your age, but scarcely a friend of yours I should say. A mean-like face."

This meant nothing to Evan. He looked blank.

"The last time he was here he said he'd wait," Miss Sisson went on, "but I said there was no place inside, because I didn't like his looks, so he said he'd wait in the Square and——"

The sound of the door-bell interrupted her.

"Here he is now!"

Evan opened the door and discovered Alfred, the Deaves' second man, on the step. Alfred smiled insinuatingly, but with a difference from their first meeting, more warily. Miss Sisson pressed forward to hear what he had to say.

"Can I see you a moment?" he said to Evan meaningly.

Evan looked at Miss Sisson, who forthwith retired with a chagrined flirt of her skirts.

"They sent me for you," said Alfred.

Evan's eyebrows went up. "What do they want?" he asked coolly.

"Search me!" said Alfred shrugging. "They're in a way about something."

"Anything new?"

"Uh-huh. Hilton says they got another letter from the blackmailers."

Evan being human, could not but feel certain stirrings of curiosity. "Very well, I'll come with you," he said.

They left a furiously unsatisfied Miss Sisson behind them.

Evan and Alfred rode up-town together on the bus. Alfred was no less silky and insinuating than in the beginning, but whereas at first he had been genuinely candid, he now only made believe to be.

"He's been warned off me," thought Evan.

The conversation on Alfred's side consisted of a subtle attempt to elicit from Evan what had happened the day before, and on Evan's side a determination to balk his curiosity without appearing to be aware of what he was after.

The Deaveses, father and son, were in the library. Before he was well inside the room the latter flung out at him:

"Where have you been all morning?"

Evan instantly felt his collar tighten. His jaw stuck out. "I don't know as that is anybody's business but my own," he said.

They both opened up on him then. Evan could not make out what it was all about. But his conscience was easy. He could afford to smile at the racket. Finally George Deaves got the floor.

"Will you or will you not describe your movements this morning?" he demanded.

"I will not," said Evan coolly.

"What did I tell you? What did I tell you?" burst out the old man. "Send for the police!"

Evan's temper had already been put to a strain that morning. It gave way now. "Yes, send for the police!" he cried. "I'm sick of these silly accusations. I owe you nothing, neither of you. My life is as open as a book. I make a few dollars a week by honest work, and that's every cent I possess in the world. Satisfy yourselves of that, and then let me alone!"

"Papa, be quiet!" said George Deaves severely. "I will handle this." To Evan he said soothingly: "There's no need for you to excite yourself. I've no intention of sending for the police—yet."

"Well, if you don't, I will!" said Evan. "I'll tell them the whole story and insist on an investigation!"

George Deaves wilted at the threat of publicity. Evan, in the midst of his anger thought: "Lord, if I *were* guilty

this is exactly the way I would talk! How easy it would be to bluff them!"

George Deaves said: "I hope you won't do anything so foolish as that."

"Well, it's a bit too much to be dragged all the way up-town just to listen to a re-hash of yesterday's row," said Evan.

"The situation is entirely changed," said George Deaves mysteriously.

"Well, I don't know anything about that!"

Deaves shoved a letter across his desk towards Evan. Evan read:

"Mrs. George Deaves:

Dear Madam:

I beg to return herewith the \$5,000 in marked bills that your husband left for us yesterday. We are too old birds to be caught with such chaff. The story, a copy of which I sent Mr. Deaves yesterday, goes to the *Clarion* at eleven A.M. to-day for publication in this evening's edition. If you wish to stop it you must persuade Mr. Deaves to find a similar sum in clean straight money before that hour. These bills must be put in an envelope and addressed to Mr. Carlton Hassell at the Barbizon Club, Fifth avenue near Ninth street. Your messenger must simply hand it in at the door and leave. If there is any departure from these instructions the money will not be touched, and the story goes through.

With best wishes,

Yours most sincerely,
THE IKUNAHKATSI."

"Good Heavens!" cried Evan amazed. "Do you mean to say the money was returned?"

George Deaves nodded.

"And addressed to your wife? What a colossal nerve! What have you done? You haven't sent fresh bills?"

Another nod answered him, a somewhat sheepish nod.

"Maud made him," snarled the old man. "Insisted on taking the money down herself and sent it in by the chauffeur."

"But you've communicated with Mr. Hassell?"

"Do you know him?" demanded George Deaves sharply.

"Why of course, as everybody knows him. The most famous landscape painter in America—or at least the most popular. His pictures bring thousands!"

"What good to communicate with him?" said Deaves sullenly. "I might better have him arrested."

"But don't you see," urged Evan, "Hassell couldn't have had anything to do with this, not with the money he makes and his reputation? Not unless he were crazy, and he's the sanest of men! It's as clear as day. They're just using his name. Easy enough for somebody else to get the letter at the club."

"Is this a trick?" muttered George Deaves scowling.

Evan laughed in exasperation. "Why sure! if you want it that way. It's nothing to me one way or the other." He turned to go.

"Wait a minute," said Deaves. "Why wouldn't it be better to call up the club?"

Evan shook his head. "A man's club is his castle. Club servants are always instructed not to give out information, particularly not over the telephone. Telephone Hassell. You should have telephoned him before sending the money. Or better still go to him. It's his interest to get to the bottom of this."

"Will you go with me?" asked Deaves stabbing his blotter.

Evan smiled. "A minute ago you implied that I was behind the scheme."

"I might have been mistaken. Anyway, if you had nothing to do with it, you ought to be glad to help me clear the matter up."

"I'll go with you," said Evan, "not because I'll feel any necessity for clearing myself, but because it's the most interesting game I've ever been up against!"

"Interesting!" shrilled the old man indignantly, "*Interesting!* If you were being bled white, you wouldn't find it so interesting! I'll go too."

"You'll stay right here, Papa," commanded George Deaves. "And don't you go out until I come back! You've brought trouble enough on me!"

"Well, you needn't bite off my head!" grumbled the old man.

The Deaves limousine was available, and a few minutes later George Deaves and Evan were being shown into the reception room of a magnificent studio apartment on Art's most fashionable street. George Deaves was visibly impressed by the magnificence. It was rather an unusual hour to pay a call perhaps, but the Deaves name was an open sesame. A millionaire and a potential picture-buyer! the great man himself came hurrying to greet them. He was a handsome man of middle age with a lion-like head, and the affable, assured manner of a citizen of the world.

He showed them into the studio, a superb room, but severe and workmanlike according to the modern usage. Before they were well-seated, an attendant, knowing his duty well, began to pull out canvases.

"I—I didn't come to talk to you about pictures," stammered George Deaves.

At a sign from his master the man left the room. Mr. Hassell waited politely to be enlightened.

Poor George Deaves floundered about. "It's such a delicate matter—I'm sure I don't know what you will think—I scarcely know how to tell you——"

Hassell began to look alarmed. He said: "Mr. Deaves, I beg you will be plain with me."

Deaves turned hopelessly to Evan. "You tell him."

"Better show him the letter," said Evan.

"The letter?" said Deaves in a panic, "what letter? I don't understand you."

"We came to tell him," said Evan. "We've either got to tell him or go."

Deaves wiped his face. "Mr. Hassell, I hope I can rely on your discretion. You will receive what I am about to tell you in absolute confidence?"

"My dear sir," returned the painter a little testily, "you come to me in this state of agitation about I don't know what. Whatever it is, I hope I will comport myself like a man of honour!"

George Deaves handed over the letter in a hand that trembled. Hassell's face was a study as he read it.

"This is blackmail!" he cried. "And in my name!"

"That's why we came to you," said Deaves—a little unnecessarily it might be thought.

"You surely don't suspect——"

"Certainly not," said Evan quickly—there was no knowing what break Deaves might have made. "But you can help us."

"Of course! This letter names eleven o'clock as the hour." Hassell glanced at his watch. "It's nearly twelve now. Why didn't you come to me earlier—or phone?"

"Well, I didn't know—it didn't occur to me," began Deaves, and stopped with an appealing glance at Evan.

Evan said bluntly: "Mr. Deaves was not acquainted with your name and your work until I told him."

The great painter looked a little astonished at such ignorance. "Has the money been sent to the club?" he asked.

Deaves nodded shamefacedly.

Mr. Hassell immediately got busy. "I'll taxi down there at once. I rarely use the Barbizon club nowadays. Haven't been there in a month."

"Shall we go with you?" asked Deaves.

"No. They may have spies posted who would see you even if you remained in the cab. If you'll be good enough to wait here, I'll be back inside half an hour."

Even in his bustle he did not neglect business. As soon as he had gone the servant appeared again, and began to show his pictures. Deaves goggled at them indifferently, but Evan was keenly interested. He studied them with the mixture of scorn and envy that is characteristic of the attitude of poor young artists towards rich old ones.

Within a few minutes of his half hour Hassell was back again. "Not much to report," he said deprecatingly. "The envelope addressed to me was delivered just before eleven o'clock, and put in the H box of the letter rack. It was gone when I looked, of course, but who took it remains to be discovered. About thirty members had gone in and out. Practically everybody stops at the letter rack. I have a list of those who passed in and out as well as the doorkeeper could make it out from memory."

"How about the door-keeper?" asked Deaves.

"Above suspicion, I should say. Has been with the club for twenty years. A simple soul hardly capable of acting a part. He would hardly have told me that he put my letter in the rack himself."

"Other servants then?"

"There were several boys on duty in the hall, but they are not supposed to go to the letter-rack without orders. If one of them had looked over the letters it could scarcely have escaped notice. No, unpleasant as it is to think so, I am afraid it was one of the members—someone who was counting on the fact that I never appear at the club except for an important meeting or a dinner. I looked over the members in the clubhouse, honest-looking men—but who can tell?"

"No doubt the one who got the money left immediately," suggested Evan.

Hassell said to Deaves: "With your permission I should like to take the matter up with the Board of Governors."

"No, no, if you please," said Deaves nervously. "No publicity."

"Then allow me to put this list in the hands of a first-class detective agency. Those fellows are secret enough."

"Let me attend to it if you please."

Hassell handed over the list with manifest reluctance; "If anyone uses my name again I trust you will let me know promptly."

"You may depend on it," said Deaves, making for the door.

"By the way, how did you like my pictures?"

"Very pretty, very pretty," said Deaves uneasily. "I don't know anything about such things. My wife buys everything for the home."

"Ah!" said Hassell with ironical eyebrows.

"I will tell her about them."

"Thank you," said Hassell, bowing them out.

George Deaves didn't say much on the way home, but Evan was aware that his attitude had changed. There were no more accusations. Clearly Deaves had been impressed by the fact that the interview with Hassell had turned out exactly as Evan had foretold.

Simeon Deaves was still shuffling around the library in his slippers. "Well?" he demanded.

His son briefly told him what had occurred.

The old man was in a very bad temper. "Yah! let him pull wool over your eyes!" he cried. "All a pack of thieves together! Artists never have any money! And this one knows more than he lets on. He's too smart by half! You mark my words!"

"Please go outside," the much-trying George said to Evan. "Wait in the hall."

Evan obeyed with a shrug. Outside the softly-stepping Alfred was loitering suspiciously. He approached Evan.

"Something doing to-day, eh?" he said with his obsequious-impudent leer. "Where did you two go?"

Evan's gorge rose at the man. He saw nothing to be gained now by hiding his feelings. "You damn sneak!" he said quietly. "Keep away from me, or I'll hurt you!"

Alfred, with a scared and venomous look, slunk down-stairs. Evan felt better.

Presently George Deaves called him back into the library. At what had taken place between father and son he could only guess. The old man's attitude had changed; he was disposed to be friendly. Divided between their fears and their suspicions father and son were continually making these face-about.

George Deaves said in his pompous way: "My father has re-considered his decision not to employ you further. He will be glad to have you stay according to the original arrangement."

"That's right," added the old man. "I just spoke a little hasty. I always said you were a good boy."

Evan's face hardened. "I'm not sure that I want the job," he said.

"Forty dollars a week's a fine salary," said Simeon Deaves.

"I'll stay for fifty," said Evan coolly.

They both gasped. "Are you trying to hold us up?" cried George Deaves.

"If that's what you want to call it," said Evan. "You force me to. If I appear anxious for the job, you will soon be accusing me again of being in the gang. As a matter of fact I don't care whether I stay or not."

"Well, I'll pay it," said George Deaves with a sour face, "provided you'll agree to investigate the list Hassell gave us in your spare time."

"I'll do it," said Evan. "I'm interested. You'd better discharge Alfred who is certainly a spy, and get a detective in his place to keep a watch on the other servants."

"Those fellows cost ten dollars a day!" cried Simeon Deaves.

"The blackmailers are getting five thousand out of you every fortnight," retorted Evan.

"I do not see the necessity for a detective," said George Deaves loftily. "As long as I'm paying you all this money. You can look out for that side of the case as well."

"Just as you like," said Evan smiling. It was hopeless to try to argue with these people.

Alfred entered, and giving Evan a wide berth laid a long envelope on George Deaves' desk. "Brought by messenger," he said. "No answer." He left the room.

Deaves paled as his eyes fell on the superscription.

"The same handwriting!" he murmured.

He nervously tore open the envelope. It contained some typewritten sheets, and a slip with writing upon it. George Deaves read the letter with a perplexed expression, and handed it over to Evan.

"What do you make of that?" he asked.

Evan read: "Received of George Deaves the sum of five thousand dollars in full payment of the story entitled: 'Simeon Deaves Goes Shopping,' including all rights. All existing copies of the manuscript enclosed. Many thanks. The Ikunahkatsi."

"Same old impudence!" said Evan smiling grimly. "This crook is something of a character it seems. Affects a kind of honesty in his dealings."

"Oh, he's kept a copy of the story," said George Deaves.

"Possibly. But why should he go to the trouble of making believe that he has not?—and send a receipt? Criminal psychology is queer. This is something out of the common that we are up against!"

CHAPTER IX

THE COMPACT IS SMASHED

Evan spent the afternoon walking about with Simeon Deaves. The old man was an indefatigable pedestrian. He had no object in his wanderings, but loved to poke into the oddest and most out-of-the-way corners of the town. They were not followed to-day so far as Evan could tell. At first Simeon Deaves was uneasy and suspicious of his body-guard, but finding that Evan took everything calmly for granted, he unbent and became loquacious. All his talk was on the same subject: how to get along in the world, i.e. how to make money.

Evan having taken him home at last, sank into the seat of a bus with relief. "Anyhow it will be good for my health," he thought.

Before going home he called at the studio of a friend, a member of the Barbizon Club, and without taking him entirely into his confidence, enlisted his aid in investigating the actions and habits of the men on Hassell's list. It may be said here, that nothing came of this.

Evan and Charley met for the evening meal. The irrepressible Charley was still singing about the red-haired girl. In spite of his boasts it appeared that his advances had consistently been turned down. Evan took a little comfort from this. Sullenness was unknown to the gay Charley and he was not a whit less optimistic because of his setbacks.

"You don't want a girl to be too come-on-ish," he said. "A highy-tighty manner adds zest to the game. They don't expect to be taken seriously when they turn you down, bless your heart, no. Why, if I let that girl drop now, she'd despise me for my faintheartedness. Sure, and be as disappointed as anything!"

Evan was not in much of a humour to laugh at him. Indeed he foresaw that an impossible situation would presently develop between Charley and him unless he said something. With an elaborately casual manner he began at last:

"I say, Charl, you and I have always played fair with each other."

"Well I should rather fahncy, as Lord Percy said. What's on your chest, boy? Unload! Unload!"

"It's only fair to tell you that I have become acquainted with the young lady in question."

Charley stared. "The Deuce you say! You, the scorner of the sex! Since when?"

"Two nights ago."

"And you never said a word about it. You let me shoot off my mouth all this time and never——"

"What was there to say?"

"You packed me off to the life class last night so you could——"

"That was for your own good!"

"Come off! Come off! Have I such a trusting eye? On the level why didn't you tell me before?"

What was Evan to say. He began an explanation that was no explanation. Charley's sharp eyes bored him through and through.

"By the Lord!" cried the latter at last, "Old Stony-heart has melted! St. Anthony has fallen for the caloric tresses. Touched where he lives, by Gad! Brought low and humbled in the dust!"

Evan grinned painfully. "Don't be a fool!" he muttered.

"How does it feel?" asked Charley with mock solicitude, "a dull ache in the epigastrium or a fluttering sensation in the pericardium; some lay stress on the characteristic feeling of heaviness behind the occiput."

"You wheeze like a vaudeville performer on small time," growled Evan.

Charley roared. He did not often get his partner on the grill like this. It was generally the other way about. But in the midst of his outrageous joshing it suddenly struck the warm-hearted Charley that under his game grin Evan was suffering very pretty torments. Charley jumped up and for the briefest of seconds laid his hand on his partner's shoulder.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "you know what I think of you really, or if you don't you'll have to take it for granted, for I'll never tell you. I haven't the words, but only a line of cheap cackle as you say. Understand, from this time on it's a clear field for you, see? Me for the Movies, to-night."

Evan was touched, but of course he couldn't show Charley his feelings, for that matter Charley did not require it. "You needn't go out on my account," he grumbled. "I don't expect to see her to-night. She has a date."

Such was the bitterness with which he said it, that Charley could not help but laugh again. "Cheer up!" he cried. "It has been known to happen. Fellows like you take it too hard. Hard wood is slow to catch, eh, but Lor' what a heat she throws out!"

"Don't jolly me," muttered Evan. "I can't take it!"

Charley's face softened again for an instant. "C'mon with me," he said. "Mildred Macy in the Spawn of Infamy's at the Nonpareil. Milly is some vamp I hear."

"Couldn't sit through a picture," said Evan. "You go."

Nevertheless when the dishes were washed up the prospect of spending the evening alone in the little room was too ghastly. As Charley got up Evan said sheepishly:

"Believe I will go."

"Bully!" said Charley. "Get your hat."

As they passed her door Evan's ears were long. No sounds came from within, no crack of light showed beneath. He had been hoping against hope that she might be there. Where was she? The picture of a little restaurant rushed before his mind's eye, Corinna and a man on opposite sides of the table, their smiling faces drawing close over the cloth. He suffered as much as if he had actually beheld them. That's the worst of having a vivid imagination.

"Spawn of Infamy" proved to be what Charley termed "High-life for low-lifers" and they were home shortly after nine. As they mounted the first flight Evan perceived a crack of light under Corinna's door and his heart rose. She was home early, she had not had a good time then. But as they rounded the landing he heard her voice inside. She had a visitor—alone in there with her! A horrible spasm of pain contracted his breast. He had much ado to restrain himself from beating with his fists on the door. He followed Charley up-stairs grinding his teeth. He had never suspected that such raging devils lay dormant in his blood.

When they got up-stairs it was quite impossible for Evan to remain there. For a moment or two he walked up and down like something caged; he could not pretend to hide the feelings that were tearing him. Charley glancing at him wonderingly out of the tail of his eye, bustled about talking foolishly.

Finally Evan said thickly: "It's stuffy up here. I'm going down to walk around the Park awhile."

Charley's eyes followed him compassionately. Charley's time to experience this sort of thing had not arrived.

When he started Evan honestly intended to go down in the Park and calm himself with the exercise of walking. But unfortunately he had to pass her door. In spite of himself he stopped there, and despising himself, listened. He heard her say: "I won't sing to-night. I'm not in the humour." Then he heard a man's voice low and urgent, and he

saw red. He knocked.

She came promptly and opened the door, opened it wide. She did not quail when she saw his lowering face.

"Good evening," she said with the upward inflection meaning: "What do you want?"

Her tone flatly denied their intimacy of the night before. This aspect of a woman's nature was new to Evan; he was astonished and hotly indignant.

"May I come in?" he asked stiffly.

"Certainly," she said promptly and indifferently, and threw the door open wide.

Evan stepped in, and his eyes flew to find his rival. The latter was sitting between the piano and the window. He was younger than Evan, not much more than a lad in fact, but a resolute, comely lad; one of whom Evan could be jealous.

"Mr. Weir, Mr. Anyway," said Corinna impassively.

They nodded, eyeing each other like strange dogs. A factitious calm descended on Evan. He could even smile, but there were ugly lines around his mouth. His voice was harsh.

"Aren't we going to have some music?" he said.

By this he meant to convey to the other man that he was accustomed to be entertained in that room. The point was not lost. The younger man whitened about the lips. The girl gave no sign at all. Even in his anger Evan commended her pluck. She kept her chin up; her eyes were scornful.

"I'll play," she said going towards the piano.

"I like your singing better," said Evan.

"I am not in the humour," she said in a tone that finally disposed of the question.

She played—what she played Evan never knew. It is doubtful if any of them heard a note. Evan sat affecting to listen with a smile like a grimace. The other man kept his eyes down. Whatever Corinna may have been feeling, it did not interfere with the technical excellence of her performance; her fingers danced like fairies over the keys, but to-night there was no magic in the sounds they evoked.

Corinna's part was the easiest because she had something to do and somewhere to look. She went from one piece to another without a word being spoken. Evan went on smiling until his face was cracking; the other never looked up.

Finally the sounds began to get on Evan's nerves. "Don't tire yourself!" he said with bitter politeness.

She stopped, and turning around on the bench waited for him to say something more. Her attitude said plainer than words: "You provoked this situation; very well, it's up to you to save it." This cool defiance in a mere girl, a little one at that, angered Evan past all bearing. He smiled the more, and addressed the other man:

"Fond of music, Mr. Anyway?"

"Very," said the other without looking at him.

"What is your favourite piece in Miss Playfair's repertoire—I mean among the songs."

"I have no favourite."

"But don't you think she sings 'Just a Wearyin' for You' and 'Love Unexpressed' with wonderful expression?"

Anway did not answer. Corinna yawned delicately. "You'll have to excuse me," she said. "I have to go to Ridgewood early to-morrow to give lessons."

Anway, better-mannered than Evan—or better-trained, immediately rose. Evan sat tight, smiling mockingly at Corinna. "No, you don't!" the smile said. His conduct was inexcusable of course, but he was beyond caring for that. She had denied him and defied him to his face; let her take the consequences. Anway seeing that Evan wasn't going, sat down again flushing.

"Don't wait for me," said Evan. "I only have to go up-stairs."

Anway bit his lip. He was not deficient in pluck, but he lacked Evan's self-possession. The two or three years' difference in age put him at a cruel disadvantage. Finally he looked at the girl.

"May I stay a little longer, Corinna?" he asked.

The Christian name stabbed Evan. He sneered. "Nice, well-mannered little boy!" his expression said.

"You must both go," said Corinna calmly.

Evan smiled at her again, but she refused to meet his glance. However he stood up now, for he wished to start the other man on his way. Anway picked up his hat and gloves. Then all three stood there avoiding each other's glances. Neither man would be the first to say good-night, nor would Corinna address one before the other. It was a sufficiently absurd situation, but it had all the potentialities of a violent one. Finally Corinna cut the knot by saying:

"Good-night, both of you." She opened the door.

The two young men glared at each other. Anway was the weaker spirit and he had to go first. But he lingered just outside the door to make sure that Evan was coming too.

Evan whispered to Corinna: "I'm coming back."

"Indeed you're not!" she retorted, glancing significantly at the key in the door.

"Then I won't go," said Evan coolly turning back into the room.

Corinna bit her lip. Clearly, Evan offered her a new set of problems in the management of men. Anway sought to enter again, but she stopped him.

"Please go, Leonard," she murmured. "This is too absurd!"

The whispered colloquy was perfectly audible to Evan.

Anway said: "But I don't like to leave you alone with——"

She laughed slightly. "Nonsense! I can take care of myself!"

"But, Corinna, if I go he'll think I——"

"I will put him straight as to that."

"Corinna," this low and thick, "what is this man to you?"

"No more than you—or any of my friends."

"But, Corinna——"

"Go!"

He went step by step with heavy feet on the stairs.

Corinna came into the room leaving the door open. Her eyes were bright with anger. "Well, you won your pitiful little victory over the boy," she said scornfully. "I hope you're pleased with yourself!"

The blood began to pound in Evan's temples. "Don't speak to me like that!" he said thickly. "I am no tame thing!"

"You may go," she said.

He smiled. "Not so easily!"

"Then I will."

"Where will you go?"

"To Miss Sisson's room."

Evan laughed. He had not much fear of that.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded.

For a brief instant he seemed to catch a glimpse inside himself and was aghast at what was stewing there. "God knows!" he said helplessly.

Corinna took heart at this evidence of weakness. "Then go away until you come to your senses," she said imperiously.

Evan flushed darkly. "I will not go!" he said.

They stared at each other.

Finally words began to come to Evan, at first haltingly: "Last night—you sang to me. Love songs—that drew the very heart out of me——"

She made an indignant movement.

"Oh, I know what you're going to say, they were just songs that you might sing to anybody. But you sung them to me—in a warm and tender voice, knowing that my ears were hungry for the sounds. You sang down all my defenses. You sang to me until I was soft and helpless. You sang me to your feet. I offered you myself—all there is of me body and soul. And you took me!—Oh, I know you made conditions, what did I care? I scarcely heard them. What do words matter at such moments? I offered you my love, and you took it. I felt from that moment that I was yours, and you mine.

"To-night when I came I found another man here—another man you were accustomed to sing to—how many of them are there?—the same songs, Oh God! Another man who looked at you with sick eyes of longing! And you denied me when I came! You looked at me with the eyes of a stranger because he was here! And now you ask me what is the matter with me. Am I a toy spaniel to be petted and turned out of the room by turn?"

She found her voice at last. "You have no right to speak to me like that! You promised me——"

"Oh, damn such promises! That's all nonsense! You're a woman and I'm a man! Have all the little brothers you want, but count me out. I will be your lover or nothing!"

"How dare you!" she gasped. "You brute!"

"Yes, I'm a brute!" he said. "I'm glad of it! Brutal things need to be said to clear the air. There's been too much sickly nonsense. You despise men, don't you? You like to see them crawling? You need a lesson! You shall be mine, and mine only and you shall respect me!"

Corinna was well-nigh speechless now. "I hate you! I hate you!" she gasped. "Leave my room!"

"Not till we come to an understanding."

She darted for the door. It was a mistake in tactics. A joyous flame leaped up in his eyes and he seized her. She fought him like a little tigress, but he only laughed deep inside of him, and drawing her close kissed her pulsing throat.

She ceased to struggle. The hands that had been beating his face stole around his neck. Her lips sought his of their own accord.

"I love you!" she murmured. "I can't help myself! I love you! What will happen to me now!"

At breakfast next morning Evan was in the highest spirits. His piercing inaccurate whistling of "Mighty Lak' a Rose" got Charley out of bed a good half hour before his time. Charley looked at him rather sourly, not too well pleased to have his role of little sunshine usurped by another. A scratch decorated one of Evan's cheeks which Charley did not overlook.

"What have you been in?" he asked sarcastically.

"Cut myself shaving," replied Evan with a casual air.

"You must have shaved early. It's dry."

Evan's only reply was another cadenza.

"Here's a change of tune!" commented Charley. "Last night it was the Dead March from Saul."

"Come on, slug! Breakfast's on the table."

It was impossible for Charley to be ill-tempered for long. Presently he began to grin. "Pleasant walking in the Square last night?" he asked dryly.

Evan couldn't quite confide in him, but he was not unwilling that Charley should guess how matters stood. "Out-o'-sight!" he cried.

"Want to borrow some money?" said Charley carelessly. "I'm flush."

Evan stared. "How did you guess that?"

"They generally do," said Charley airily.

"I'll be paid by the old man at the end of the week."

"That's all right. Here's five, son. I can recommend the one on the Avenue just below Fourteenth."

"The one what?" asked Evan innocently.

"Florist."

Evan blushed.

On his way down-stairs Evan tapped on her door with beating heart. There was no answer. With a sigh he went on. Carmen, who missed little, had heard him stop and coming out, volunteered the information that Miss Playfair had gone out real early. Evan thanked her, and hurried on, dreading to face the sharp-eyed spinster.

All morning he walked the streets with Simeon Deaves in a dream. In the middle of the day he made an excuse to avoid luncheon at the Deaves' and rushed home, stopping en route to buy a small-sized cartwheel of violets.

He let himself in softly and managed to get on the stairs without attracting Carmen's attention. The violets were hidden under his coat. Corinna's door stood open now, and his heart began to beat. "Will she recognise my step?" he thought. "I would know hers on my flight."

He stood in her doorway and the heart slowly froze in his breast. The room was empty, dreadfully empty. She was gone. The empty mantel, the empty floor, the empty place where the piano had stood seemed to mock at him. He turned a little sick, and put his hand out behind him on the door frame for support. "There is some mistake," he told himself, but he knew in his heart there was no mistake. This was the natural outcome of the tormenting mystery in which Corinna enveloped herself.

He looked stupidly down at the violets in his hand. In a spasm of pain he threw them on the floor and ground them under his heel. Their fragrance filled the room. Then the violence passed and he felt dead inside. He looked inside the little dressing-room—not that he expected to find her there, but it was a place to look. It was empty of course.

When he issued out again the sight of the bruised flowers caused him a fresh wrench. Lying there they were like a public advertisement of his betrayed heart. He picked them up and thrust them as far as he could reach up the chimney flue.

In the midst of Evan's pain a voice seemed to whisper to him: "You might have expected it. It was too much happiness!"

Later he thought: "There will be a letter for me up-stairs," and ran up the two flights, knowing there would be no letter. Yet he searched even in the unlikeliest places. There was no letter. To his relief Charley was out.

He thought of Carmen. Dreadful as it was to face her prying eyes, it was still more dreadful not to know what had happened. He went down-stairs again. On the final flight the unhappy wretch started to whistle, hoping by that to attract her to her door that he might not have to ask for information.

The ruse was successful. She came out into the hall. Evan found himself curiously studying the odd bumps that the curling pins made under her frowsy boudoir cap. She required no lead to make her talk.

"Miss Playfair has gone!" she cried.

"So I see," said Evan. He listened carefully to the sound of his own voice. It did not shake. He kept his back to the light from the front door.

"What do you know about that! I never did like her. One of them flibbertigibbets! You never can trust a red-haired woman! And such a display of her hair, as if it was beautiful indeed! That showed her character. But I should worry! Paid me a month's rent in advance when she came. Wanted part of it back this morning. But I said, 'Oh, no, my dear! That's the landlady's propensity—I mean perquisite.'"

Evan wondered if the sick disgust he felt of the woman showed in his face. As a matter of fact his face was simply wooden. Carmen rattled on unsuspectingly:

"That's enough for me. I don't care if I never rent the rooms. No more women in my house. They lower the tone. A man of course can do anything and it doesn't matter, but a woman in the house is a cause for suspicion even if she doesn't do anything."

Evan was not interested in Miss Sisson's ideas. He wanted information. "What reason did she give for leaving?" he asked carelessly.

"Said she had an important musical offer from out of town. But do you believe that? I don't."

"She didn't lose much time in moving her things," suggested Evan.

"No indeed. Looks very suspicious if you ask me."

Evan was obliged to put his question in more direct form. "Who moved her things?"

"Just an ordinary truck without any name on it. I looked particularly. The piano people came for the piano. Rented. It was a Stannering."

Fearing that the next question could not but betray him, Evan was nevertheless obliged to ask it: "Did she leave any forwarding address?"

Miss Sisson's gimlet eyes bored him through before she replied. "Yes, I asked her. She said she didn't expect anything to come here, but if it did I could forward it care of her friend Miss Evans, 133 West Ninth street. Did she owe you any money?"

This was too much. "No, indeed," said Evan, and hurried away.

He walked blindly across the Square, conscious only that Carmen was probably watching him through the narrow pane beside the door. How well he knew her expression of mean inquisitiveness. He was marching into blackness. He was incapable of thinking consecutively. What was left of his faculties was concentrated to the sole end of concealing his hurt.

But he still had two clues. He automatically turned down Ninth street looking for 133 only to find what everybody knows that West Ninth street ends at Sixth avenue and there are consequently no numbers beyond 100. He went to the Stannering piano warerooms to ask if they had the new address of Miss Corinna Playfair on their books. He was told that Miss Playfair had returned her piano that morning saying that she was leaving town and would require it no longer.

CHAPTER X

MAUD'S INTEREST

Meanwhile Evan's association with Simeon Deaves was not without its humorous side. By the exercise of patience and diplomacy he gradually learned how to manage the old man like a child, though like a child there were times when he was perfectly unmanageable. Evan in a way became quite attached to him simply because he was a responsibility.

Avarice was a kind of disease that afflicted him. Apart from that he was a harmless, even a likable old fellow. He suffered from acute attacks, so to speak: these were his unmanageable times. He became sly and furtive, and sought for pretexts to sneak out of the house without Evan, or to give him the slip in the street. Evan had to watch sharp to keep him out of trouble. He had little doubt but that they were generally followed, but by more experienced trackers than the youth in grey for he could never be sure of it.

Simeon Deaves had a thousand foibles, some of which Evan found sadly trying. For instance it was his delight to walk up and down the aisles of department stores asking to be shown goods, and haggling over the price without the slightest intention of purchasing anything. The audible remarks of the salesgirls made Evan's cheeks burn.

When he remonstrated with the old man, the latter would not rest thereafter until he had given Evan the slip. Under cover of the crowds he would slip out of a side door, or dart into an elevator just as the door was closing. After a search Evan would find him perhaps entering a second-hand shop to trade the decent clothes that Maud made him wear for something out of stock with a little cash to boot. At other times Evan would track him by the crowd that gathered to hear his argument with a shoe-string peddler or a push-cart man. A favourite trick of his to evade Evan was to suddenly dart behind a moving trolley car. More than once this almost ended his career on the spot. At other times he was quite tractable and seemed almost fond of Evan.

Bargaining was his ruling passion. Consequently they haunted such places as the sidewalk market in Grand street, and the fish market under the Queensboro Bridge. Notwithstanding his avarice the old man not seldom bought things for which he had no possible use, simply because he thought they were cheap. He would bring home a doubtful fish in a bit of newspaper or a bag of pickled apples which promptly found their way into the Deaves' garbage cans.

His pet aversion was beggars. Woe to the beggar who tackled Simeon Deaves unwittingly. He would receive a lecture on Thrift on the spot. This likewise furnished amusement to the street crowds.

Evan's grand object, of course, was to keep the old man from doing anything which would give the blackmailers a further hold on him. One of his narrowest escapes took place under the very roof of the Deaves house. The old man was considered safe in his own little junk room in the basement, and was allowed to potter there unwatched. One rainy morning while he was supposedly so engaged Evan was enjoying a respite with a book in the little office adjoining the library, when through the open door into the hall he saw one of the maids whisper to another, then both tittered and scampered down stairs. Evan always on the alert for mischief, quietly followed.

He found most of the servants of that disorderly establishment gathered in a basement passage with heads bent, listening to sounds that issued through the door of Simeon Deaves' room. Among them was Hilton the butler, an oily, obese rascal whom Evan thoroughly distrusted. All vanished the other way down the passage at Evan's approach.

Evan knocked peremptorily, and the door being opened, he saw that the multi-millionaire was closeted with a typical specimen of old clo' man, bearded, dirty and cringing. It was their dispute over sundry articles in Simeon Deaves' weird collection that had drawn the giggling servants. It appeared that the old man was the seller. Evan bounced the old clo' man in spite of his protests.

"I come by appoindmend, mister. I come by appoindmend!"

"All right" said Evan. "Call it a disappointmend, and get!"

The old man was indignant too. "A very honest man," he protested. "He was willing to pay me twenty-five cents for my alarm clock. I could have got him up to thirty. It isn't worth more than fifteen!"

"You can be sure then that he was taking a chance of picking up something for nothing," said Evan. "When will you learn sense! All the servants listening and giggling in the passage. Nice story the alarm clock would make in the papers!"

But it was impossible to make the old man realize his own absurdity. "Well, you needn't bite my head off," he said pettishly. "Come on, let's go out. A little rain won't hurt us."

From which it will be seen that their relative positions had undergone a considerable change since the beginning. Evan had become the mentor and guide.

In the past the demands for money had come pretty regularly about once a fortnight, Evan learned. As the end of the two weeks drew near a certain apprehension was evident in the house. George Deaves was wretchedly anxious, Evan somewhat less so, while the old man went his ways undisturbed.

And then the letter came. One morning on his arrival Evan was directed to the library where he found George Deaves in a state of prostration. He waved a letter at Evan in a kind of weak indignation. Evan took it and read:

"Dear Mr. Deaves:

Another story has been written to add to the blithe biography of your parent. It is the most humorous chapter so far. We do not enclose it, as we desire to stimulate your curiosity. You can read it in the *Clarion* to-morrow evening—unless you wish to reserve that pleasure exclusively to yourself. In that case you may send a picture to the rummage sale of the Red Cross at — Fifth avenue. Mrs. Follett Drayton is in charge. Send any framed picture and between the picture and the backing insert five of Uncle Sam's promissory notes of the usual denomination. Put your name on the picture for purposes of identification.

Yours as ever,
THE IKUNAHKATSI."

"This is the return I get for the money I have paid you!" said George Deaves reproachfully.

"It's a bluff!" said Evan.

"Can you assure me of that?"

"I can't swear to it of course. Mr. Deaves gives me the slip once in a while. And there was one day I was not with him. But he says he didn't go out that day. I'm sure it's a bluff. If they had a new story on him they'd send it fast enough."

"Maybe they're going to print the last one."

"Maybe. But in that case why not say so? They have shown a queer sense of honour heretofore in suggesting that when you paid for a story that was done with. Have you got the envelope this came in?"

George Deaves handed it over. It was of medium size and made of cheap "Irish linen" paper. The post-mark was Hamilton Grange. A small peculiarity that Evan marked was that though it had been sent from a New York post-office the words "New York City" were written in full.

"What do you think about this Mrs. Drayton?" asked Deaves.

"A woman above suspicion. They're using her as they used Hassell. Easy enough to plant somebody in the Red Cross shop to watch the packages received. Someone to buy the picture you send."

"You advise me to ignore this then?"

"No, if it was me I'd call their bluff. Have a better moral effect. Get an old picture from somewhere and stick a

piece of paper in the back. The fellow who wrote this letter fancies himself as a humorist. Answer him in kind. Write on the paper: 'Show me first your wares.'"

"What does that mean?" asked George Deaves innocently.

"A quotation from Simple Simon," answered Evan grinning.

The other man hung in a painful state of indecision, biting his nails. At last he said breathlessly with a tremendous effort of resolution: "Very well, I'll do it."

But the gang proved to have another shot in its locker. Next morning Evan was sent for again to the library where he found a family conclave in session. The gorgeous Maud in purple velvet and pearls ("How does she get the money out of them?" thought Evan) was detonating like a thunderstorm in the hills. George Deaves sat crushed at his desk, and the old man sputtered and snarled when he could get a word in. Maud (it was impossible for Evan to think of her by a more respectful name) promptly turned to discharge her lightnings at Evan's head.

"What are you good for?" she demanded. "Aren't you paid a good salary to keep my husband's father from disgracing us all? Why don't you do it then? Why don't you do it?"

Evan bit his lip to keep from smiling in her face. To an outsider these family rows smacked of burlesque. One could always depend on the actors to play their regular parts.

"If you would please explain," said Evan mildly.

"Read that!" She thrust a letter at him.

Evan read:

"Mrs. George Deaves:

Dear Madam:

Your husband has declined to purchase the latest anecdote of Mr. Simeon Deaves, and has bidden us to let the general public enjoy the laugh. This we will very gladly do, but knowing you to be a lady of sensitive nature, it seemed too bad not to give you a chance to act in the matter first. The story will be published in the *Clarion* this evening unless we hear from you or from Mr. Deaves. In case you wish to stop it please see our letter of yesterday for instructions how to reach us and what to send.

In the meantime pray accept, dear Madam, the assurances of our distinguished consideration, and believe us,

Yours most respectfully,
THE IKUNAHKATSI."

"Why wasn't it sent?" she cried.

"Mr. Deaves decided that they were bluffing this time," said Evan.

"You advised me!" said Deaves.

"Certainly" said Evan. "That's all I can do. The decision rests with you."

"Why wasn't I consulted?" cried Maud.

And so the storm raged up and down. Evan devoutly wished himself some place else.

"Knowing your father's propensity for disgracing us I don't believe it's a bluff!" cried Maud.

"Disgracing you!" retorted the old man. "Whose money paid for those gew-gaws?"

"Must I stand here to be insulted in the presence of my husband!"

"Papa, be quiet!"

"Disgracing you? Where would you all be, but for this disgraceful old man I'd like to know!"

But neither of the men was any match for Maud. Within a quarter of an hour she had driven the old man from the room and reduced her husband to a palpitating jelly.

In the end the latter said hopelessly: "Very well, I'll send the money."

Maud swept triumphantly out of the room. Evan looked after her with a new eye. During the last few minutes an extraordinary suspicion had come into his mind, an incredible suspicion, but it would not down.

The wretched George Deaves played with the objects on his desk. "All very well to say I'll send it," he muttered. "But where am I going to get it? Useless to ask Papa."

Evan was silent. There was nothing for him to say.

George Deaves looked at him aggrievedly. "You think I'm wrong to send it."

"I should think it would be hard enough to send it when they had something on you, let alone when they were only bluffing."

"It is hard," whimpered the other. "I think it's a bluff myself. But suppose it isn't and the story is printed. What would I say to Maud? How could I face her?"

"It's for you to decide," said Evan.

George Deaves rapped on his desk, bit his fingers, looked out of the window, got up and sat down again. Finally he said tremulously: "Very well, I'll take a chance."

With what anxiety they awaited the appearance of the *Clarion* may be guessed. Simeon Deaves and Evan started out immediately after lunch to get a copy. The old man wanted to go direct to the publishing office to get it damp from the press, but Evan persuaded him it would never do to betray so much anxiety in the matter. The *Clarion* office might be watched. Indeed it was not unlikely the gang had an agent there.

They found that none of the newsstands in the vicinity of the plaza carried the *Clarion*: "a socialistic rag" it was called in that neighbourhood. They had to walk all the way to Third avenue to find a dealer who would confess to handling it. It would be up at four he said, so that they had an hour to kill, which old Simeon spent very happily in the fish-market.

For the last fifteen minutes they hung around outside the newsstand while the proprietor watched them suspiciously from inside his window. When the newswagon drove up Simeon Deaves snatched a *Clarion* from the top of the pile. The newsdealer held out his hand for the two cents, but it was ignored.

Evan got a copy for himself. Skimming over the headlines he failed to find the name of Deaves and breathed more freely. A more careful search column by column revealed not so much as a stick of type devoted to Simeon Deaves. Evan and his employer looked at each other and grinned.

The newsdealer demanded his two cents.

"Shan't need the paper now," said Simeon, calmly putting it down.

Evan averted an explosion by hastily paying for both copies.

On the way home the old man was in such an extraordinary good humour that he actually bought Evan a five-cent cigar. Evan keeps it to this day as a curiosity.

At home they found an ashy and shaken George Deaves waiting for them in the library.

"It's all right!" said Evan.

A look of beatific relief overspread the other's face. He immediately began to swell. "That is most gratifying! most gratifying!" he said pompously. "I am really under obligations to you, Weir. We both are, aren't we, Papa?"

"Sure, Evan's a good boy. I always said so. I bought him a cigar."

"Tcha! A cigar! I should really like to do something for you, Weir."

"You can raise my salary if you want," said Evan slyly.

A comical transformation took place in both faces. "What! Raise your salary! Again! Impossible!" both cried.

Evan laughed. "Well, you proposed doing something for me."

Someone else in that house had bought a copy of the *Clarion*. Mrs. George Deaves entered in what was for her a high good humour with a copy of the sheet under her arm.

"Well, I see you sent the money," she said.

George Deaves looked self-conscious. He greatly desired to lie, but lacked the effrontery to do so before the other men. His father saved him the trouble of doing so. Eager to get back at Maud he said:

"No, he didn't!"

Mrs. Deaves' face fell. The black eyes began to snap. Another storm portended. "You promised me——" she began.

"But you see we were right," interrupted her husband. "It was a bluff. There's nothing in the paper."

"You don't know it's a bluff!" she cried. "Perhaps they were too late for the paper. It will be in to-morrow. You have got to send the money at once as you promised!"

But George Deaves' momentary relief had put a little backbone into him. "I still think it a bluff!" he said doggedly. "I'm willing to take a chance."

The storm broke. "Oh, you're willing, are you? How about me? How about me? Here you sit all day. What do you know about how people talk? I have to go about. I have to see people smile when they think I'm not looking and whisper behind their hands. Do you think I don't know what they're saying? Oh, I know! 'That's Mrs. George Deaves, my dear. Wife of the son of the notorious miser. You've heard how he squabbles in the street with newsboys and fruit vendors over pennies!' Well, I've had enough of it! Enough, I say! I won't stand it!"

In the full course of her tirade she happened to look at Evan. Evan's suspicion had become almost a certainty. His eyes were bent steadily upon her. He was not smiling, but there was an ironical lift to the corners of his mouth.

She pulled herself up. "Well, if there's anything published to-morrow you know what to expect," she said, and swept out of the room.

Evan glanced at father and son. Nothing showed in their faces but simple relief at her going. Evan marvelled at their blindness. He had yet to learn that habitually suspicious people never see what goes on under their noses.

Evan had plenty of food for thought. An extraordinary situation was suggested; one in which it behooved him to move with exceeding caution. For the moment his best plan appeared to be to continue to keep the old man out of trouble, while he watched and waited and found proof of what he was already morally sure.

CHAPTER XI

THE STEAMBOAT *ERNESTINA*

On a shining morning when the Northeast wind had swept the sky as clean as a Dutch kitchen, Evan was on his way to work, trying to make out to himself with but poor success that all was right with him and with the world. As a matter of fact the loveliness of the morning only put a keener edge on his dissatisfaction. He could not but remember other lovely mornings when the heart had been light in his breast.

Every pretty woman that he met put him in a rage. "All alike! All alike!" he said to himself. "God help the man that takes them at face value! Well, they'll never get their hooks in me again! I know them now!" It did not occur to him that there was rather an inconsistency in raging at something so perfectly unimportant; nor did he enquire too closely into the motives that led him to search ceaselessly among the feminine passers-by and to turn his head to look down every side street. His search for a certain red-haired individual of the despised sex had become involuntary.

At Thirteenth street he suddenly perceived Anway coming towards him down the avenue, and his heart bounded. Never was a man gladder to stumble on his rival. Luckily Evan saw him first. Hastily turning his back, he stared in a shop window until he judged the other had passed behind him. Then he took up the trail, forgetting his job, and indeed everything else save that Anway must possess the clue to Corinna's whereabouts.

He was led to the corner of Broadway and Twenty-third street, where Anway stopped, evidently to wait for an eastbound car. This was a little awkward, for the cars bound in that direction were but sparsely filled at this hour. Evan bought a newspaper. Anway boarded a cross-town car and sat down inside. Evan swung himself on as the car got in motion, and remained out on the back platform, using his paper as a screen.

As the car progressed to the far East side it gradually emptied until only Anway and Evan remained on board. Evan became rather nervous. "Well, if he spots me I'll follow him anyhow," he said. "What on earth is he doing on this ragged edge of the town?"

At the end of the line Anway got off the front end of the car without having discovered Evan, and headed down the water-front street to the South. A number of groups of people, having the gala look of those bound on an excursion, were going the same way; and Evan concealed himself among them.

On the river side the new city piers stretched out into the water. Not having been leased yet, all kinds of craft were tied there; canal-boats, lighters, schooners, launches. All the people, including Anway, were heading towards a pier where a queer little old-fashioned steamboat was lying. She had a tall, thin smoke-stack and immense paddle-boxes. She looked like one of those insects with a tiny body and a wholly disproportionate outfit of legs, antennas, etc., spreading around. Her name was painted in fancy letters on the paddle-boxes: *Ernestina*.

From the rear Evan saw Anway pass on board. He wondered what the elegant Anway had in common with all the poor and humble people who were bound on the excursion. Many of them obviously did not even possess any Sunday clothes to put on for the trip. There is, surely, no greater degree of poverty. Children were very largely in the majority, pale, great-eyed, little spindle-shanks. All had red tickets in their hands. If, as it seemed, this was a charitable excursion, Anway must be one of those in charge.

As he drew closer Evan saw that the tickets were being collected by a man at the shore end of the gangway. Here was a proper source of information. This man had the pale and earnest look of the professional philanthropist, a worthy soul, some half a dozen years older than Evan, with a wife and four children undoubtedly. Evan took up a place near him and watched the procession wending aboard with brightening faces.

"You couldn't have a better day for the trip," he hazarded.

The ticket-taker responded amiably: "Great, isn't it? We'll bring 'em back with rosy cheeks."

"Is this the outfit Anway told me about?" asked Evan, feeling his way.

"Yes, the Ozone Association trips. Are you a friend of Anway's? He's just gone aboard."

"He told me so much about it I thought I'd stroll down and take a look."

"Go aboard if you'd like to. We won't be leaving for ten minutes yet."

Evan desired a little further information before trusting himself aboard. "You must need quite a crowd of helpers to look after the kids."

"Miss Playfair takes care of that for me. She's a host in herself."

All the blood seemed to leave Evan's heart for a moment, and then came surging back until it seemed as if that much-tried organ would burst. He heard his informant saying:

"But if you know Anway, no doubt you're acquainted with Miss Playfair?"

"I've met her," said Evan, carefully schooling his voice.

"A wonderful little woman!"

"Quite so," said Evan dryly. "Look here," he went on, "I'd like to go with you to-day if I wouldn't be in the way. I mean, work my passage, of course; help take care of the kids, or amuse them, or feed them, or whatever may be necessary. My name's Evan Weir."

The other man looked Evan over and was pleased with what he saw.

"I'd be delighted to have you," he said. "We can always use more help. My name's Denton."

"Well, then, give me a job," said Evan.

"First of all, take my place for a moment," said Denton. "The ice-cream hasn't come. I must go and telephone."

"Sure thing!"

"You needn't be too strict about tickets," Denton added in an undertone. "I mean in respect to women and children. The main thing is to keep the bad and healthy little boys off."

"I get you," said Evan.

Denton hurried away. Evan took his place and the procession passed before him deprecatingly presenting its squares of red pasteboard. At first Evan scarcely took note of them, he was so busy with his private exultation. He had found her! And once they got away from the pier he would have her all day on the boat where she couldn't escape him. His luck had changed. For the present he kept his back turned to the *Ernestina* that he might not be unduly conspicuous to anyone happening to glance out of the cabin windows.

He was recalled to the business in hand by a plea: "Say, Mister! Let me and me brutter go, will yeh please? We had our tickets all right, but a big lad pasted us and took 'em offen us."

Evan looked down into a little angel face and clear shining eyes. The "brutter" waited warily in the background. Evan knew boys, and had no doubt but that this was a pair of incorrigibles, but he couldn't refuse anybody just then.

"What's your name, boy?"

"Ikey O'Toole."

"Well, you are out of the melting-pot for sure!"

"No, sir; I live in Hester street."

"That's all a stall about losing your tickets," Evan said, trying to look stern. "But I'll let you go. I'm going too, see? And if there's any rough-housing you'll have me to deal with."

The surprised and jubilant urchins hurried aboard.

This incident was witnessed with visible indignation by two pale and solemn little girls who stood apart. They knew the bad little boys told a story if the gentleman didn't. Lost their tickets, indeed! During a lull Evan beckoned them. They came sidling over, each twisting a corner of her pinafore.

"Are you waiting for somebody?" he asked.

A shake of the head.

"Haven't you got any tickets?"

Another shake.

"Do you want to go anyway?"

An energetic pair of nods.

"What will your mother say?"

"Ain't got no mutter. Sister, she don't care. She works all day."

"All right. Skip on board."

Denton and the ice-cream arrived simultaneously. Shortly afterwards a warning whistle was blown. A small pandemonium of singing and delighted squealing was heard from the upper deck. Evan stuck close to Denton. They remained on the lower deck while the gangplank was drawn in and the ropes cast off. Meanwhile Evan was gathering what further information he could.

"How often do you make these trips?"

"Twice a week—Tuesdays and Saturdays."

"What is the Ozone Association? I never heard of it."

"I can't tell you much, though I work for them. I've always understood it was some rich man who wished to keep his name out of the thing. I was hired by a law firm to manage the trips, and the money comes to me through them."

"How did you get hold of all your helpers?"

"Oh, one way and another. Miss Playfair gets her friends to help."

When the *Ernestina* finally moved out into the stream, Denton remained below, attending to the stowage of the ice-cream and to other matters, and Evan stayed with him. To tell the truth, he dreaded a little to put his fortunes to the touch by venturing up above. They were unpacking sandwiches when Denton suddenly said:

"Here's Anway. Anway, here's a friend of yours."

Evan looked up with a wary smile. As it chanced, the busy Denton was called from another direction at that moment, and he did not see the actual meeting between the two. Evan had his back to the light and Anway did not instantly recognise him. Anway's expression graduated from expectancy at the sound of the word friend to blankness as he failed to recognise Evan, and to something like consternation when he did.

"What are you doing here?" he blurted out.

"The same as yourself," replied Evan. "Only a volunteer."

Without another word Anway turned. Evan went with him. He had no intention of letting him warn Corinna. They mounted the main stairway side by side, Anway gazing stiffly ahead, Evan watching him with a grin.

As soon as they rounded into the saloon Evan saw Corinna, and his head swam a little. She was so very dear and desirable he forgot how badly she had used him. She was kneeling on the carpet, feeding a hungry baby with cup and spoon. The baby sat in the lap of a woman so spent and done, she could do no more than keep the infant from slipping off. It was an appealing sight. In such an attitude Corinna was all woman, her face as tender as a saint's. Evan laid a restraining hand on Anway's arm.

"Let the kid have his meal anyway," he whispered.

But some current of electricity warned Corinna. Looking up, she saw Evan at a dozen paces' distance. Evan trembled for the cup. It was not dropped. Corinna had herself better in hand than Anway. No muscle of her face changed; only the light of her eyes hardened.

"She thinks you brought me aboard," murmured Evan wickedly.

Anway flushed.

Corinna resumed her feeding of the baby.

Evan was divided between admiration and chagrin. Secretly he had counted on his appearance creating a more dramatic effect than this.

Anway hung around in a miserable state of indecision. If Evan had only given him an excuse to punch him he would have been glad no doubt. Finally he said:

"You see what she's doing. Come away and let her be."

Evan good-humouredly shook his head. "The sight gives me too much pleasure," he said. "But don't let me keep you."

But Anway lingered unhappily, walking away a little and coming back.

Corinna did not look at Evan again. Her self-control was too provoking. "By Heaven, I'll make her show some feeling before the day's out!" he vowed to himself. When the cup was empty she came straight toward him with her chin up.

"How do you do, Corinna?" said Evan.

She looked at him with the faint air of surprise she knew so well how to assume. Then, as if suddenly placing him: "Oh! You must excuse me now. I have a dozen hungry babies to feed."

Evan, with a smile, allowed her to pass downstairs. It required no small amount of self-control. "Patience, son!" he said to himself. "You have all day before you. If you lose your temper, she'll have you exactly where she wants you. However she bedevils you, you must be little Bright-eyes still!"

Corinna presently returned with more food and proceeded to the next baby in line. In the meantime Anway, finding himself both unnecessary and helpless in this situation, had drifted away—to confer with his "brothers," perhaps. The second baby's mother was perfectly capable of feeding her own offspring, and Evan saw that Corinna was merely using the infant as a shield against him. But he could not seem to interfere between a helpless baby and its food.

When she passed him again bound down below he said: "Let me help you."

"Thanks, this is hardly in your line," she said coldly.

Nevertheless he followed her down and saw that she went to the galley for a soft-boiled egg for the next child.

"You're wasting your time running up and down," he said with obstinate good nature. "Let me be your waiter and fetch the different orders while you feed."

"Thanks; I don't need your assistance," she said.

But he saw that her temper was beginning to rise, and took heart. If he could only put her in the wrong! He blandly followed her back again, and as she started to feed he found out for himself what the next baby required. This was a small one and its order was for six ounces of milk with two ounces of barley water and a teaspoonful of sugar added, the whole in a bottle well-warmed.

He procured it from the galley in due course. Corinna received it of him with a very ill grace. "She'd make a face at me if she didn't have her dignity to keep up," thought Evan. After that he had her. They worked their way down one side of the saloon and back on the other, to all outward appearance at least like two pals. Evan was careful to confine his remarks to milk, oatmeal gruel, beef broth and orange juice. Corinna could not find matter in this to quarrel over. She was as acidly sweet as one of the oranges.

Only the little ones and the sick were specially fed in the saloon. The others were taken down in relays to the dining-room on the main deck aft. Corinna's and Evan's task came to an end at last. As he carried the last cup back to the galley Evan said to himself: "Now's my chance!"

But when he returned he saw that Corinna, for the sake of the convalescent children not allowed out on deck, had started to tell a story. They were pressing around her in close ranks that presented a triple line of defence.

CHAPTER XII

EVAN LOSES A ROUND

Evan, somewhat crestfallen, went out on deck and lit a cigarette. "Oh, well, it can't last forever," he told himself. He found a seat near an open window where he could overhear the story. To his mind Corinna had not much of a talent for it. He thought he could have told a better one himself. It was the chronicle of an unpleasantly good little girl, and when Corinna was gravelled for matter to continue with, she filled in by lengthily describing the heroine's clothes. "Just filibustering like the U. S. Senate," thought Evan disgustedly.

Corinna, suspecting perhaps that she had too critical a listener, changed her seat on the pretext of a draught and he could hear no more.

Meanwhile the good ship *Ernestina* was industriously wig-wagging her walking-beam down the upper Bay. She was a quaint, crablike little craft. Her tall and skinny smokestack was like a perpetual exclamation point. Her gait resembled that of a sprightly old horse who makes a great to-do with his feet on the road but somehow gets nowhere. At the end of each stroke of her piston she seemed to stop for an instant and then with a wheeze and a clank from below, and a violent tremor from stem to stern, started all over. Her paddle-wheels kicked up alarming looking rollers behind, but with it all she travelled no faster than a steam canal-boat. Not that it mattered; the children got just as much ozone as on the deck of the *Aquitania*.

Evan's patience was not inexhaustible. By the time they reached Norton's Point he was obliged to go in to see how the story was progressing. It was no nearer its end, as far as he could judge. Corinna's Dorothy Dolores was donning a party dress of pink messaline with a panne velvet girdle. The children's interest flagged and they drifted away, but there were always others to take their places.

Ikey O'Toole and his pal happened to pass through the saloon bound on some errand of their own, and Evan had a wicked idea. "Come here, boys," said he, "and I'll tell you a story about robbers."

Their eyes brightened. Evan took a seat opposite Corinna's and began:

"There was a band of train-robbers and cattle-rustlers who lived in a cave out in Arizona, and they had for a leader a guy named Three-fingered Pete. Pete could draw a gun quicker with his three fingers than any other man with five."

And so on. There was magic in it. Let it not be supposed that little girls are proof against a story of robbers however they may make believe. They came drifting across the saloon. In ten minutes there were twenty children surrounding Evan, while Corinna's audience had dwindled to four and they were restive. Corinna kept on. Her pale, calm profile revealed nothing to Evan, but he doubted if she were pale and calm within. Corinna was not red-headed for nothing.

When her hearers were reduced to two she abruptly rose. Evan wondered if sweet Dorothy Dolores had been brought to a violent end. He got up too.

"To be continued in our next," he said.

"Aw, Mister! Aw, Mister!" they protested, clinging to his coat.

"After lunch," he promised, freeing himself, and hastening down the saloon after Corinna.

He thought he had her cornered in the bow, but she dropped into a seat beside a woman with a sick baby and enquired how it was getting on. The two women embarked on what promised to be an endless discussion of the infant's symptoms. Evan felt decidedly foolish, but stubbornly stood his ground.

Denton unexpectedly came to his assistance. "Miss Playfair," he said, "I've got a seat for you in the dining-room, and one for Mr. Weir. Won't you come down now?"

Two seats! Together, naturally. Evan's heart went up with a bound. But Corinna was not going to be led into any such trap. She asked the woman beside her if she had had her lunch. The answer was a shake of the head.

"Then I'll hold the baby, and you go with these gentlemen," said Corinna blandly.

"Let me hold the baby," said Evan.

"Oh, thank you, sir; but he don't like men."

Evan went down with Denton and the woman, but he did not mean to be put off so easily. Seeing the crowd in the dining-saloon, he said:

"They're rushed here. Let me help serve for a while. Save two seats when Miss Playfair comes down."

"Sure," said Denton amiably.

Down the length of the lower saloon there was a double row of tables, each with an end to the side wall. Every seat was taken. In addition to Denton the waiters were Anway and a black-haired youth with a hot eye who greeted Evan with a frank scowl. Denton introduced him as Tenterden. "Another of Corinna's 'brothers'," thought Evan. "The boat is manned with her family!" He turned in to help with a will.

Nearly an hour passed before Corinna appeared for her lunch, and the dining-saloon was beginning to empty. Seeing Evan there, she naturally supposed he had finished eating and had remained to help. She took a seat next the window at one of the tables, and thus protected herself on one hand. Indicating the chair on the other side of her she said to Denton:

"Sit here. You can be spared now."

"Thanks, but I promised this seat to Weir," said Denton innocently.

Corinna bit her lip. The said Weir made haste to slip into the seat, before anything further could be said. Corinna quickly started a conversation with a youth across the table, another helper, and supposedly a "brother"—at least he looked at Corinna with sheep's eyes.

Evan, determined not to allow himself to be eliminated, said firmly: "I have not met this gentleman."

Corinna said coldly: "Mr. Domville, Mr. Weir."

Next to Domville sat another helper, an older man with a queer, clever, bitter face, Mr. Dordess. Some belated mothers made up the tableful. Anway waited on them. As he placed a plate of soup before Evan with set face, Evan suspected he would rather have poured it down the back of his neck. Evan thanked him ironically.

Corinna did her best to keep the conversation of the whole tableful in her hands, but of course it was bound to escape her sometimes. And there were lulls. At such moments Evan could speak to her without anybody overhearing.

"Corinna, what's the use?"

Affecting not to hear him, she asked a question across the table. Evan patiently bided his time.

"What's the use?" I said."

"I don't understand you."

"What's the use of trying to evade something that's got to be faced in the end."

"What's got to be faced?"

"Me."

"Is that a threat?"

"No. You know, yourself, after what happened you owe me an explanation."

"The explanation is obvious."

"Then I must be very dense."

"If you were the least bit sorry, I could talk to you; but to glory in it, to try to trade on it——"

"Sorry for what?"

"Oh, of course you have nothing to be sorry for."

"You're talking in riddles. You know I love you."

She laughed three notes. He frowned at the sound.

"It's a funny way you have of showing it," she said. "To try to humble me further!"

"But you ask for it, Corinna—with your high and mighty way. I told you that before."

Silence from Corinna.

"I don't know what cause you have to be sore at me," he resumed when he got another opportunity. "It seems to me I'm the one——"

"Oh, you'll get over it, I suspect."

"Corinna, why did you run away?"

She rolled a bread ball. "Because I was ashamed."

He looked at her in honest surprise. "Ashamed! Of what?"

"You know very well what I mean."

"I swear I do not!"

"I will hate you if you force me to say it."

"I'll take my chance of that," he said grimly.

"Very well. Don't you understand that a person may be carried away for the moment, and do things and say things that they bitterly regret afterwards. Of course if you have no standards of right and wrong you wouldn't understand."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"What happened that night," she went on, "that sort of thing is horrible to me!"

At last he understood—and frowned, for it was his deepest feelings that she slandered. But he was not fully convinced that she was sincere. "Then you lied when you said you loved me?"

"I was carried away. That sort of thing isn't love."

This angered Evan—but he held his tongue. He sought to find out from her face what she really thought. She looked out of the window.

"Now I hope you understand," she said loftily.

"You have a lot to learn," said Evan, "about love and other things."

"At any rate I hope I have made you see how useless it is to follow me," she said sharply.

"It is useless," said Evan—"to talk to you," he added to himself. "When I get you off this confounded steamboat we'll see what we'll see."

"Don't stare at me like that," said Corinna. "It's attracting attention."

Evan thought: "If there was only another girl on board that I could rush! That might fetch her!"

Evan saw indeed that Dordess was regarding him quizzically. Of all the men (saving Denton) Dordess was the only one who did not scowl at Evan. Evan was not deceived thereby into thinking that he had inspired any friendliness in this one. It was simply that Dordess was more sophisticated, and had his features under better control. To create a diversion, Evan asked him:

"What has your particular job been to-day?"

"Serving at the water-cooler," was the response, with a wry smile, "to keep down the mortality from colic."

Thereafter Evan took part in the general conversation, and when the time came to rise from the table, he let Corinna go her way unhindered. He pitched in with a good will to help wash dishes, and to pack up the Ozone Association's property in the galley. But let him work and joke as he might, he won no smiles from the "brothers."

"Lord, if it was me, I'd put up a better bluff to hide my feelings," he thought.

Later he took over part of the deck to watch and keep the children from climbing the rails and precipitating themselves overboard. Later still, as they neared home and the small passengers became weary and obstreperous, he resumed the tale of the bandits in the saloon to an immense audience. Evan, perhaps because of his casual air towards the children, became the most popular man on the boat. He did not try to win them, and so they were his.

Corinna could not quite fathom his changed attitude towards her. During the whole afternoon he let her be. More than once he caught her glancing at him, and laughed to himself. He was taking the right line.

On one occasion the sardonic Dordess joined him on deck. Dordess had excited more than a passing interest in Evan. He was different and inexplicable. He had eyebrows that turned up at the ends like a faun's, giving him a devilishly mocking look. The essence of bitterness was in his smile. He had the look of a man of distinction, yet his clothes were a thought shabby. "Clever journalist gone to seed," was Evan's verdict.

Dordess said very offhand: "How do you like your job of nursemaid?"

"First-rate!" said Evan.

"How did you happen to stumble on our deep-sea perambulator?"

Evan was wary. "I just happened to be passing, and saw the kids crowding aboard. I stopped to look, and Denton asked me if I wanted a job."

Dordess cocked one of his crooked eyebrows in a way that suggested he didn't believe a word of it. Evan didn't much care whether he did or not.

Dordess said dryly: "Denton said you were a friend of Anway's."

"He misunderstood," said Evan carelessly.

"Are you going to be with us regularly?" asked Dordess with a meaning smile.

"I only volunteered for to-day." Evan's tone implied that the future could take care of itself.

Dordess said deprecatingly: "I hope the boys haven't made you feel like an outsider."

"Not at all," said Evan cheerfully. "I wouldn't mind if they did," he added. "The main thing is for the kids to have a good time."

"Sure," said Dordess dryly. "You see, the boys get the idea that these excursions are a sort of family affair, and they're apt to resent the help of strangers."

"I see," said Evan. "Are you one of Miss Playfair's 'brothers' too?"

"No; I'm an uncle," said Dordess with his bitter smile.

He walked away. There had been nothing in his words to which Evan could take offence, nevertheless as plainly as one man could to another he had conveyed the intimation that Evan was not wanted on board, and that if he ventured on board again it would be at his peril.

"The brotherhood evidently fears that I'm going to break up the organization," thought Evan.

As they approached the end of their journey Evan began to consider what measures he should take upon landing. His part was a difficult one to play with good humour; that is, to force himself on a young lady who said she detested him, and who had half a dozen brothers and an uncle to take her part.

"She'll do her best to give me the slip," he said to himself. "When we tie up I'll stand by the gangway on the pretext of keeping the kids from falling overboard. Some of them or all of them will take her home, no doubt. I'll tag along, too. They can't very well openly order me away, and I don't give a damn for their black looks and meaning hints. The main thing is to find out where she lives. I can choose my own time to call. Perhaps she won't open the door to me. Well, my patience is good."

As they approached the pier Evan went down to the main deck. Corinna was not visible at the moment. Only the forward gangway of the *Ernestina* was used. Her shape was so tubby that she couldn't bring any two points alongside a straight pier simultaneously. While they were making a landing all the children were kept roped off in the stern and up in the saloon. The only persons in the bow space beside Evan were Denton, Anway, Domville, Tenterden, two other "brothers" and two deckhands to stand by the lines.

Up forward there was an additional stairway from the saloon. This was enclosed and had a door at the bottom, locked at the moment to keep the children out of the way. In the centre of the deck was a hatch for freight, used presumably when the *Ernestina* served as a carrier.

As the steamboat sidled up to her pier Evan heard Corinna's voice call down the stairway: "Oh, Mr. Denton; will you come up here for a moment?"

Denton unlocked the door and disappeared upstairs. The door was locked after him. At the same moment Domville and one of the unidentified young men threw back the hatch cover. The latter said: "Let's get the cargo ashore first."

Evan wondering what cargo the excursion boat could be carrying, stepped forward in idle curiosity to look down the hatch. Suddenly he became aware that the young men were circling behind him. Before he could so much as turn around, he was seized from each side and a hand clapped over his mouth. With a concerted rush they swept him into the hole in the deck, falling on their knees at the edge, and letting him drop in. He fell on a mattress and was not in the least hurt. From above he heard a loud guffaw from the deckhands. Then the hatch cover was clapped down, and he heard heavy objects being piled upon it.

Evan raged silently in his prison. Pride restrained him from making any outcry. He had no fear that his murder was contemplated. They'd have to let him out again. In the meantime they'd get no change out of him. And the future could take care of his revenge.

He was in a small cargo space between two transverse bulkheads. He could touch the beams over his head. The place was perfectly empty except for the mattress. The mattress suggested that this had been carefully planned. It was not dark, being lighted by a fixed porthole on either side, not much bigger than an orange. These lights were only a foot or two above the waterline, and when the *Ernestina* reversed her engine in making the pier, the water washed up over the glass.

Evan could hear all the sounds attendant upon making a landing; the casting lines thrown ashore, the hawsers pulled over the deck, the jingle to the engine room signalling that all was fast. Then the gangway was run out and the feet poured over it.

Evan found that through the porthole on the pier side he was able to catch a brief glimpse of the passengers as they stepped ashore. He saw the children scurry away, never dreaming that the admired story-teller was immured below. The big girls followed more sedately, and after them the mothers with backs sagging under the weight of babies. Last of all he had the unspeakable chagrin of seeing Corinna pass with Denton grasping her arm.

"That's why I was put down here," he thought. "To allow her to make her getaway."

In the fraction of a second that she was visible to him, her head was turned back towards the boat. When a woman glances over her shoulder her true feelings come out; she cannot help herself. There was anguish in Corinna's backward look. Evan marked it, but he did not love her then. Not that he meant to give over the pursuit; on the contrary he swore that she should pay.

Five minutes later the hatch cover was lifted, a short ladder was let down, and Evan was bidden to come up. He mounted smiling. What that smile cost him none but he knew. But he also knew that with six or more against him to show truculence would only have been to make himself ridiculous. He paused on the deck, and coolly looking around him, tapped a cigarette on the back of his hand.

Dordess was now with the others. He had the grace to look away, as Evan's glance swept around. The younger men betrayed in their faces their hope that Evan would show fight, and thus give them a chance to justify themselves. Evan saw it, and had no idea of gratifying them.

Tenterden, he of the hot black eyes, who seemed to be leader in this part of the affair demanded aggressively: "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Much obliged for the mattress," said Evan, coolly meeting his gaze. "Very thoughtful of you." He counted them ostentatiously. "Six of you—and a couple of deckhands in reserve. You flatter me, gentlemen!"

He strolled over the gangway. How they took it he did not know, for he would not look back. At least none of them found a rejoinder. He had the last word.

"They think they have me scared off," he said to himself. "Just let them wait till the *Ernestina* sails again, that's all!"

CHAPTER XIII

A LITTLE DETECTIVE WORK

At first Evan had some doubts as to what ought to be his course of action in respect to Mrs. George Deaves. While it was true that her husband had definitely given him to understand that he was hired for the purpose of running down the blackmailers, he did not suppose that George Deaves would thank him for proof that his own wife was implicated. But that didn't alter his duty.

"I'm being paid to deliver them from the gang," he said to himself. "As long as I take their money I've got to do what I can to earn it. It's none of my affair where the trail leads. If they want to kick me out for my pains, why that's up to them."

It promised to be no easy matter to watch Mrs. Deaves. Evan rarely saw her. During the few hours that he spent in the house she was presumably either in her own rooms, or out in the motor. One suspicious circumstance he did not have to look for, because everybody in the house was aware of it. Maud Deaves was continually in money difficulties. Her creditors camped on her trail.

Two lines were open to Evan: to bribe her maid and to watch her letters. The maid, Josefa, was a light-headed creature perfectly willing to plot or counterplot with anybody. Unfortunately she was of very little use to Evan, because her mistress did not trust her in the least. As for the letters, it was scarcely likely that if Maud Deaves were carrying on a dangerous correspondence she would have the letters come openly to the house. Nevertheless Evan determined to get to the house early enough in the mornings to look over the first mail before it was distributed.

On the morning following his trip on the *Ernestina* he found a letter addressed to her that gave him food for reflection. The address was typewritten. The envelope was of medium size "Irish linen" of the kind that never saw either Ireland or flax; in other words, just such an envelope as those which had brought the blackmailing letters. In itself this was nothing for many thousands of such envelopes are sold. But it was postmarked "Hamilton Grange" and it was addressed "New York City." The three little facts taken together were significant. Evan slipped it in his pocket.

But though it had the look of a mere business letter or a bill, he still had qualms about opening it. Useless to tell himself that it was his duty to do so. To tell the truth Evan was not cut out by nature to be a detective. He finally decided to put his problem to George Deaves.

"Mr. Deaves," he said, "am I employed to accompany your father on his walks or to discover the blackmailers?"

"Primarily to run down the blackmailers," was the prompt reply. "Merely to go with my father is not worth all the money I'm paying you."

"Very good. Then I'm supposed to follow the trail wherever it may lead?"

"Certainly."

"Even in this house?"

"Of course. I told you particularly to watch the servants. Whom do you suspect?"

"I have no evidence yet. I merely wanted to know where I stood. Would I be justified in opening letters that looked suspicious to me?"

"Why, yes. The guilty person wouldn't tell you of his own accord."

"Thanks; that's what I wanted to know."

"Have you found out anything?" Deaves asked eagerly.

"Not yet."

"Mind, you are to find out everything you can, but you are not to take any action without consulting me."

"I understand."

While the servants were at breakfast Evan went to the water heater in the basement and, opening the valve, steamed the envelope open. He took the contents to the little room off the library to read. This is what met his eyes:

"Madagascar Hotel August—

"Mrs. George Deaves:

Dear Madam:

I am exceedingly sorry to be obliged to inform you that my customary fortnightly contribution to your charity must be omitted on this occasion, the reason being that the activity of a certain agitator has resulted in shutting off the income from my business, and I am without funds. I am sure you will agree with me that these agitators ought to be discouraged in every possible way. Let us make a stand against them. You can reach me at this hotel at any time.

Yours faithfully,
RODERICK FRELINGHUYSEN.

This had an innocent sound, and for a moment Evan supposed he had made a mistake in opening it. But he read it again, and began to grin as the various implications of the note became clear to him. "Damn clever!" he thought. "If this was found lying about no one could suspect anything from it. Not even George Deaves. Why, it almost took me in and I was forewarned!"

Evan thoughtfully considered all that the letter meant. "First of all it shows that Maud is not a regular member of the gang, but that they have been whacking up with her just to gain her good will. That's why she supplies the pressure from this end. It all fits in! Of course I am the agitator that he refers to, and he's suggesting to her that she get me fired. But why does he give her an address so that she can write to him? By George! I have it! He's giving her a chance to send him a story that can be used against the old man!"

He took a copy of the letter, sealed it up again and slipped it back among the rest of the mail matter in the hall.

During the morning he was obliged to accompany Simeon Deaves on one of his peregrinations. When they returned for lunch Evan sought out Josefa, the lady's-maid.

"What's your mistress been doing all morning?" he asked.

"Oh, Maud's got a new bug!" was the scornful answer. "Been practising on the typewriter for hours."

Evan pricked up his ears. "The typewriter?"

"She went out right after breakfast and brought home a second-hand machine. Been beating the Dickens out of it ever since."

"What is she writing?"

"Search me. Won't let me come near her. Looks like a story or something."

"Get a glimpse of it if you can."

"No chance. She's got eyes all round her head."

"Can you work a typewriter?"

"A little bit."

"Well, when she goes out stick a piece of paper in the machine and strike every key once, see? I want an impression of every character."

"I get you."

After lunch Evan had to waste more precious hours walking around with the old man. When they returned Josefa reported that Mrs. Deaves had finished her typewriting about three, and had then done up the sheets in a large envelope, and after carefully destroying the spoiled sheets, had carried the envelope out, presumably to post it. Josefa gave Evan the paper he had asked for, with a print of each character of the typewriter.

It was then five o'clock. City letters require two hours or more for delivery, and supposing this package of Mrs. Deaves' to be an answer to "Mr. Frelinghuysen's" note, it would soon be due at the Hotel Madagascar. Evan determined to go and ask for it himself. He did not suppose that Mr. Frelinghuysen was stopping at the Madagascar. That would be too simple. He knew, as everybody knows, what an easy means the "call" letters at a great hotel offers for the exchange of illicit correspondence.

The Madagascar, as all the world knows, is one of our biggest and busiest hotels. Evan went boldly to the desk and asked if there were any letters for Mr. Roderick Frelinghuysen. The name sounded imposing. The busy clerk skimmed over the letters in the F box, and, tossing him a bulky envelope, thought no more about it.

Evan, in high satisfaction, wended his way to another hotel in the neighbourhood, and there at his leisure tore the envelope open and read—well, very much what he expected: a story designed to be used for blackmailing purposes against Simeon Deaves. No letter accompanied it; none was necessary.

This story dealt with ancient history, and contained uglier matter than mere ridicule of the old man's avarice. It had to do with the circumstances of the marriage of George Deaves to Maud Warrender and what followed thereupon. In other words, Maud had been engaged in the amiable occupation of fouling her own nest. According to this account Simeon Deaves had instigated his weak and complaisant son to woo Miss Warrender because her father was President of a railroad that Simeon Deaves coveted. As a result of the marriage Deaves, who up to that time had only been a money-lender, had succeeded in entering the realms of high finance. No sooner was his own position secure, so the story went, than Simeon Deaves set himself to work to undermine Warrender, and in the end ousted him from his railway and ruined him.

This tale had none of the finesse and humour of that written by the blackmailers; it was simply abusive. Yet Maud had not so far forgotten herself as to show her hand. The facts were such as many persons beside herself might have been aware of.

Evan painstakingly compared the sheets of the story with the paper Josefa had given him. Every typewriter, save it is just from the factory, has its peculiarities. There was enough here to make out a case: "e" was badly worn and had a microscopic piece knocked off its tail; "a," "w," "s" and "p" were out of alignment; there was something the matter with "g," so that the following letter generally piled up on top of it.

In short, Evan held in his hands positive evidence of Maud Deaves' treachery. But upon consideration he decided not to put it before her husband at least for the present. In the first place, he didn't relish taking the responsibility of breaking up the Deaves family, and in the second place it was clear that the woman was only a tool in the hands of a rascal far cleverer than she. To deprive him of his tool would not break up the rascal's game; he could get another. Therefore Evan decided to keep his discovery to himself, and use it if possible to land the principal in the affair.

He considered whether he should have the desk at the Madagascar watched with a view to apprehending "Mr. Frelinghuysen" when he asked for his letter, but decided against that also. So clever a fox would hardly be likely to walk into so open a trap. He would send an innocent agent for the letter, while he watched in safety. On the whole it seemed best to do nothing that might put him on his guard, but to wait until he attempted to use his story, for a chance to land him.

He procured another envelope, had the hotel stenographer address it, and, sealing up the manuscript, carried it back to the Madagascar and handed it in at the desk "for Mr. Frelinghuysen," careful to choose a different clerk from

the one who had given it to him.

It must have been called for shortly afterwards and acted upon at once. Next morning, when Evan arrived at the Deaves house, the story was already back there. The customary violent family conference was in progress in the library. Evan guessed from their expressions that his name had entered into this quarrel. Indeed, Mrs. Deaves was for ordering him out of the room again, but the old man was too quick for her. He placed the latest letter in Evan's hands. Mrs. Deaves turned away with a shrug.

"Well, you know what I think of it," she said.

Evan read:

"Mr. George Deaves:

Dear Sir:

You thought we were bluffing, didn't you, when we said we had a chapter to add to your father's biography? Well, here it is. Your rejection of our proposal was received during the absence from town of our chief. That accounts for the delay. Upon his return our chief instructed that you were to be given a chance to read the matter before it was published. So we enclose it. In the absence of any further communication from you before noon, it will appear in this evening's edition of the *Clarion*.

To-day your procedure for communicating with us must be as follows: Bring the specified sum in cash to the house at 11 Van Dorn street. It must be enclosed in an envelope or package. You must approach on foot. Ring the bell; hand it to the woman who opens the door with the words: 'For the gentleman up-stairs' and leave at once. You may bring a single attendant with you if you choose—you would probably be afraid to come without one. But neither you nor he must linger, nor question the woman, nor seek to penetrate beyond the front door. If you do so, or bring any other persons with you or after you, let the consequences be or your own head.

Yours as ever,
THE IKUNAHKATSI."

"What are you going to do?" asked Evan of George Deaves.

Maud snatched the answer from her husband's lips. "He's going to pay!" she cried. "He can take you with him if he wants, as there's no one else available. I've no objection to that. But if you go you're to do exactly what the letter tells you and no more!"

As Evan continued to look to George Deaves, the latter was obliged to nod a feeble assent.

"He hasn't got the money," put in Simeon Deaves.

"Then let him get it from you!"

"Not if I know it!"

"Well, I don't care where he gets it from. This story is ruinous—ruinous! This story hits directly at me! If this is published it would be impossible for me to go on living with George!"

"Bravo, Maud!" thought Evan. "You're some actress! What a bombshell I could explode in this room if I wanted to!"

Maud's parting shot was: "At ten o'clock when the bank opens I will take you there myself in the car."

When she had gone the wretched George mumbled to his father: "No use my going to the bank. I'm overdrawn there. I can't ask for another loan unless you'll guarantee it."

"Not another cent! Not another cent! Let 'em publish and be damned!" He shuffled out of the room.

Evan could not but feel sorry for the unfortunate George, though his pity was mixed with contempt. George's first impulse was to apologise for his wife.

"You must make allowances," he said. "Mrs. Deaves is so dreadfully upset by this matter."

"So I see," said Evan dryly.

"I don't know what I'm going to do!"

"You don't need any money," said Evan quietly.

"Eh?" said Deaves dully.

"You've got a real chance to catch them now!"

"What do you mean?"

"Trap them in this house in Van Dorn street! I was sure they'd get careless in the end."

Deaves began to tremble. "But how can we? How do we know how many there are?"

"You'll have to call in the police and have the house surrounded."

"Oh, no! No!" Deaves cried in a panic.

"But that's what they're counting on: that you're afraid to call on the police!"

"The whole story would come out in the papers!"

"Not necessarily. Those matters can be arranged. And if they should slip through our fingers, we can buy up the story at the *Clarion* office later. We'd be no worse off."

"What could I say to Mrs. Deaves?"

"Don't tell her anything. She couldn't help but approve after we land them behind the bars." Evan said this with an inward smile.

"But she'll insist on my going to the bank."

"Let her take us there. She won't come in."

"I can't! I can't!" he quavered. "The risk is too great!"

"But if this payment is hard to meet, how about the next, and the next after that?"

"Oh, they'll ruin me!" he groaned.

"Then strike for your freedom while there's time!"

George Deaves would not positively consent, but he was so spineless that Evan was able to rush him along the path that he wished him to follow. Evan telephoned to police headquarters and made an appointment with the inspector in charge of the detective bureau to meet them at the bank.

Therefore, when Mrs. Deaves dropped them at the bank, and drove away, satisfied that things were going as she wished, instead of obtaining the money they went into consultation with the Inspector in plain clothes in the manager's office. Evan did the talking.

"Mr. Deaves is being hounded by a gang of blackmailers," he began.

The Inspector bowed as if blackmailing was a mere bagatelle to him. He had the mannerisms of the army. Evan was not so sure, though, of his capacity. But one must take an inspector as one finds him.

"He received this letter this morning." Evan handed it over.

It was read and handed back with a military nod.

"The opportunity seemed a good one to land the crooks."

"Quite so."

"We asked you to meet us here, because if we were seen going to headquarters the news would soon reach them. They were counting, you see, on Mr. Deaves not being willing to consult the police. But of course Mr. Deaves has nothing to hide.

"Of course not!"

George Deaves began to look anxious at this, but Evan did not intend to be taken too literally, as his employer soon saw.

The Inspector was not so stiff and correct but that he could feel an unregenerate curiosity. "May I see the enclosure the letter speaks of?" he asked.

"It has been destroyed," said Evan coolly. "It was merely scurrilous, and Mr. Deaves saw nothing to be gained in keeping it. The criminal intent is shown in the letter."

The Inspector looked disappointed, but bowed as usual. "Nevertheless I should be informed as to their previous activities," said he.

"Certainly," said Evan. "But if you will excuse me, the time is so short! I thought we should immediately take our measures. All the facts will come out at the hearing, of course."

Their plan was soon made. It was arranged that in the first place a man in plain clothes should be sent through Van Dorn street to locate the position of number eleven. Being an odd number, it would be on the north side of the street. He would then spot the corresponding house in the next street to the north, Carlton street, and four men would be sent to that house to be in readiness to take the Van Dorn street house in the rear. Six other men would be in readiness to follow George Deaves and Evan to the front door. In order to avoid warning the inmates of the house these six would be sent through the block in a covered van to leap out as the door was opened.

"What signal will there be for the concerted attack?" asked Evan.

"No signal," said the Inspector. "The double approach will be timed at a fixed moment, military style. You will ring the door bell at eleven o'clock precisely. Let me see, we'll give them forty-five seconds to open the door. Zero for us will be forty-five seconds past eleven. You can depend on us. Are you armed?"

Evan shook his head.

"As you are to be the first to enter the house it would be as well. Take this."

"This" was a neat and businesslike automatic. George Deaves shuddered at the sight of it.

The Inspector compared watches with Evan and departed in his automobile to make his arrangements.

CHAPTER XIV

NUMBER 11 VAN DORN STREET

Evan borrowed a newspaper at the bank and cut from it five pieces of the size and shape of bills. These he enclosed in an envelope and gave it to George Deaves. The latter was already longing to turn back from this expedition, but Evan gave him no opening to do so.

It was about half-past ten when they left the bank. In case they should be under observation Evan had to find some plausible reason for delay. They taxied back to the Deaves house as if they had forgotten something, and then down-town again. They dismissed their cab in MacDougall street, and proceeded on foot according to instructions.

Few people in New York could lead you to Van Dorn street, but Evan happened to have marked it during his wanderings with Simeon Deaves. It is only three blocks long, from MacDougall street to the river; one of the forgotten streets of the real Greenwich Village, not the spurious. Down the first block extends a double row of little old red brick dwellings; number eleven was presumably one of these. The remaining blocks are given up to great storehouses.

It was not any too easy to time their arrival to a second without rousing the suspicions of anyone who might be watching them. Evan dared not consult his watch too often. He made careful calculations of the time they took to walk a block. As it was he arrived in sight of the corner some seconds too soon. He used up this time by asking the way of an Italian grocer who had no English.

It was ten seconds to eleven when Evan guided the shaking George Deaves into Van Dorn street, and they mounted the steps of number eleven precisely on the hour. A great bell was tolling as Evan pulled the old-fashioned knob. In the depths of the house a bell jangled. Evan's heart was beating hard in his throat; George Deaves was as livid as a corpse—nothing strange in that, though, if anybody was watching.

The little brick house with its beautiful old doorway and wrought iron railings was the very epitome of respectability—they had left the swarming Italian quarter around the corner. With its shining brass knobs, neat window curtains and scrubbed steps one would have sworn that good, church-going people lived there—but you never can tell!

There was no wagon or van in the block that might have contained the police, but it was only a hundred feet or so to the corner. Evan had faith in the inspector. As a matter of fact, the van was about half a minute late in arriving; not a very long time, but long enough to make a fatal difference in modern tactics.

They heard steps approaching the door from within—still no sign of the police.

"Fumble for the envelope," Evan swiftly whispered. "It'll gain time."

The door was opened by a woman as respectable in appearance as her house, in short a hard-working, middle-aged American woman with an expression slightly embittered perhaps as a result of the influx of "dagoes" in her neighbourhood. She looked at them enquiringly. George Deaves fumbled assiduously in his inside breast pocket.

"What is it?" she asked sharply.

"I have something for the gentleman up-stairs," he muttered.

"Oh!" She waited five seconds more. "What's the matter?"

"I can't seem to find it."

Still no sign of the police. Evan was on tenterhooks. To create a diversion he asked:

"Has the gentleman lived here long?"

"Only took the rooms yesterday. Hasn't moved in yet."

Evan's heart went down. "Oh, then he isn't in?"

"Yes, he and his friend are up there waiting for the furniture."

She was evidently a victim rather than an accomplice. Still no sign of the police! George Deaves had not the assurance to keep up his pretended search. Evan signalled to him with a look to hand over the envelope. He did so with trembling hands.

At the same moment Evan, whose ears were stretched for sounds from within the house, heard a voice say, not loud: "They're coming over the back fence!" And another voice answered: "Beat it, then."

To Evan it was like the view halloo of the huntsman. He could not resist it. Never thinking of danger, he pushed past the astonished landlady and sprang for the stairs, pulling his pistol as he ran. As he left the stoop he had an impression of a motor van turning the corner from MacDougall.

The woman screamed, and George Deaves yelled to Evan to come back. The woman slammed the door in Deaves' face with the impulse of keeping out at least one intruder. This was unfortunate for Evan, for it delayed the entrance of the police.

As Evan went up the first flight he heard flying feet on the stairs overhead, and he made no pause on the second floor. He heard a door on the third floor slam. It was in the front. Houses of this type have a window on the stair landing and Evan had no difficulty in seeing what he was about.

On the third floor there were four doors on the hall, all closed. Evan went directly to the door he had heard close, the door of the principal front room, and throwing it open, stepped back, half expecting a fusillade from within. But none came. After a moment he stepped to the door and looked in. The room was empty. But there was a door communicating with the rear.

That was as far as his observations carried him. Suddenly a suffocating cloud was thrown over his head from behind and drawn close about him.

A voice said: "Give him one; he's heeled!"

A sickening blow descended on his skull. His strength became as water. Still he did not lose consciousness.

A different voice said: "Let him lie! Come on!"

The first and more determined voice replied:

"Bring him, I tell you! It's too good a chance to miss!"

A rope was hastily wound around Evan's body, and he was partly dragged, partly boosted up a ladder and through a scuttle to the roof. The last sound he heard from the house was the trampling of heavy feet in the entry below. He was put down on the roof. He was still incapable of helping himself, but he heard all that went on as in a dream.

He heard them cover the scuttle. He heard the more resolute voice say: "Help me lift this slab from the parapet." The other replied agitatedly: "Oh, what's the use! Come on! Come on!" The first said: "Do what I tell you! Only one man can stand on the ladder at a time: he'll have all he can do to push this up."

A heavy object was dropped on the scuttle. Evan was then picked up between the two and carried over the roofs. They laid him down on the low parapet that separated each house from its neighbour, and jumping over, picked him up again. In this manner they crossed the roofs of six houses. Evan heard vague sounds of excitement from the street below.

He was put down again. One of his captors climbed above him: he heard his voice come down. With one

pulling from above, and one boosting from below, with strenuous efforts Evan was hoisted to a higher roof. The second man climbed after. As he did so he said:

"They're out."

The other replied: "Bolt the door as you come through."

A door slammed to behind them and was bolted. Evan was jolted down many stairs. Someone began to pound violently on the door above. Other doors on the way were opened. Women exclaimed in astonished Italian. "Out of the way! Out of the way!" commanded the resolute voice, and none sought to interfere.

They ran down a long passage and down a few steps to the open street again. Evan was carried across the pavement and flung into an automobile. The door slammed. Running feet were heard from another direction. The resolute voice said:

"Beat it!"

The car jerked into motion. A hoarse voice ordered them to stop. A pistol was fired. The bold voice said:

"Step on her hard!"

The car roared down the street with wide open exhaust, turned a corner on two wheels, and another corner, and soon outdistanced all sounds of pursuit.

The power of movement was coming back to Evan, but he still lay still; he was at too great a disadvantage to put up a struggle. That which enveloped him was a thick cotton comforter; it clove to his tongue, and the stuffy smell of it filled his nostrils. Moreover, he had a lively recollection of the blackjack or whatever it was that had laid him out in the beginning. It was useless to cry out; even if he should be heard above the noise of the engine, who could stop the flying car?

As his wits cleared he set them to work to try to puzzle out the direction in which he was being carried. He could tell from the lurch of the car whether they turned to the right or the left. In the beginning they turned so many corners that all sense of direction was lost, but after a while they struck a car-line and held to it for a long time. He knew they were running in car-tracks by the smoothness of their passage, broken by occasional bumpings as they slipped out of the rails. It was a street with little traffic, for their progress was rapid and uninterrupted.

Presently he heard an elevated train roar overhead, and he knew where he was. "Greenwich street or Ninth avenue," he said to himself. As they still held to their car-line he knew they were bound up-town; headed the other way, they would have reached the end of the island before this. Bye and bye they coasted down a long hill and puffed up the other side. He guessed this to be the valley between Ninety-third street and One Hundred and Fourth, and presently knew he was right, when he heard the wheels of the elevated trains grinding on a curve high overhead. The Hundred and Tenth street curve, of course; there is no other such curve on the island.

The car turned to the right and then to the left again, still running in the rails. "Eighth avenue now," he said to himself, "and still heading north."

Later he heard a car-gong of a different timbre and the unmistakable hiss of a trolley wheel on its wire. There are no overhead wires on Manhattan Island except at the several points where the off-island railways terminate. "Union railway," Evan said to himself. "We've reached the Harlem river." Sure enough, they passed over a draw-bridge; the double clank-clank of the draw could not be mistaken. "Central Bridge," thought Evan.

But in the smoothly paved streets of the Bronx he lost every clue to his whereabouts. They ran in the car tracks for a while, then left them; they made several right and left turns and crossed other tracks. Evan guessed they were in a well-travelled motor highway for he heard other cars, but that told him nothing; there are a dozen such highways radiating from Central Bridge.

He lay against the feet and legs of his two captors. He listened eagerly for any talk between them that might furnish him with a clue. But if they conversed it must have been in whispers. On one occasion, though, he heard him

of the milder voice say:

"He's so quiet! Do you suppose he's all right?"

"Search me!" was the indifferent response. "His body is hot enough on my feet, I know."

"Hadn't I better look at him?"

"Sure! And print your face on his memory forever!"

"I believe that comforter is half suffocating him."

"What of it? You can't make a cake without breaking eggs."

Gradually the noises of the street lessened, and Evan gathered that they were getting out into the sparsely settled districts. They were bowling along rapidly and smoothly. About twenty minutes after they had crossed Central Bridge (if Central Bridge it was) the more determined voice suddenly said to the chauffeur:

"Don't turn in now. There's a car behind. Run slow and let it pass. Then come back."

This was evidently done. They turned in the road. As they came back the voice said:

"All clear. Go ahead in."

The car turned to the right and jolted over what seemed to be a shallow ditch. The road that followed was of the roughest character. If it was a road at all it was a wood-track; Evan heard the twigs crackle under the tires. They lurched and bumped alarmingly. Once they had to stop to allow the chauffeur to drag some obstruction out of the way. Evidently they had not had the car that way before, for the chauffeur said anxiously:

"Are you sure we can get through?"

The resolute voice answered: "We've got to."

The chauffeur said: "I couldn't turn around here."

The other voice replied: "There's a clear space in front of the house."

This way was not very long; a quarter of a mile, Evan guessed. They came to a stop, and the two men climbed out over Evan. He was unceremoniously dragged out feet foremost. They carried him a short distance—Evan heard grass or verdure swishing around their legs. They entered a house and laid him down on a floor, a rough worn floor.

Here Evan heard a new voice, a woman's voice with slurred accents and a fat woman's laugh. The strong-voiced man said:

"Here's a guest for you, Aunt Liza."

"Lawsy! Lawsy! What divelment you been up to now!"

A general laugh went round. To the bound Evan it had a blackguardedly and infamous sound.

He was abruptly turned over on his face. While one man held the folds of the comforter tightly round his head, the other two knelt on his back and, pulling his arms behind him, tied his wrists together. Evan put up the best struggle he could against such heavy odds. The man who had taken the principal part against him laughed.

"You see, there's life in him yet," he said.

After his wrists they tied his ankles, and got up from him. The comforter was still over Evan's head, and he was powerless to throw it off. The same voice said:

"After we're out of the room you can uncover his head, and give him air. And feed him when dinner's ready."

A door closed.

CHAPTER XV

THE CLUB HOUSE

The coverlet was thrown back from Evan's head, and breathing deep with relief, he saw bending over him a grinning, fat negress, not evil-looking, but merely simple in expression.

She exclaimed like a child: "Laws! it's a pretty man!"

"Where am I?" asked Evan.

"Deed, I do' know, chile!"

"I'll pay you well if you'll help me out of here."

"Deed, I cain't help you, honey. I'm here, but I don' know where it is no more than you do. White folks brung me here, and white folks will take me away again I reckon."

Evan looked around him. He seemed to be in a room of an ancient abandoned farm-house. There was no furniture. The ceiling was low; the great fireplace was certainly more than a century old. The smell of rotting wood was in the air; the plaster was coming down, revealing the wrought hand-split laths beneath; the floor was full of holes. There were two windows with many missing panes. The sun was streaming in. From Evan's position flat on his back on the floor he could only see the sky through the upper sashes.

In contrast with the wreckage that surrounded them the old negress was neat and clean. She wore a black cotton dress and a gingham apron and on her head was a quaint, flat-topped cap made from a folded newspaper. She seemed neither ill-disposed nor well-disposed towards Evan but regarded him simply as an amusing curiosity.

It ought not to be difficult to bend one so simple to his will, Evan thought, and set to work to conciliate her.

"Aunt Liza, you seem like a decent woman. What are you doing in a den like this?"

She affected not to understand him. "Excuse me, suh, I don' understand No'the'ners' talk very good."

"I say this is a funny looking place."

"Well, I reckon they's gwine fix it up some. Ain't had time yet. The other rooms is better than this."

"Who lives here?"

"Nobody lives here. It's a club."

"What club?"

"Ain't got no name as I knows. It's a private club."

"Well, who comes here?"

"Jes, my boss and his friends."

"What's your boss's name?"

"Mistah Henry."

"What's his other name?"

"Henry."

"What's his first name, then?"

"Henry too. Mistah Henry Henry."

Evan looked at her sharply, but her face was black and bland.

"What do they do here?" he asked.

"Same as gemmen allways does in a club I reckon; smokes and talks and plays cards and mixes juleps."

"Well, do they generally bring their guests here tied hand and foot?"

Aunt Liza dissolved into noiseless fat laughter. "No suh! No suh! That's somepin new, that is!"

"Well, who do you think of it?"

"Laws! I never thinks, suh. I leaves that to the white folks. I jus' looks on and 'preciates things!"

Evan was sure now that she was simply using her simplicity as a cover. In such a contest he could only come off second best, so he fell silent. He was anxious to get her out of the room now that he might get a glimpse out of the window.

"Somebody said something about dinner," he said. "How about it?"

"Ready d'rectly, suh. I'll go look at it."

She went out. The room had but the one door which she locked after her. After a series of struggles Evan succeeded in getting to his knees. If this sounds easy let the doubter have his hands tied behind him, and his ankles tied together, and try it. This brought his head above the level of the window-sill, but the view out the window scarcely repaid him for his trouble. It was much what one might have expected from the condition of the house, a door-yard grown high with grass and weeds, a clump of tiger-lilies, some aged lilac bushes, a few rotten palings marking the line where a fence had run.

Beyond the fence was the road, only a slight depression now in the expanse of weeds. The automobile that had brought Evan was standing there. It was a shabby little landaulet with the top up. It looked like a taxi-cab but carried no metre. Beyond the line of the road the view was shut off by second-growth woods, with a larger tree rising here and there.

It looked like a spot long forgotten of man, yet Evan doubted if it were more than eight miles from Harlem river, and the chances were that it was actually within the New York city limits. Indeed while he looked he heard the faint-far-off chorus of the noon whistles in town.

Hearing the old darkey's shuffling step in the hall, he hastily lay down again. But her sharp eyes instantly marked the change in his position and detected the dust on his knees.

"Ah reckon the sun's too strong for yo' eyes," she said dryly. There were stout, old-fashioned wooden shutters folded back into the window-frames. These she closed and hooked, and Evan was left in gloom.

There was nothing the matter with the dinner she presently brought him; corn soup, fried chicken and hominy. She fed him with the anxious solicitude of a nurse. Indeed Aunt Liza throughout evinced the greatest willingness to make friends; she was so fat and comfortable she just couldn't help it. It was only when Evan started to question her that she showed what a tricky spirit inhabited the solid frame.

After dinner Evan heard the automobile leave. He guessed that he and Aunt Liza were now alone in the tumbledown house. During the long hot afternoon she left him pretty much to his own devices. He could hear the bees humming outside, and the twitter of birds.

In stories Evan had read when the hero was captured and tied up he always succeeded in "working himself free"

at the critical moment. Well Evan patiently set to work to free his hands, but after hours of effort, as it seemed, he had only chafed his wrists and his temper and drawn the knots tighter.

The extreme stillness of the house suggested that Aunt Liza might be indulging in a siesta, and he determined to reach the window if he could. Patiently rolling and hunching himself in the desired direction, he finally made it. He then by a course of gymnastics finally succeeded in getting to his feet. With his chin he knocked up the hook that fastened the shutter, and after many attempts succeeded in pulling the shutter open with his teeth. Even then he was no nearer freedom, for the sash was down, though most of the panes were missing. And Aunt Liza came in and caught him in the act.

"Sho! honey what yo' tryin' to do!" she said reproachfully. "Turn around and sit down."

There was nothing for Evan to do but obey, whereupon she coolly seized his heels, and pulled him across the floor. She fastened up the shutter again. After that she visited him more frequently, and as long as he was a "good boy" was disposed to be quite friendly and sociable.

Towards the end of the afternoon the "club-members" began to arrive. Evidently they came on foot for there was no sound of automobile. Evan, whose only useful sense was hearing, thought he could distinguish eight or nine individuals at different times. None opened his door. The principal gathering place seemed to be the room over his head. A low-voiced hum of conversation came down to him but he could distinguish no words. Frequently there was laughter, which had a particularly devilish and unfeeling ring to Evan.

Aunt Liza served another meal.

Later she entered his room carrying a bandana handkerchief.

"What's that for?" demanded Evan.

"To blind yo' eyes, honey."

"What for?"

"The gemmen wants to see yo' upstairs."

Any prospect seemed better than lying bound alone in the semi-dark, and Evan submitted. Aunt Liza made very sure that he could not see under the bandage over his eyes. Then untying the knots that bound his ankles, she helped him to his feet, and steered him out through the door. Placing his foot on the bottom step she bade him mount the stairs. At the top she led him towards the front of the building and through a doorway into the middle of a room. Here she left him. He heard her steps recede, and heard her close the door behind her.

There he stood bound and blind facing—he knew not what. A thick excitement choked him. Nobody spoke, but his sharpened senses told him that he was surrounded by people. He heard them breathe. The continued silence was cruel on his nerves. He imagined them moving cat-footed about him, smiling meaningly at each other as they prepared to attack. If he only had a wall at his back!

"Keep cool! Keep cool!" he told himself. "They're trying to break your nerve. Stand fast! Make them speak first!"

Finally one spoke. It was he of the resolute, cynical voice. "Well, Weir, here we are! What have you got to say for yourself?"

"It's not up to me to say anything," coolly retorted Evan.

There were several chuckles in the room. Their laughter was hateful to Evan. He gathered from the sounds that the room was of considerable size. Evidently this house was a more pretentious building than he had supposed. The voices echoed as they do in a bare room.

"You are in the presence of the Ikunahkatsi," the voice went on, "that is to say of some of them. We're not at all

ill-disposed towards you personally. On the contrary we admire the pluck you've shown. It's been some fun to get the best of you. Confess, we fooled you neatly in the library that day."

Evan thought: "This is the humorous guy that writes the letters." Aloud he said: "Say your say and have done with it."

The voice resumed: "As I say, it's been a good game. We'd be willing to go on indefinitely matching our wits against yours, but the dice are loaded against us, you see. We're outside the law. With that advantage on your side you'd be bound to get us in the end."

"It's not all fun with us, you see. We have a serious purpose in view. You are in the way of that purpose and so, regretfully, we've got to remove you. You're much too good a lad to be in the pay of an old rascal like Deaves. You ought to be on our side, with the free spirits. But there you are. I know you wouldn't switch now."

"To a gang of blackmailers? No thank you," said Evan.

"It would be just as well for you to speak civilly," the voice warned him mildly. "All the gentlemen present are not as patient as I am."

"What do you want of me?" demanded Evan. "Say it."

"You are absolutely in our power here, yet we are willing to release you on a certain condition."

"What's your proposition?"

"Give me your word of honour that you will leave Simeon Deaves' employ, and have no further relations with him or his son."

Evan considered what trap might be concealed behind this seemingly fair offer.

"What will the old miser ever do for you?" the voice went on, "or his slack-twisted son for that matter? Let them stew in their own juice. Give me your word, and you'll be taken home to-night."

"And if I won't?" said Evan.

"Oh, we'll have to keep you prisoner until we have pulled off our big coup. I can't say how long that will be."

Evan said coolly: "Well, I'll see you all damned first."

There was a stir in the room. "Ah!" said the voice that fronted him, coolly. "As a young man of spirit I suppose you feel that is the only possible answer. It's too bad. You may go down-stairs." He called for Aunt Liza.

Evan was returned to his prison on the ground floor.

Aunt Liza said: "Sit down, honey. Be a good boy and let me tie yo' feet together. If you acks ugly I'll have to call the gemmen."

Evan submitted. His ankles were bound, the bandage over his eyes removed, and he was left to his own devices.

The leaden minutes slowly added themselves up to hours. For a long time in his rage he could not think clearly. He was all for defiance, defiance though his life paid the forfeit. But in the end he was bound to cool off and a craftier voice began to advise him.

"I owe this gang neither truth nor loyalty," he thought. "They struck me from behind. They carried me off. They trussed me up like a fowl for roasting. They're about a dozen to one against me. By fair means I haven't a ghost of a show against them. Very well, I'll use foul. If they are simple enough to let me lie myself out of their hands, I'll do it."

Late in the evening he was sent for again. He was eager now to face his jailors. As before his eyes were

blindfolded, and his ankles freed. Aunt Liza took him up-stairs and retired.

The mocking voice said: "Well, Weir, I didn't want to leave you in that rat-infested room all night without giving you a chance to change your mind. Wouldn't you rather sleep between your own sheets?"

"I would," said Evan coolly. "I have changed my mind. As you say, Simeon Deaves and his son are nothing to me. I will let them alone hereafter."

"Good man," said the other. "You promise to have nothing further to do with them?"

"I promise to have nothing further to do with them."

A new voice spoke up, a voice that vibrated with anger and hate: "That's too thin! He's trying to fool us! Can't you hear the lie in his voice?"

"Wait a minute," said the other, "I'll put him under oath." Addressing Evan he said mockingly: "I don't know what your attitude towards the bible is, but I'll take a chance. Will you swear it on the bible?"

It suddenly came to Evan that they were just playing with him, that they had no intention of letting him go. Moreover that hateful voice had roused a fury in him that was incapable of making further pretences.

"I'll swear nothing," he said sullenly.

"That's too bad!" said the man who faced him, with hypocritical regret. Evan was sure now that they were grinning among themselves. "I'll have to return you to your luxurious chamber."

The harsh voice broke in again: "We're taking too big a chance, leaving him here. We can't stay here ourselves, and the woman is no match for him. He'll break out."

"What do you propose then?" asked the other man.

"He'll never let up against us. Look at that stubborn jaw. It's us or him!"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Put him out of the way!"

Evan thought: "They're bluffing!"

But he heard the gentlest voice among them murmur: "Oh, no! no!" And that was more convincing than the other man's abuse. A chill struck to his breast.

The angry man turned on him who had protested. "You be quiet! Your chickenheartedness has spoiled our game more than once! What's the use of half measures? We're all good for prison sentences if we're caught. Mark my words this man will put us all behind the bars if we don't put him where he can do no harm."

He whom Evan had taken to be the leader said: "This is not a question for us to decide. Put it up to the chief."

So he was not the chief then. One of them left the room. Evan wondered about this leader who held himself so far above his men that he disdained to take part in their meetings. Meanwhile he waited for the return of the messenger as an accused murderer waits for his jury. Silence filled the room. Through the windows came the voices of the cheerful katydids and the shrill tree-toads. A sudden sense of the sweetness of life stabbed Evan like a poniard.

The man was not gone long, nor did he keep Evan waiting for the verdict. "Chief says I am right," he blurted out—it was the harsh-voiced one. "Orders are let him pass out before we go home to-night."

A pent breath escaped from all those in the room. A rush of conflicting emotions made Evan dizzy; fear, the determination not to show fear, and that unmanly sense of the terrible sweetness of life. Oh, for a wall behind his

back!

"So be it!" said the man in front of him soberly.

The other went on: "The arrangements are left to you. How are you going to do it?"

"I have the pistol that I took from him."

"What will we do with the body?"

"Let it lie. We're ready to flit from here anyway. It will be unrecognisable before it's discovered."

Evan visualised his own body putrefying, and the heart shrivelled in his breast. He clenched his teeth. All he had left was pride. "I will show nothing," he repeated to himself.

With too much suffering, the whole scene became slightly unreal to him. He heard their talk as from a little distance:

"We will draw lots. Who's got a sheet of paper? Anything will do.... This will do. Tear it in eight pieces.... No, seven. Leave C. D. out. He couldn't pull the trigger if his own life depended on it.... I mark a cross on one piece, see? Now fold each piece in four.... Call Aunt Liza up-stairs.... A hat? All right. Drop them in. Shake it up.... Don't let on anything to Aunt Liza.... Be quiet; here she is.... Aunt Liza hold this hat above your head, so.... Now come up to her one at a time and draw a paper. Do not open it until the last one is drawn."

A dreadful silence succeeded. The hard breathing of many men was audible in the room. Little cold drops sprang out in front of Evan's ears. A horrible constriction fastened on his breast, so that he could scarcely draw breath.

"Am I a coward?" he asked himself—and that caused him the sharpest pang of all. "Other men have died without flinching. Why do I suffer so?"

The resolute voice said: "Leave the room, Aunt Liza."

Evan heard the old negress shuffle out. She was the nearest thing to a friend that he had there.

"Now," cried the man, with a sharp catch of excitement.

Evan heard the crackling of the little bits of paper, and heard their breath escape them variously.

"Who has it?"

"I have!" It was the harsh voice. "It's no more than fair, since I proposed it."

"Oh, it's too horrible! It's too horrible!" sobbed the gentler voice. He ran out of the room.

"Let him go," said the harsh one. "This is no sight for kids."

"Here's the gun," said the other.

Evan thought: "Well, I won't take it standing still!"

Somewhere behind him the door was open. Putting his head down he charged for it. Instantly half a dozen pairs of hands seized him. He was borne back until he crashed against a wall. He felt of it gratefully. A deep instinctive need was supplied by the feeling of something solid at his back.

"Take your hands off him," said the principal voice.

Evan was freed, but he knew they still stood close beside him. The voice went on peremptorily. "Stand still if you don't want to be pinned against the wall like an insect."

"Unbind my eyes!" cried Evan. "Let me see what's coming to me."

The voice replied in its grim drawl: "Sorry, but we can't let you take mental pictures of us even to the other side."

"You're afraid to face me, you cowards!"

"Maybe. If you want to send any messages I'll transmit them."

Evan snatched at the chance. "I'd like to send a letter."

"All right." There was a pause while the speaker presumably found pencil and paper. "Go ahead."

Evan dictated Charley Straiker's address. "Dear Charl: I have cut loose. I have taken to the trail. You will not see me again. I leave everything I have in my room to you. It will not make you rich. With one exception. I want to send my least-bad picture to a friend. It's the one I call 'Green and Gold,' the view of the Square from my window in the morning light. There's a little frame that fits it. Write on the back of it—write—Oh, don't write anything. Wrap it up and address it to Miss Corinna Playfair. Take it to the steamboat *Ernestina* which will be lying at the pier foot of East Twentieth street on Saturday morning up to Nine-Thirty. Be good, old son. Here's how. Evan."

"Are you ready?" demanded the harsh voice unexpectedly close.

"Shoot and be damned to you!" said Evan.

He felt a little rim of cold steel pressed against his temple. With that touch all Evan's agony rolled away. After all, what was life but a jest? Thank God! he was not a coward!

The other man was still speaking—Good God would he never have done!—"I will give you the word." Then he began to count: "One, two, three——!"

Evan cried gaily: "So long, all!"

"Fire!"

There was a deafening crash. Everything went from him.

CHAPTER XVI

BACK TO EARTH

Like a thin, torn wrack of cloud scurrying across the night sky; like music so far away that the instrument and the air were alike unrecognisable; like an underexposed photograph; like the kiss of wind—such were Evan's vague impressions. "What existence is this?" he asked himself. Consciousness was sweet and he was afraid to question it for fear of slipping back into nothingness. He lay exulting in his sensations.

As these sensations became stronger the questioning spirit would not be denied. "I breathe," he thought. "I feel my breast rise. Therefore I have a body. I hear a sound like the stirring of a breeze among leaves, and another sound, a strange, faint hum. And I see, though I am surrounded by darkness. It is night and out-of-doors."

The feeling of having awakened in a new existence wore off. He accepted that which surrounded him as the same old world. He found that he was lying on a soft bed of leaves in a wood. He was wrapped in a bed covering, a cotton coverlet in fact. He did not recognise it. He instinctively felt about for his hat and found it near. He stood erect, and found that his legs were able to perform their office. He started to walk blindly through the wood. There were no stars.

A certain part of his brain had stopped working. It was that part which reasoned from memory. He remembered nothing. He did things without knowing why he did them. He came to a road; he knew it was a road, and knew what roads were for. He followed it. He was dimly conscious that he was not in a normal condition, but the fact did not distress him: on the contrary he experienced a fine lightness of spirit; it was enough for him that the blood was stirring in his veins, and the night air was cool and sweet.

Presently he heard a whirring sound familiar to his senses, and saw the oscillating reflection of a bright light around a bend in the road; an automobile. He hastily dived into the underbrush at the side. He had no reason to be afraid, but he felt a shivering repugnance to showing himself to his fellow-creatures in his present state.

When the car had passed he returned to the road. A few paces further on the trees at his right hand opened up, and a wonderful panorama was spread before him; a great, dark, gleaming river far below, and on the other side myriads upon myriads of fairy-like white lights like fireflies arrested in mid-flight. From this direction came the faint hum he had remarked.

Evan knew instinctively that this was the city, and that he must get there. He saw further that he was bound in the wrong direction. The way he was heading the lights were thinning out; the thickest clusters were behind him. His instinct further told him that where the lights were thick he would find a means of crossing the river. So he retraced his steps.

Bye and bye houses began to rise alongside the road, all dark-windowed and still. "It is very late," thought Evan. Finally the road came to an end at the gates of a ferry-house. Evan automatically produced a coin to pay his fare, and passed on board the boat. There were but few passengers. He gave them a wide berth.

Reaching the other shore he started walking towards the centre of the city. Coming to a place where trains of cars passed to and fro on a trestle overhead, he climbed a flight of steps to a station, and producing another coin, took a seat in the first train that came. He was perfectly able to see, to hear, to read the advertising cards in the train, but it was all new and inexplicable to him. Some power outside of his consciousness was directing his steps. In the brightly-lighted car he shivered under the gaze of his fellow-passengers, but nobody paid him any special regard.

At a certain station something stirred his feet, and they bore him off the train, down the steps and through certain streets to a certain door facing upon a little Park. Fronted by this door his hand dived into his pocket and brought forth a key which opened it. Like a sleep-walker he mounted to the top of the house and entered a room there. Something in the aspect of this room caused a deep sigh of satisfaction to escape him; he knew where everything was without lighting the gas. Undressing and climbing into bed he fell into a dreamless sleep.

He was awakened by a pillow flung at his head. He beheld a grinning, sharp-featured face under a shock of

lank, molasses-candy-coloured hair, a face as dear and familiar to him as the room, and he knew that the owner of it was called Charley.

"Aren't you going to get up to-day?"

"Go to Hell!" said Evan, grinning back. Oh but the sight of his friend was good to his eyes! Something real, something familiar, something that identified this poor wandering soul and gave it a locus.

"You must have made a night of it," remarked Charley.

Some deep instinct still bade Evan to conceal his condition. "What's for breakfast?" he cried, jumping up.

"Same old stunt! Beggs and acon."

"Gee! I'm as hungry as a hunter. Break me three Humpty-dumpties and fry them sunny side up."

Charley perceived nothing amiss. Breakfast was partaken of to the accompaniment of the usual airy persiflage. Evan knew very well that Charley could supply the clues to his lost identity, but he couldn't bring himself to ask him directly. He kept his ears open for any chance remarks that might throw light on the matter, but Charley's style was so flowery he didn't get much. Charley finally departed on some errand of his own.

Left alone, Evan went about his room, touching the familiar objects, looking into everything, trying to fill in that blank space in his mind. As soon as he saw the paraphernalia he knew he was a painter. His pictures interested him greatly. He knew they were his own pictures, but he had lost all sense of kinship with them. In a way it was a great advantage; he brought a fresh point of view to bear.

"I see what's the matter with them," he said to himself. "You have been trying to convey the inner spirit of things without being sufficiently sure of their outward form. What you've got to do is to study the outsides of things further, and invite the spirit to express itself."

So interested was he that he put a fresh canvas on his easel on the spot, and started to paint. Any object would serve to prove his new theory; their brown pitcher with a broken spout and a green bowl beside it on the table. An hour passed without his noticing its flight.

Charley returned.

"Hello!" he said. "Had another row with your old man?"

"Old man!" thought Evan. "Oh, nothing much," he said aloud.

"Well, I must say you take your job pretty lightly," said Charley.

Evan thought: "So I have a job."

Charley went on: "There was a story in the paper this morning about one of your lot. I brought it in. Sounds fishy."

Evan pricked up his ears.

Charley read: "A reporter assigned to police headquarters happened to see Inspector Durdan, chief of the Detective Bureau, and five plain clothes men climbing into a covered motor van on Mulberry street yesterday, and scenting a good story, followed in a taxi-cab. Naturally the Inspector does not personally take part except in raids of some importance. The chase led to No. 11 Van Dorn street. Van Dorn is an obscure little street on the far West side. An agitated individual was discovered on the steps of this house whom the reporter recognised as Mr. George Deaves, son of the multi-millionaire. He cried out to the police: 'He's gone in! He's gone in!' The police forced their way into the house. One was left at the door, and the reporter was not allowed to enter. Through the open door he saw other police inside, who must have entered from the back. They were searching the house. One called down-stairs: 'They've gone over the roofs towards MacDougall street,' whereupon several of the police started to run down

the block to the corner of MacDougall and the reporter followed. He was just in time to see two men issue from a tenement house carrying what looked like the corpse of a third between them. The body was wrapped in an old cotton comforter. They threw it in a waiting taxi and made a getaway though the police fired in the air, and ordered them to stop. At police headquarters all information was refused. At Mr. Deaves' residence word was sent out that Mr. Deaves had not been out that morning. The woman who keeps the Van Dorn street house, a Mrs. Patten, either would not or could not tell what had happened."

At this point in the story Charley looked up to see how Evan was taking it. Seeing Evan's expression he forgot to read the rest. Evan was staring into vacancy as if he saw a ghost. As a matter of fact complete recollection had returned in a great flash, and the reaction was dizzying. His first conscious act was to feel of his temple. It was whole.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Charley.

"I—I was that corpse," stammered Evan.

"Have you gone crazy?"

"Here, I've got to see about this!" cried Evan, and seizing his hat he ran out.

Evan took a taxi-cab to the Deaves house. He took out his pocket book to pay the driver. It was the first time he had used it. The money in it was intact, but something had been added, a little note. Evan read it while the driver made change.

"You've got good pluck. When the pistol missed fire we decided to let you off. Take warning. Keep away from the Deaves outfit or next time you'll get a ball."

Evan thought: "The pistol did not miss fire. It was loaded with a blank. The whole scene was staged just to break my nerve. I passed out temporarily just as a result of self-suggestion. Lord! what a weak-minded fool I was! But by God! I'll get square with them! This is how I answer their threat!"

He glared around him defiantly, hoping he was watched, and rang the bell of the Deaves house.

The servant who opened the door looked at him queerly. This successor to Alfred was more respectful, but Evan did not trust him much further. "Where is Mr. George Deaves?" asked Evan.

"I don't think you can see him just now, sir," was the answer. "He's up-stairs."

"And Mr. Simeon Deaves?"

"He's in the library, I believe."

"I'll go up there."

As they got further into the house shrill cries, muffled by several doors, reached Evan's ears.

"What's that?" he asked startled.

"Mrs. Deaves, sir," said the man demurely.

"What's the matter with her?"

"Hysterics, I believe, sir."

"Ah!" said Evan.

He found Simeon Deaves in the library. The old man greeted him with the unvarying sly grin. There was something inhuman about that grin. Nothing could move the old man much—save the threatened loss of money.

"So you got here," he said with cheerful indifference. "George told me they carried you off. How did you get clear?"

Evan told him briefly what had happened—keeping certain details to himself.

"Pooh! Sounds like a melodrama!" said the old man. "Don't believe a word of it!"

Evan, well-used to his ways by now, simply shrugged.

"There's the devil to pay here this morning," the old man went on, grinning like a mischievous boy at others' misfortunes. "Maud got a letter from them, and went into hysterics." He pointed up-stairs and laughed his noiseless laugh. "Hear her? George is up there slapping her hands and begging her to come to, and he'll pay the money. That's no way to treat hysterics. George is a fool."

Evan heard a heavy step on the stairs. "Here he comes," he said.

The old man notwithstanding his expressed contempt for his son was not anxious to face him. "Well, well, I've got to go down-stairs," he said, shuffling rapidly out by the small door.

George Deaves entered. Evan could not but feel sorry for him, absurd figure though he was. He looked as if his backbone had lost its pith; he sagged. His necktie was awry, and his hair hung dankly over his forehead, his mouth hung open; he looked like a man nauseated with perplexity.

"So you're here," he said to Evan, not any more concerned about his fate than his father had been.

Evan repeated his brief tale. George Deaves made no comment; scarcely seemed to listen to it in fact.

Evan said: "I suppose the police are looking for me?"

Deaves nodded.

"Then I had better report to them?"

This partly roused Deaves from his apathy. "Leave that to me," he said. "I will see that they are told what is necessary. I don't want any more fuss."

"Mr. Simeon Deaves tells me another letter has been received this morning."

"I can't discuss that with you," said George Deaves stiffly.

Evan's eyebrows went up. "Indeed!" he said.

The weak man could not face out Evan's indignant stare. "Oh, I don't blame you," he mumbled. "But I'm sorry I listened to you yesterday. Mrs. Deaves is heartbroken at what she considers my deception."

Evan reflected grimly that a broken heart does not customarily take itself out in hysterics, but he kept the reflection to himself.

"You will have to go," said George Deaves.

Suddenly a hurricane blew into the room in the person of Maud Deaves with her hair and kimono flying. The innocent Evan stood aghast at the terrible secrets of the boudoir that were revealed. The magnificent Mrs. Deaves was reduced by rage to the level of a furious fish-wife, but lower, for no fish-wife ever so far neglects self-interest in her rage. Mrs. Deaves' face was splotched and livid; unbridled passion had added fifteen years. She addressed her husband with a ridiculous assumption of calmness.

"They told me this person was here. I came down to see that you did your duty! This clever rascal has twisted you about his finger once too often for me!"

Evan flushed up. "Are you referring to me?"

"Yes I am!" she cried. "You've been a nuisance in the house from the first with your officious meddling! You take too much on yourself! You forget your place!"

"Good Heavens, madam, *I* didn't write the story about your marriage!" said Evan with meaning.

It never reached her. In the fury she had worked up, she had conveniently forgotten that she had written it herself. "Don't answer me back!" she cried, beside herself. "I don't know whether you did or not. I don't know whether you're more a rascal or a fool! But I know we're done with you. You're discharged, do you understand? You can go!"

Evan stared at her in frank amazement. Then he laughed. He was sorely tempted to tell what he knew, but when he looked at the crushed figure at the desk, he hadn't the heart. He wasn't going to take his dismissal from her, though.

"Mr. Deaves, do you wish me to go?" he asked.

George Deaves nodded.

"Very well," said Evan. "It suits me!" He bowed ironically to each of them, and left the room.

In the lower hall on his way out he was arrested by a cautious "Sst! Sst!" The old man appeared from around a corner. With many a furtive look over his shoulder, he pulled Evan into the small reception room off the hall.

"Did they fire you?" he asked.

"They did," said Evan grimly.

"Well, well, well!" said the old man with that unalterable grin. "You're a good boy too! I always said so! But what can anybody do with a wilful woman! So we've had our last walk together, eh?"

He really seemed to be sorry. So was Evan. In spite of all, Simeon Deaves was a funny old cuss. "Our last walk!" said Evan.

"But of course you're not worth what George pays you," he added, quickly. "Nothing like! Nothing like!"

The old fellow was incorrigible. Evan laughed. "Well, good-bye," he said without any hard feeling.

"Wait a minute. Say, I hate to think of those blackguards getting away with the money after all."

"So do I," said Evan quickly.

"Why don't you go after them yourself?"

"Where is the money to be sent to-day?"

"To the library."

"Do you remember what book was mentioned?"

"Yes. 'Carlyle's Essays,' Riverside edition."

"Well, maybe I will," said Evan. "I owe them something on my own account."

"That's right! That's right. If you land those rascals behind the bars, I'll mention you in my will."

"That's kind of you," said Evan dryly.

Evan didn't care to show his eagerness to the old man, but as a matter of fact his heart jumped at the suggested chance of getting back at the gang. He could hardly hope to do anything at the library in his own person, but Charley's assistance might be enlisted. Evan hastened home to get him.

An hour later Evan and Charley called upon the librarian who had assisted Evan and George Deaves on the former occasion. In the meantime Charley had been told the story of the previous night's happenings, and he was eager to take a hand in the game.

Evan said to the librarian: "Mr. Deaves received another demand for money this morning."

The librarian naturally assumed that Evan was still in his employ, and it was not necessary for Evan to lie in that connection.

A similar arrangement to the previous one was made. An inquiry revealed the fact that "Carlyle's Essays" had just been returned to the shelves. They were brought to the librarian's office, and Evan found that the bills were indeed in volume one. He marked them and the books were returned with instructions that they were to be notified when they were again called for. Evan and Charley waited.

They were called for in an hour, and from the same seat in the reading-room as on the former occasion, number 433. Charley and the librarian departed for the reading-room. Charley's instructions were to make very sure that the bills were actually abstracted from the book, and then to apprehend the man who took them without waiting for him to get out of the building, and to call on any of the library attendants for assistance if need be. Meanwhile Evan waited in the librarian's office, prepared to take a hand when the alarm was raised.

But no alarm was raised. Evan waited half an hour in the keenest impatience and then the librarian returned alone.

"What happened?" demanded Evan.

"Nothing—as yet," was the answer. "I took your friend around through the American History room, just as I took you that day, and explained to him the location of seat 433. Since there was no danger of his being recognised he went right into the reading-room and took a seat at the same table. I scarcely liked to show myself, so I waited in the adjoining room. I had an attendant there in case he needed help.

"But we heard no sound, and when I finally looked into the reading-room I saw that your friend had gone, and that seat number 433 was also empty. The Carlyle books were lying on the table. The money had been taken. So I came back here to tell you."

Evan was anxious and perplexed. "I don't understand what could have happened," he said. "If the crook got away in spite of Charley, why didn't he come back here to report?"

"Perhaps he's still on his trail."

"But he was told not to let him get out of the building. There's nothing for me to do I suppose, but wait here."

Evan waited in the librarian's office until after lunch, but Charley neither came back nor sent any word. By the end of that time Evan, divided between anger and anxiety, was in a fever. He decided to make a trip home.

By the time he reached Washington Square anxiety had the upper hand. The gang must have got the better of Charley he told himself, or he would have had some word. Evan had had experience of the desperate lengths to which they were prepared to go. Would they now put their final threat into execution upon his hapless friend? Evan blamed himself bitterly for having sent Charley into danger. "If I do not hear from him during the afternoon, I'll send out a general alarm at police headquarters," he thought.

When Evan opened the door of 45A, Miss Sisson, according to her custom, stuck her head out into the hall.

"I suppose you haven't seen Mr. Straiker," said Evan.

"Yes, I have," she answered. "He came in about lunch time."

"What!" said Evan staring.

"He came in and packed his trunk and took it away in a taxi-cab. Said he was going away for a few days. Wouldn't tell me where he was going. Seemed funny to me he wanted his trunk if it was only a few days, but of course I couldn't object for his rent is paid up and he left his furniture anyway, though that wouldn't bring much. I will say he acted funny though, to an old friend like me. Wouldn't give me any information."

Evan stared at the woman as if he thought she had suddenly lost her mind. Then without a word he ran up the three flights of stairs. A glance in Charley's room confirmed what she had told him. Things were thrown about in the wildest confusion. But all Charley's clothes were gone, as well as all the personal belongings that he treasured.

Evan never gave a thought to the five thousand dollars; what cut him to the quick was the suggestion that his friend had betrayed him. There is nothing bitterer.

"I needn't have been so anxious about him," thought grimly. "This is more like treachery!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE *ERNESTINA* AGAIN

The next day was Saturday, and whatever had happened to Evan, he did not forget that this was the day of the *Ernestina's* excursion, nor would he relinquish his determination to take it. In his present sore and bitter state of mind the prospect of a row was rather welcome than otherwise.

He timed himself to arrive at the East Twentieth street pier at nine-twenty, that is to say ten minutes before the steamboat was due to leave. He found Denton taking tickets at the gangway as before, but it was a very different face that Denton turned to him this morning; censure, reproach and apprehension all had a part in his expression. "He's been filled up with great stories about me," thought Evan. There was a policeman standing near Denton. Evan's eyes glittered at the sight of him.

Evan made believe not to notice any change in Denton's manner. "Good morning," he said cheerfully.

Denton made no reply.

"What can I do to-day?" asked Evan.

Denton shook his head.

Evan affected to be greatly surprised. "Why, what's the matter?"

"I guess you know," the other said sorely.

The policeman stepped up. "Is this the guy as made trouble for you last trip?" he asked hoarsely.

Denton nodded.

The policeman turned self-righteously on Evan. "Say, fella, you'd ought to be ashamed of yourself! Don't you know no better than to make trouble for a charity!"

"You've got me wrong, officer," said Evan sweetly. "I didn't make any trouble. It was the other fellows made trouble for me!"

"Yes, they did!" was the scornful rejoinder. "That's what they all say! Well, they're running this show, see? And they don't want you. So beat it!"

Evan did not suppose that any charge would be pressed against him, but even if he were arrested and allowed to go, it would end the trip as far as he was concerned. He decided upon a strategic retreat. A new idea had occurred to him.

"That's all right, old fellow," he said indulgently. "Don't apologise." He turned to go.

The policeman turned a shade pinker than his wont. "Don't you get gay, young fella! I ain't apologising to the likes of you!"

"My mistake," said Evan, laughing over his shoulder. "Keep the change!"

As he passed out of hearing the blue-coat was saying sagely to Denton: "He's a bad one, all right. You can see it."

When Evan reached the shore end of the pier, he was cut off from the view of Denton and the policeman by a pile of freight which rose between. Unobserved by them, he made his way out on the next pier. This pier like its neighbour was occupied by craft of all kinds, canal-boats, lighters, scows, etc. Evan came to a stop opposite the *Ernestina*, and looked about him.

At his feet lay a large power-boat. She had a skiff tied to her rail. A burly harbourman, the skipper evidently, sat on the forward deck with his chair tipped back against the pilot-house and his hat pulled over his nose.

"How are you?" said Evan affably.

"How's yourself?" was the non-committal reply.

"I see you've got a skiff tied alongside," said Evan.

"Remarkable fine eyesight!" said the skipper ironically.

"I'll give you a dollar if you'll put me aboard that steamboat yonder."

"Why the Hell don't you walk aboard by the gangway?"

"Well, you see it's a kind of joke I want to put up on them. I want them to think they've gone off and left me, and then I'll show myself, see?"

"I never see nothing as don't concern me."

"I'll make it two dollars."

"I ain't running my head into no noose."

"Oh, I assure you it isn't a hanging matter."

"Nothin' doin', fella."

"Well, look here; you be looking the other way, and I'll take the skiff, see? Then you won't know anything about it. You can recover it with one of the other skiffs in the slip here."

"How do I know you won't make off down the river in my skiff?"

"All you've got to do is start your engine."

"Nothin' doin'!"

"You get the two dollars first of course."

The skipper let his chair fall forward and slowly rose. He looked past Evan. "Hey, Jake!" he cried to one on the pier. "Wait a minute! I got somepin' t' say to yeh." He stepped to the stringpiece.

Evan thought he had failed—until he saw a hand poked suggestively behind the skipper. Into it he hastily thrust two dollars. The skipper nonchalantly went his ways. Evan stepped aboard the power boat, skinned over the rail, and untied the skiff.

A few strokes of the oars brought him alongside the *Ernestina*. A steamboat of this type has a wide overhang bounded by a stout timber called the "guard." When Evan stood up in his skiff his shoulders were at the level of the guard. But as the ledge it made was only three inches wide and the gunwale rising above it provided no hand hold, it was a problem how to draw himself up.

He finally drew the skiff down to the paddle-box where the interstices of the gingerbread work enabled him to get a grip. As he pulled himself up he thrust the skiff away with his foot. He climbed back along the ledge to her stern gangway and vaulting over the rail found himself on the narrow deck encircling the stern, which is in marine parlance the "quarter."

All the business of the vessel was on the pier side, and this part was deserted. The sliding door leading to the entrance hall was closed and Evan took care to keep out of the range of vision of anyone who might look out through the panes. He determined to stay where he was until she got under way. A warning whistle had already been

sounded. He made himself comfortable on a camp stool.

He chuckled to think of the sensation his appearance would cause. True, they might seize him and put him down in the hold again; they were strong enough. But at least this time they would not take him by surprise, and he doubted anyway if they would attack him before the children. Evan was strong with the children. It might precipitate a riot on board.

The *Ernestina* began to back out of the slip without anybody having stumbled on Evan's hiding-place. By this time the skipper of the power boat had recovered his skiff, and was watching Evan stolidly. Evan waved him a farewell.

Evan had no notion of risking all he had gained by venturing out too soon. He sat tight, entertaining himself as best he could with the unbeautiful panorama of Long Island City, Greenpoint (which is anything but green nowadays) and Williamsburgh. They had passed under the far-flung spans of the three bridges, rounded Governor's Island and headed down the Bay before he ventured to open the sliding door into the entrance hall.

At the moment there was no one in the hall who knew him, nor upon the stairway. He mounted unhindered. At the top he almost collided with Domville, the meekest of Corinna's brethren.

"How are you?" said Evan affably.

Little Domville stood as if rooted to the deck, his face a study in blank dismay. Then he turned without a sound, and scurried like a rabbit down the saloon and out on the after deck, presumably to spread the dreadful news. Evan chuckled.

Others in the saloon had recognised Evan. "Mister! Mister! Tell us a story! You know. About the robbers in the cave. They was just going to shoot Three-Fingered Pete for treachery!"

Evan reflected that he could hardly do better than take a leaf out of Corinna's book, and protect himself with a rampart of children. So he sat himself down and began, while they pressed close around:

"Well, Three-Fingered Pete was just about ready to give up when a shot was heard at the mouth of the cave, and a clear young voice cried, 'Hold! in the name of the U. S. cavalry!'"

The door to the after deck opened and Domville returned with Corinna and Dordess, the cynical one. Evan watched them without appearing to, and laughed inwardly at their amazed expressions. His heart beat fast at the sight of the red-haired girl. He told himself he hated her now—but perhaps hate can accelerate the pace of a heart too.

For a moment the three remained by the door in consultation, then Corinna and Domville went out on deck again, while Dordess came down the saloon, not towards Evan but on the other side. Evan was not going to let him pass in silence.

"How are you?" he called cheerfully.

Dordess sent him an ironical and courteous greeting. He had more *savoir faire* than the younger males of Corinna's family. He passed out of sight behind the engine trunk.

"Gone to get the others," thought Evan.

But Dordess presently returned alone, and nothing happened. He went back to the after deck. As the minutes passed, Evan grew anxious, not knowing what they had in store for him, but he kept the story going.

Suddenly he saw the hump of Staten Island sweep around into view through the stern windows, and the Statue of Liberty passed by on the port side. A few minutes before they had left it to starboard. Wails began to be raised in the cabin. "Oh! We're going back again! What's the matter? I don't want to go back!" No need for Evan to ask himself then what they were going to do.

He saw his opportunity when Corinna appearing in the saloon, stopped to pacify a crying child near the door. Dordess was on the other side of the saloon. Going to Corinna's side Evan said softly:

"I suppose you're going back to put me ashore."

She did not answer.

He said in the same tone: "Corinna, I will not submit to such a humiliation a second time."

"You have brought it on yourself," she answered without looking at him.

"Just the same I will not submit to it."

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked scornfully.

"I'll go down to the little deck outside the entrance hall on the port, that is the left-hand side. I will wait for you there. If you do not come to me before we pass under Brooklyn Bridge, I'll jump overboard."

She looked at him startled and searchingly. "You can't frighten me that way," she said proudly.

"I'm not trying to frighten you. I'm making a simple statement. You know what it is to have a strong will. Very well, others may have as strong a will as your own. When I say a thing I'd die rather than go back on it."

Corinna paled, but would not weaken. "I am not your keeper," she said. "You must do as you will."

"Give me five minutes talk alone with you, and I'll go ashore willingly. That's all I came for."

"I will not come. You will only make a fool of yourself."

"Very well, you have your choice," said Evan. He turned and went down the stairway.

Back on his camp-stool on the narrow deck, he felt as a man must feel after burning his bridges, a little shaky. He knew the lengths to which a stubborn will may carry a person, and he was not at all sure of her coming. Not that he meant to draw back; he spoke truth in saying he would have died first; he was a good swimmer, and he had no serious doubt of his ability to reach the shore, but he did not fancy being dragged out on a pier drenched and shoeless, and having to give an account of himself. And in that case Corinna would win out anyway. The only way he could really get the better of her would be by committing suicide, and he was not prepared to go as far as that.

To save time the *Ernestina* passed through Buttermilk channel between Brooklyn and Governor's Island. On the New York side the slips of South Ferry and Hamilton Ferry passed before Evan's eyes, and a little later Wall street ferry. The bridge was not visible to him where he sat, but he knew it was looming close ahead; the next ferry-house, Fulton Ferry, was almost directly under it. Finally he got an oblique view of the approach to the bridge with the trolley cars and trucks crawling upon it, and he stooped over to untie his shoes.

Suddenly the *Ernestina* gave a little lurch, and he looked up to see what was the matter. She was swinging around again! She turned her tail to Brooklyn Bridge and started out to sea again. Certainly if anybody had been following her course that morning they would have been justified in supposing the Captain to be slightly demented.

Evan laced up his shoes. He grinned to himself in mixed satisfaction and chagrin. Corinna had found a way to evade the choice he had given her! True, she had prevented him from jumping overboard, but she had not come to him. Clearly she preferred to endure his presence on the boat all day rather than give him five minutes alone with her.

The only thing he could think of to bring her was the power of curiosity. Perhaps if he stayed where he was she would be forced in the end to come see what had happened to him. He determined to try it anyhow.

"But as soon as she looks out of the door and sees me safe, she'll fly back," he thought. He moved his stool around to the very stern of the *Ernestina*. Here he was invisible unless one came all the way round to see.

Here his patience was indeed put to a test. He had nothing to read—he could not have applied his mind to it, if he had had, and he dared not smoke for fear of betraying himself. All he could do was to sit and study the scenery. The *Ernestina* went back through Buttermilk channel, and rounded Red Hook. She passed the Erie basin where upon the boundary fence Evan had the edification of reading a sign half a mile long extolling the virtues of a certain English condiment. And they say the English are not enterprising! She crossed the mouth of Gowanus bay and passed the villas of Bay Ridge, and still nothing happened.

But as she approached the Narrows, Evan thought he heard one of the sliding doors squeak, and his heart leaped. Jumping up he flattened himself against the deck house. There was an agonising pause. If only he dared peep around the side. Then Corinna came plump into view.

At sight of him a sharp exclamation escaped her. She hung motionless for a moment, her face fixed in a comical mask of surprise and indignation, like a child's, then she turned to run.

"Wait!" cried Evan peremptorily.

She saw that he could seize her before she gained the door. She had learned the folly of running from him. So she stood still. Drawing herself up she said:

"I have nothing to say to you. I only wished to make sure that you had not done anything foolish."

Evan glanced at the shores. Staten Island was the nearer—less than half a mile. "It is not too late," he said.

"Overboard I go," said Evan, "unless you stop here and talk to me as if I were a Christian."

She smiled scornfully.

"I shall not be fooled a second time," she said.

"You were not fooled the first time," he said quietly. He bent down and started to unlace his shoes.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"Can't swim with my shoes on," Evan said without looking up.

He heard her catch her breath, but her voice was still inflexible. "Do you think me so simple!"

"I don't think at all," said Evan with his hand on the rail. "I give you your choice. Will you stop and talk to me like a reasonable being for five minutes."

Their hard eyes battled furiously, and neither pair would down. "No!" she said, though her lips were white.

He glanced down at the water boiling from under the *Ernestina's* counter, and gathered himself for the spring.

The glance was too much for Corinna. "Evan! Evan!" she cried sharply, and put her hands out.

In a trice he had her in his arms.

"Ah, don't kiss me!" she begged, even while her lips surrendered to his.

"Ah, you nearly let me go!" murmured Evan.

"I would have gone too!"

"Then we'd both have drowned. I couldn't carry you all that way."

"I wouldn't have cared."

"I'd rather live with you, you beautiful thing! Why do you want to kill us both?"

She tore herself from his arms. "I can't help myself. This is only torment."

"But why? why? I'm of age. I have a right to know, to judge for myself. What comes between us?"

"I cannot tell you."

"And do you expect me to let you go on your mere say-so? No, by God! Not while I live!"

"You must let me go!"

"Is it a sin for you to love me?"

"It is impossible."

"That's not answering my question. Have you a husband?"

"Certainly not!" she said indignantly.

He laughed at her tone. "Is there any other man who has a better claim on you than I have?"

She shook her head.

"Well, then!" he cried in great relief. "What's the matter? There's no other reason that I would recognise."

"Have mercy on me," she murmured. "Let me go. Help me to be strong!"

"In other words help you not to love me," he said tenderly. "Not on your life! I will never let you go without a good reason."

"I will tell you everything as soon as I can."

"What does that mean, 'soon as you can'?"

"In a few days, a week maybe."

"Why not now?"

"Something must happen first."

"Corinna, don't you understand how this mystery tortures one who loves!" he cried.

"I know. I cannot help myself."

"But you promise to tell me?"

"Yes, if you will let me entirely alone until I do tell you."

"I'll do my best," he groaned. "One can't promise miracles."

"And you must not let yourself love me, until you know."

"Oh, that's clearly impossible. I would have to love you just the same if you had two or three husbands and were the wickedest woman in the world beside."

"I'm not a wicked woman!" she passionately cried.

"Why, I didn't suppose you were," he said surprised. "But it wouldn't make any difference."

"Let me go now," she begged. "This only makes it harder."

"Tell me you love me, and I'll let you go. You owe me that after having had me assaulted on the last trip."

"I didn't know what they were going to do."

"Well, tell me you love me, anyhow."

"I do not love you."

"You do! It's in your eyes, your lips, I know you do!"

"If I told you it would be impossible to manage you!"

Evan laughed a peal. "Darling stubborn child! Then kiss me of your own free will and I'll let you go."

"No! No! No!"

"Then I must kiss you."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ACCIDENT

Evan's talk with Corinna did not help him at all with the brotherhood. Whether they knew or not that he had had his five minutes with her, the fact that Corinna had ordered him put ashore and had then countermanded the order, was enough to rouse their jealous suspicions. One and all they sent Evan to Coventry. Let him work as willingly and cheerfully as he might, they ignored him: when they met they looked straight through him or over his head. Evan told himself he didn't care—and devoted his time to the children; but he was a man, and the heart in his breast was hot against them. With the children his popularity grew apace.

To-day the *Ernestina* was bound for Sandy Hook to give the small passengers a sight of the real ocean. They saw the ocean, and were not much impressed. Apparently they had expected the waves to come rolling in mountains high, whereas the ocean was as flat as Central Park lake. To be sure there was a slow swell that mysteriously heaved the *Ernestina* and troubled squeamish tummies, but it was not at all spectacular.

Later they lay in calm water inside the Hook while everybody ate. As the day wore on the weather began to thicken. The wind veered to the East and blew chill, and banks of white fog gathered on the horizon. Evan wondered why no one gave the word to return. It was hardly his place to interfere, but in the end he felt obliged to.

Tenterden happened to be the one that he spoke to. "We're going to have some dirty weather," Evan said lightly, "and we're a long way from the Bowery."

Tenterden looked him up and down. "Say, are you going to tell us how to run this show?" he asked. "That's good."

Evan shrugged and left him. "I owe you one for that, old man," he thought. "All right, my time will come."

It came sooner than he expected.

Someone did give the word, and the little *Ernestina* started back up the lower Bay at her customary head-long rate of eight miles an hour. And none too soon; the white wall of fog was creeping fast on her trail.

Evan was doing duty on the forward deck where the largest crowd of children was gathered. These were the healthiest and most obstreperous of their passengers. With his back in the point of the bow he could survey all his charges at once. No other helper was in that part of the boat at the moment. All was serene; the children for the most part swinging their legs in camp chairs and amiably disputing.

Suddenly from the very bowels of the vessel there came a horrifying report. The *Ernestina* staggered sickeningly, listed to port, and commenced to limp around in a circle like a wounded bird. Terrible smashing and rending sounds succeeded the first crash. It seemed as if the frail little vessel must fly asunder under such blows.

After a second's frozen silence on deck a dreadful chorus broke forth. Only those who have witnessed a panic at sea will know. On land one may always run from a horror; at sea there is nothing between horror and horror. When the majority of passengers are helpless children the scene surpasses horror. With sharp animal cries of fright, they ran around in blind circles, or charged in a body from side to side of the deck.

An icy hand was laid on Evan's breast. He expected to see little bodies with flying skirts drop into the water. How could he be everywhere at once? He sprang on a seat.

"Sit down, children!" he cried. "She's broken her engine, that's all. The danger's over now."

They were deaf to his voice. The most frantic of them all was not a child but a woman, who half lay on a bench with limbs stiffened out, screaming continuously like a maniac. Evan's voice was powerless against those cries. He was obliged to silence her. She fell over on the bench limply. Evan sprang up into sight of all again.

"Sit still!" he cried. "The danger's over. Sing with me!"

He raised his voice in Suwanee River, the song every child knew. A few joined in, some of the mothers helped. The frantic cries were stilled a little. The crashing sounds had ceased, but presently the roar of escaping steam renewed the confusion. Panic broke out afresh. Evan sang louder.

They looked in his steady face and ceased their aimless running about. Many joined in. The chorus swelled louder and louder. It was extraordinary what reassurance there was in the sound. The children sat down again, and presently like children, many of them were laughing at their late terrors.

The situation was saved on the forward deck, but Evan sang on with a sick anxiety in his breast. He looked up at the pilot-house. It was empty. Under the chorus he could hear ominous sounds from below, and from the saloon. And Corinna, what of her?

In a moment Corinna herself came out on deck, deathly pale but mistress of herself. Her eyes sought Evan's eyes. His heart swelled that she had thought of him in her extremity. Amazement filled her eyes at the sight of the laughing, singing children, amazement and a passion of relief. She closed her eyes, and swayed, clinging to the door-handle.

"Sing!" cried Evan quickly. "That's *your* job!"

She quickly pulled herself together, and throwing back her head let her full voice go out. It gathered up the ragged chorus, and gave the song a fresh start. Fog began to creep around the vessel.

"Inside with you!" cried Evan. "Show those crazy kids in there how to sing!"

He and Corinna herded them in by the two doors. The singing procession streaming into the cabin had an effect little short of magical on the bedlam within. Corinna changed the tune to Annie Laurie. The cabin roof rang with it.

Little Domville was rushing to and fro in well-meant but futile efforts to reassure the children. Evan seized him and planted him at one of the doors.

"Let no one go out!" he commanded. "And sing!"

Another youth rushed up. "Corinna, are you all right?"

"Sure, she's all right! Everybody's all right!" cried Evan. He put him at the other door. "Stand there and sing!"

The young man yielded instinctive obedience to the commanding voice.

Evan and Corinna passed down the saloon, Corinna singing and Evan beating time with extravagant gestures like an Italian bandmaster. Even the children who were still weeping had to laugh. They met Dordess on the way. Denton and Anway were bringing in the children from the after deck. As far as the passengers were concerned the crisis was passed—but ominous sounds still rose from below.

Evan whispered to Dordess: "Put a man at each door and at the stairway and keep the kids together. I'll go below and see what's the matter."

Dordess nodded. There was that in Evan's eye which caused all the men to look to him. Their late animosity was forgotten. He was avenged.

Evan hastened down the stairway. Below there was nobody in the after part of the vessel. Up forward he found a scene of dire confusion. Alongside the engine room the engineer lay prone on the deck with his second bending over him. Up in the nose of the vessel the remainder of the ship's company it appeared was engaged in a free-for-all fist fight with oaths and stamping.

At first Evan could not make head or tail of the fracas. Then he saw that it was the mate, a manly, up-standing young fellow and Tenderden against the four deckhands and the two firemen. But the two were more than holding

their own; the six cringed and sought to escape their blows. Evan rushed between them.

"Leave off! Leave off!" he cried. "You'll start the kids off again."

"These —— —— cowards won't work!" cried the mate.

"Let them be. We've enough without them."

The mate and Tenterden reluctantly drew off.

"First of all is there any immediate danger?" asked Evan.

"No, she's not taking water," said the mate.

"Go up to the pilot-house. There's nobody there."

"I left the Captain there," the mate said, surprised.

"He's gone. Sound a distress signal on the whistle. Tenterden, you go with him to help keep a look-out."

The two hastened up the forward hatch. Even the truculent Tenterden made no bones about taking orders from Evan now.

Evan returned to the second engineer, leaving the sulky crew to their own devices.

"What's the damage?" he asked.

The second waved a tragic hand towards the engine, and Evan saw for himself what had happened. The main shaft on the port side had broken clean through. The sudden shifting of the strain had thrown the walking-beam out of plumb, and the connecting rods had snapped off and threshed wildly about. The ruin was complete, but fortunately, all above the water-line.

"Is the chief badly hurt?" asked Evan.

"I don't think so. Got a side swipe from the connecting rod. I can't find any fracture."

"Leave him to me. Get the fires banked so you can shut off that infernal steam. Just keep steam enough to blow the whistle."

"Come on, boys," said the Second to his firemen.

They did not budge.

"Come on, boys!" said Evan. "Don't let the kids shame you! Listen to the little beggars singing up there."

The two firemen slunk aft and disappeared down their ladder.

Evan presently had the satisfaction of seeing the engineer open his eyes. He was apparently not seriously injured. Two of the deckhands carried him to his berth which was on the same deck.

Evan returned to the saloon. "All straightened out below," he said cheerfully. "The old flivver has made a complete job of her engine. We'll have to get a horse."

The children laughed. Evan said aside to Dordess: "When they're tired of singing, get up a show."

He went on up to the pilot-house. The mate and Tenterden were anxiously straining their eyes through the fog. At minute intervals the mate sounded the distress signal of five short blasts on the *Ernestina's* whistle.

"Where's the Captain?" asked Evan.

"In his room," was the curt reply.

"What's the matter with him?"

The mate made a significant gesture of turning his hand up at his mouth.

Evan whistled noiselessly. "Has he been that way all day?"

"No, he took a dram when the crash came to steady his nerves."

"Well, let him be," said Evan. "What chance have we of being picked up here?"

"Not very good," said the mate. "We're on the flats inside the Hook. Few small vessels come down here, and a big vessel couldn't come to us even if she heard us. I'm afraid it's a case of wait till the fog lifts."

"We can't keep this gang out all night," said Evan. "That's flat."

"What do you propose?"

"Somebody must go ashore in a boat to telephone for a tug."

"No easy matter to take a boat ashore in this fog."

"It can be done. Just before the fog came down on us I marked that Atlantic Highlands was due south of us, and not above a mile distant. The wind has just come in from the east, and she'll hold there a while. By keeping the wind abeam on the port side you'd hit the shore somewhere near the pier."

"Well, I'll try it."

"No; you're our only qualified seaman. You must stand by the vessel. I'll go."

"How will you get back?"

"I'll borrow or beg a compass ashore. You keep the whistle going, and if the steam gives out, ring your bell."

"I doubt if you'll get the deckhands to bring you back. They'll go quick enough."

"I'll get boatmen from the shore if they desert."

The deckhands were brought up through the forward hatch, and one of the *Ernestina's* boats was lowered away. As Evan stepped in he said:

"Don't tell them below that I've gone ashore unless you have to."

It was a ghostly trip. At a hundred yards' distance the *Ernestina* was swallowed up entire in the fog, and thereafter they proceeded blindly in a grey void. Only a little circle of leaden water was visible around them, which travelled with them as they went. At minute intervals the sound of her whistle reached them, but it was only confusing for it seemed to come now from this side, now from that. Fog plays strange tricks with acoustics. Evan steered, keeping the wake of his boat straight and the wind in his left ear.

Finally to his relief the shapes of trees swam out ahead, and he had the comfortable sensation of touching reality again. It is a thickly settled shore, and he was quickly directed to the pier and the village. Here Evan's story quickly won him help from the water-farers. To be sure, two of his men incontinently walked off, but a dozen volunteers offered to replace them. After patient telephoning he succeeded in getting the promise of a tug from Perth Amboy, and stopping only to buy out the greater part of a grocer's stock, he started back.

Within an hour of leaving the *Ernestina* he was back on board. The mate and Tenterden were still on deck. For a single moment the latter looked at Evan with friendly eyes. No vessel had come within hail, they reported.

Evan hastened down to the saloon. Corinna and her aides had the children pretty well in hand—but a cry of welcome went up at the sight of Evan. Somehow the smallest toddler on board had gathered that Evan was the man of the hour.

"A tug will be along in half an hour to pick us up," Evan announced.

Cheers from the crowd.

"Why, how do you know that?" Corinna demanded of him privately.

"Oh, I just stepped ashore to telephone," said Evan airily.

Corinna sat down suddenly. "You went ashore, and left us!"

Within the promised time they heard a deep-toned whistle searching for them in the fog.

"Wh-e-e-re?"

To which the *Ernestina* agitatedly responded: "Here! Here! Here! Here! Here!"

This duet was carried on for upwards of ten minutes. The tug appeared to be travelling around them in a circle. It was like a game of Blind Man's Buff with both sides blinded. All of a sudden she came charging out of the fog, as if a magician had evoked her. The children swarmed out on the deck with cheers. Their elders let themselves relax with thankful hearts. A furtive tear or two stole down Corinna's cheeks.

Ropes were passed to and fro, and with the tug alongside, the slow homeward journey began.

As soon as all danger was over Evan received another lesson in the curious workings of human nature. Once more the brotherhood drew away from Evan as if the latter had the plague. Evan had them in an uncomfortable hole now, for all were conscious of being under an obligation to him. That only made matters worse, for when a person is resolved to hate you, to put him under an obligation only obliges him to be more hateful. As for Corinna, she retired into herself and was inscrutable.

It was a weary journey. The supper, materials for which Evan had brought from shore, created a welcome diversion; but supper over, they were still miles from home, and the helpers were hard put to it to keep the small passengers even moderately contented. Fortunately during the last hour the greater part fell asleep where they were, on the sofas, on the floor, on a couple of camp-stools placed together.

Evan and Corinna happened to meet beside one child draped over the arm of a chair in an excruciating attitude. They straightened her out together. Corinna did not look at Evan nor speak, but from her to him he thought he felt a warm current pass—or perhaps it was only because he wished to believe it. None of the other helpers were near. The child was sleeping soundly.

"Corinna, I love you," whispered Evan.

"Please!" she murmured distressfully. "You make it so hard for me!"

He would not remind her of what he had done for her, but he felt that it would be only decent of her to show some recognition of it. "Is nothing changed?" he asked.

"Nothing can be changed."

"After all we've been through?"

"I'm deeply grateful to you, but I suppose that's another story, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well—would you be satisfied with my gratitude?"

"No!" he said promptly.

"It's all I can give you."

"Corinna, you drive me mad!"

"Ah, don't begin that again. Think of my position. Be generous!"

"You're always appealing to my better feelings," he grumbled. "I tell you, they won't stand the strain."

So absorbed were they in this little exchange that they did not hear footsteps approaching down the carpeted saloon. Looking up, they beheld Dordess approaching with the whole brotherhood at his heels: Anyway, Tenderden, Domville, Burgess, and the blonde youth whose name Evan never knew.

Corinna flushed up at the sight of them, but it was impossible to say for sure what her feelings were—mixed, probably. She looked guilty at being surprised in talk with Evan, and she was certainly angry; angry at the men, or angry at herself for betraying the blush. Evan, on the alert for trouble, smiled grimly.

Dordess was no less cynical and bland than usual, but he could not conceal the angry glitter in his eye. As for the others, they betrayed their feelings more or less according to their natures; Anyway was hard and composed; Tenderden vicious and truculent; little Domville apologetic and reproachful, and the other two, youths of no particular character, merely self-conscious and inclined to bluster.

"May we have a few words with you?" said Dordess to Corinna.

"Certainly," she said stiffly. "What's the matter?"

"I speak for all of us," said Dordess, "to save time. We wish to convey to Mr. Weir our appreciation of the fine way he acted at the time of the accident."

Evan was not deceived by these honeyed words. He saw that there was more to follow. He spoke up. "Not at all. Every one of us did his damndest, I'm sure."

Dordess went on: "We willingly grant that he's a fine fellow. Unfortunately we don't like him any better than we did before. And his fine conduct does not make it any more possible for us to work with him in future."

An involuntary exclamation of indignant reproach broke from Corinna: "Oh!" Evan was not displeased at the turn things were taking. "They're pushing her too far," he thought. "They'll drive her into my arms."

Dordess resumed: "You got us on board this boat. We look to you as our head. So we felt we ought to tell you at once how we felt, and leave it to you to act as you thought best."

Evan was conscious that there was a good deal more in this than appeared on the surface. He watched them keenly. Dordess' eyes held Corinna's unflinchingly, and Corinna's were the first to fall. Evan, seeing this, felt a sinking in his breast. "What hold has he over her?" he asked himself.

"What do you wish me to do?" asked Corinna in a muffled voice.

Evan was amazed. He had thought these men were Corinna's slaves, and here was Dordess visibly wielding the whip hand over her.

"Tell him," said Dordess, "that we very much regret it will be impossible for us to have him with us on future trips of our Association."

"You are ungenerous!" cried Corinna. "After he has saved us all!"

The six faces changed. Evan imagined that he could feel their hate like a wave.

Dordess' voice was still smooth. "I can't tell you how sorry we are. He has put us in a difficult position. But

there is no help for it."

"Suppose you address me directly instead of through Miss Playfair," said Evan, careful to keep his voice as smooth as the other man's. "Don't let the trifling service that I am supposed to have done you trouble you, but tell me what's the nature of your objection to me."

"I think you know that," said Dordess. "You have been pleased to refer to us jokingly as the 'brotherhood.' All right, we accept that word. We are a brotherhood working under a certain understood rule. Well, you've had your chance, and you refuse to be governed by our rule. You insist on playing your own hand. That's all right. But if every one of us was working for himself it would make these trips impossible. Surely you can see that."

"And if I refuse to tell him what you ask me to?" Corinna burst out angrily.

"Then the rest of us will go," said Dordess instantly. "Our minds are made up as to that."

"A strike of the brotherhood!" cried Evan mockingly.

Corinna kept her head down, and traced a pattern with the toe of her slipper.

Evan became anxious at her silence. "Let them go!" he cried. "I'll undertake to fill their places before the next trip."

To his astonishment all six men laughed scornfully. Surely there was something going on here that he did not know. He scowled.

Finally Corinna raised her head. She ignored Evan's offer. She appeared to be looking at him, but her eyes did not quite meet his. "I am sorry to appear ungenerous and ungrateful," she said like a child repeating a lesson, "but it is true, as Mr. Dordess says, notwithstanding your brave conduct to-day, it will be impossible for us to have you with us in future."

"Corinna!" cried Evan in dismay.

The six men triumphed. In the faces of the weaker ones it showed offensively; the stronger hid it, but Evan was none the less conscious of it. His self-love suffered a ghastly wound.

Dordess relentlessly resumed: "We wish to be courteous, but there must be no misunderstanding. Please tell him that if in spite of this friendly warning he persists in forcing himself on board, you will authorise us to put him ashore."

A flash from under Corinna's lowered lids suggested that Dordess would have to pay for this later on; nevertheless she repeated tonelessly: "If in spite of this friendly warning you persist in forcing yourself on board I will have to authorize them to put you ashore."

Evan stared at her in angry incredulity. He simply could not take in the fact that she was putting so public an affront on him.

Dordess could no longer make believe to hide his real feelings. He went on, sneering: "Tell him further that if he continues to force his unwelcome attentions on you, you will feel justified in appealing to us to protect you."

Corinna repeated: "If you continue to force your attentions on me, I shall be obliged to appeal to these gentlemen to protect me."

Evan suddenly went cold. His lip curled. He told himself she had killed his love dead, and he didn't give a damn anyhow. He bowed to her.

"Oh, I assure you that won't be necessary," he said ironically.

Corinna walked away down the saloon. The brotherhood straggled after, victors perhaps, but secretly uneasy in

the moment of victory. Evan was left standing alone, looking after them scornfully. The *Ernestina* blew for the pier.

CHAPTER XIX

FOUR VISITS FROM GEORGE DEAVES

As long as he was under the observation of his enemies it was possible for Evan to maintain his scornful and indifferent air, but at home and alone, his defenses collapsed. Useless for him to tell himself that the girl was not worth troubling about, that it was impossible he should love her after having received such an injury at her hands. Perhaps it was true he no longer loved her, but the wrenching out of his love had left a ghastly gaping wound in his breast. The only thing that kept him going at all was a passionate desire for revenge. Oh, to get square!

At home he had an additional cause for pain in the empty room adjoining his, though Charley's defection was somewhat overshadowed by the greater misfortune. But to be betrayed on succeeding days by his best friend and by his girl was enough to shatter any man's faith in humanity.

Next morning after breakfast he sat at his table with his head between his hands, when he was aroused by the sound of an apologetic cough in the hall outside his door. The door was open. A voice spoke his name deprecatingly.

"Here!" said Evan. "Come in."

George Deaves appeared in the doorway, and Evan was sufficiently astonished. Deaves was neatly dressed in black as for a funeral, carrying a highly-polished silk hat over his thumb. He was pale and moist with agitation, and looked not at all sure of his reception.

"I—I didn't know which door was yours," he stammered. "The woman told me to come right up."

Evan could hardly be said to be overjoyed to see his visitor, though his curiosity was somewhat aroused. "Come in," he said. "Sit down. This is an unexpected visit."

"Yes. Thank you." Deaves looked around him vaguely. "So this is where you live?"

"Not a very palatial abode, eh?" said Evan, following the other's thought.

"Not at all! Not at all!" said Deaves hastily. "I mean, very nice. Very suitable. One understands of course that a young artist has his way to make."

It was clear from his agonised and distraught eye that he had not come merely to exchange civilities. "What can I do for you?" asked Evan bluntly.

Deaves trailed off into explanations that explained nothing. "I intended to come anyway—to tell you—to express how it was—my position is very difficult—you can understand I am sure—to tell you—to tell you how sorry I was to be obliged to let you go."

"Oh, that's all right," said Evan indifferently.

"And then something happened which obliged me to come at once. I was here yesterday, but you were out."

"Yes, I was out all day," said Evan bitterly. "What has happened?"

Deaves wiped his face. "I have had another letter from those blackguards, a—a most dreadful letter!"

"Already?" said Evan.

"And so I came to you at once."

"You will pardon me," said Evan coolly, "but I do not yet see why you should come to me about it—after the manner of our parting."

"I had no one else to go to," said Deaves helplessly.

In spite of himself Evan was a little touched. "Let me see the letter," he said, holding out his hand.

Deaves passed it over and Evan read:

"Mr. George Deaves:

Dear Mr. Deaves:

Our enterprise has had its exciting side. We'd be willing to keep it up indefinitely for the pure fun of the thing were it not that it is so expensive. I mean, a large part of our takings is swallowed up in the inevitable charges. This leads us to offer you an alternative plan.

Under the present scheme we will assess you this season about forty thousand dollars, and an equal amount, or more, next year. Now we propose to save you money and ourselves trouble by asking you to endow the Ikunahkatsi once and for all. Four hundred thousand dollars is the sum required. At five per cent this is only twenty thousand a year, so you see you would save a clear half. On our part we would bind ourselves not to ask you to advance us any further sums of money on any pretext whatsoever. You will concede that heretofore we have scrupulously kept all our engagements with you. To put it humorously, it will cost you four hundred thousand dollars to get rid of us for good. Isn't it worth it? Especially now that the old gentleman has lost his efficient guardian.

We will give you until Sunday morning to think it over. If you agree to our proposal hang a flag from the pole that juts from the second story of your house, and we will send you instructions how to proceed. We are sure you will agree, but if you do not, we have further arguments to offer you.

Yours very sincerely,
THE IKUNAHKATSI."

"Same old humourist!" said Evan grimly.

"And only the day before I sent them five thousand!" groaned Deaves.

"Just the same this is a confession of weakness," said Evan. "I see that clearly. The game is getting too difficult for them."

"What would you advise me to do?"

"Ignore that letter."

"But—but what do you suppose they mean by 'further arguments'?"

"I don't know. Make them show their hand."

"Do you suppose they contemplate—er—personal violence?"

"They may intend to threaten it."

Deaves shuddered. "Suppose they took me into custody as they did you?"

"Well, they didn't do me any harm, really."

"I am not so sure—the second time——"

"They wouldn't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs," said Evan grimly.

Deaves saw nothing humorous in the illustration.

"Have you shown the letter to Mrs. Deaves?" asked Evan.

Deaves shook his head. "I suppose they will be writing to her next," he moaned.

"Your father?"

"What's the use?" Deaves struck his forehead. "My position is becoming unbearable!" he cried.

"I'm sorry for you," Evan said, thinking: "If you only had a little more backbone!"

Deaves arose lugubriously. "After all there is nothing for me to do but to ignore this letter," he said. "I suppose you do not feel inclined to help me any further in the matter."

"On the contrary, I'll be glad to," said Evan quickly. "But on my own terms. I have my own score to settle with this gang."

Deaves looked heartened. "Then if I hear from them again what is your telephone number?"

"There is no telephone in this house."

"But I may send to you?"

"By all means."

"—Er—would you mind coming down-stairs with me?" said Deaves. "The halls are so dark. And this letter has made me wretchedly nervous."

Evan went with him, concealing his smile.

In the lower hall Deaves said: "Of course I shall not venture out on foot after this. I shall always use the car." A new and dreadful thought struck him. "But then in a car one offers such a conspicuous mark to a bullet!"

"You needn't fear bullets," said Evan. "A dead man can't pay blackmail."

Deaves seemed to take little comfort from this. "What do you think about my chauffeur?" he asked anxiously. "Take a look at him. Does he look honest?"

Evan glanced through the narrow pane beside the door. "There's nothing remarkable about him," he said. "He looks like—like a chauffeur. How can one tell from a man's looks what he's thinking about?"

"Suppose they were to bribe him, and he drove me off to their lair?" stuttered Deaves. "I—I think I'd better stay home altogether hereafter."

But he was back again at nine o'clock that night in a still greater state of agitation. "Father has not come home!" he cried. "Where is he?"

"How should I know?" said Evan.

"But you accompanied him on all his walks! You know his haunts!"

"His haunts!" exclaimed Evan. "His haunts comprised the whole five boroughs of Greater New York with occasional excursions into Jersey!"

"But you must go in search of him! I cannot let the night pass and do nothing!"

"My dear sir, I wouldn't have the faintest notion where to begin. The only thing to do is to send out a general alarm through the police."

Deaves wrung his hands. "I can't do that! I can't risk another horrible newspaper sensation on top of everything else!"

"Then there's nothing to do but wait to see what happens," said Evan patiently. "If he's had an accident in the street, you will be notified."

"You think I'd be glad if something happened to him," said Deaves. "Everybody thinks so. But after all he's my father. It's the suspense that drives me out of my mind!"

"It cannot be for long. If the blackmailers have kidnapped him——"

"That is what I fear!"

"They will open negotiations in the morning. And you need not fear that anything will happen to him during the course of negotiations."

"But what good will it do to negotiate?" cried poor Deaves. "I cannot possibly meet their demands."

"Tell them so," said Evan. "Put it up to them."

"Then they'll make him suffer."

"In that case he can pay them."

"Ah, you don't know my father! Four hundred thousand dollars! He'd die rather!"

"Well, that's up to him, isn't it?" said Evan coolly.

"Ah, you have no heart!" cried George Deaves.

"My dear sir," said Evan patiently, "it is your 'heart' as you call it that these fellows are working on. They would not dare to harm Mr. Deaves, really. If they did, it would arouse public opinion to that extent we could catch and hang every man jack of them!"

"Your cold words cannot ease the heart of a son!" cried Deaves.

Evan ushered him gently towards the staircase. "Take it easy!" he said soothingly. "Wait until to-morrow. Perhaps in opening negotiations they will give us a good chance to trip them up."

Deaves returned next morning before Evan had finished his breakfast. He extended a letter in a trembling hand.

"In the first mail," he said.

Evan read:

"One of our members happened to meet Mr. Simeon Deaves on the street yesterday, and invited him to spend a few days as our guest at the clubhouse. He is with us now, and appears to be enjoying himself pretty well, but unfortunately the climate of the vicinity is very bad for him. At his age one cannot be too careful. We think he should be returned home at once. A single day's delay might be fatal. If you agree, hang out the flag at eleven, Monday. We realize that you feel you must be extra careful in regard to the old gentleman's health, because you would profit so greatly by his death. You are so conscientious! Personally we would be very glad to see you come in for a great fortune; it would enable you to put so much more into the enterprise in which we are jointly associated."

Said Evan: "Stripped of its humorous verbiage this means: 'Come across or we'll croak the old man. And you needn't think you would profit by his death because we'd come down on you harder than ever then!'"

"Isn't it awful! Isn't it awful!" gasped Deaves. "Was ever a man put in so frightful a position? What am I to do?"

"Three courses are open to you," said Evan patiently; "the first, and in my opinion the wisest, course is—to do nothing. Put it up to them."

"But my father! He will suffer for it! A rotting old house overrun with rats, you said. And such an ordeal as you went through! It might very well kill him. How can I risk it?"

"He will always have the option of freeing himself," said Evan.

"He would die rather than submit!"

Evan shrugged. "Well, we went over all that last night. Your second course would be to take that letter to the police and put the whole matter in their hands. A force of ten thousand men with the information I can give them ought to be able to locate the clubhouse before night."

"And find papa's body!"

"Well, your third course is to hang out the flag and open negotiations."

"I have nothing to negotiate with! I cannot raise a cent more!"

"Never mind; bluff them. Spin them along as far as you can, on the chance of outwitting them in the end."

"What chance would I have of outwitting them?" cried Deaves mournfully.

Evan looked at the poor distraught figure and thought: "Not much, I guess." Aloud he said: "Well, that's the best I can do for you."

"All three courses are equally impossible!" cried Deaves desperately.

"Yet you must follow one of them."

"You are no help at all!" cried Deaves. He turned like a demented person, and ran down-stairs.

Evan thought he had seen the last of him.

But on the afternoon of the following day he returned once more. He was still perturbed, but his desperate agitation had passed; there was even a certain smugness about him. Clearly something had happened to ease his mind.

"Well, what did you do?" asked Evan.

Deaves looked confused. "Well—I couldn't make up my mind what to do," he confessed. "I—I didn't do anything."

"Just what I advised," said Evan. "Then what happened?"

Deaves evaded a direct answer. "I came to ask you if you would accompany me on a little expedition to-night?"

"What for?" demanded Evan.

"Is it necessary for me to tell you? I would pay you well."

"It's not a question of pay," said Evan. "I must know what I'm doing."

"You wouldn't approve of my course of action."

"All the more reason for telling me."

Deaves still hesitated.

"Let me see the latest letter," said Evan at a venture.

Deaves stared. "How did you know there was a letter?"

"Well there always is another when the first doesn't work, isn't there?"

Deaves looking a little foolish produced a letter and handed it over. Evan read:

"The enclosed speaks for itself. You will please proceed as follows:—bearing in mind that the slightest departure from our instructions in the past has invariably been followed by disaster:

You will leave home in your car at eight P.M. Tuesday. You may bring a companion with you in addition to your chauffeur, as we realize you have not the constitution to carry this through alone and we do not wish to ask the impossible. Therefore you may bring the huskiest body-guard obtainable—but neither you nor he must bear weapons of any description.

You will proceed over the Queensboro Bridge and wait on the North side of the Plaza at the corner of Stonewall avenue until eight-thirty precisely. You will not get out of your car during this wait. You will be under observation the whole way, and we will instantly be apprised of any departure from our instructions. In that case you will have your trip for nothing and the consequences will be on your head.

At eight-thirty you will proceed out Stonewall avenue to the corner of Beechurst, an insignificant street in the village of Regina. It is about ten minutes' drive from the Plaza. You will know Beechurst street by the large and ugly stone church with twin towers on your left hand. You get out on the right-hand side and send your chauffeur back. Tell him to return to the bridge Plaza and wait for you.

When he is out of sight you proceed up Beechurst street to the right. It climbs a hill and seems to come to an end in less than a block among a waste of vacant lots. You will find, however, that it is continued by a rough road which you are to follow. It crosses waste lands and passes through a patch of woods. You will be held up on the way, but do not be alarmed. This is merely for the purpose of searching you for weapons.

In the patch of woods further along, you will find two men waiting for you. To them you will deliver the securities. They will examine them and if they are all right you will be allowed to proceed. Do not return the way you came, but continue to follow the rough road. A short way further along it will bring you to a highway with a trolley line by which you may return to the Bridge Plaza.

If you do your part Mr. Simeon Deaves will be home before morning.

THE IKUNAHKATSI."

"What was the enclosure they speak of?" asked Evan.

"A note from my father."

"Ah! May I see it?"

"I haven't it. It was addressed to Culberson, President of the Mid-City Bank."

"An order?"

"Yes, for Culberson to buy \$400,000. of non-registered Liberty bonds and deliver them to me!"

"So he gave in!" cried Evan in strong amazement. "Even Simeon Deaves values his skin more than his money!" he added to himself. "You have already secured the bonds?" he asked Deaves.

The latter nodded. "They're at home."

"By God! I hate to let those rascals get away with it!" cried Evan. "Four hundred thousand! Think of the good you could do with such a sum!"

"But they have promised to let us alone for good," said Deaves eagerly.

"They can afford to!" said Evan dryly. "It fairly drives me wild to think of them triumphing!"

"But you'll come with me?" said Deaves anxiously.

"Sure, I'll go with you. I may get a chance at them yet!"

"No! No!" cried Deaves in a panic. "That would ruin everything! You must promise me you will make no attempt against them!"

"I must be free to act as I see fit!" said Evan stubbornly.

"Then I cannot take you!"

"That's up to you," said Evan with an indifferent shrug. He turned away.

Deaves lingered in a state of pitiable indecision. "I have no one else I can ask," he said appealingly. "I beg of you to be reasonable, Weir. You must see that we are helpless against them. Promise me you will do nothing against them, and you may ask me what you like."

"I want nothing from you," said Evan coldly. "I won't promise."

"Then I must take a servant," said Deaves helplessly—"and perhaps lay myself open to fresh demands from another quarter!" He turned to go.

Evan of course was keen on going. When he saw that Deaves was actually prepared to stick to what he said, Evan gave in.

"I'll compromise with you," he said. "I promise to carry out instructions exactly as given in the letter until after the securities are handed over. After that I must be free to act as I see fit."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Deaves anxiously.

"I don't know. How can I tell? I'm hoping that something may happen to give me a clue that I may follow up later."

"Oh well, that's all right," said Deaves. "You'll be at my house before eight then?"

"I'll be there."

CHAPTER XX

THE BEGINNING OF THE NIGHT

George Deaves and Evan sat in the Deaves limousine with the package of bonds between them. Deaves was perspiring and fidgety, Evan the picture of imperturbability—not but what Evan was excited too, but the display of agitation the other was making put Evan on his mettle to show nothing. The car was lying against the curb on the North side of the Queensboro Bridge Plaza, and they were watching the hands of a clock in a bank building creep to half-past eight.

"Why do you suppose they insisted on our waiting here?" said Deaves querulously.

"Can't say," answered Evan. "I have fancied that some of their orders were just thrown in to mystify us, to undermine our morale. Possibly they stipulated we must leave this point at eight-thirty so they would know exactly when to expect us."

"That man who just passed us, how he stared! Do you suppose he could have been one of them?"

"There must be a lot of them then. Everybody stares. Like ourselves, they wonder what we're waiting here for."

On the stroke of the half hour they gave the chauffeur word to proceed out Stonewall avenue. The village of Regina is not a beautiful hamlet. Its founders had large ideas; they laid off the principal street a hundred feet wide, but the city has its own ideas about the proper width of streets, and when in the course of time the municipality took over Regina it paved but two-thirds of Stonewall avenue, leaving a muddy morass at each side. The buildings that lined this thoroughfare were something between those of a city slum and those of a Western boom town. They had no difficulty in picking out Beechurst street; the big stone church in its muddy yard was a horror.

They alighted in the middle of the street, for the chauffeur opined that if he fell off the hard pavement he'd never be able to climb back on it. They dismissed him, and watched him turn and roll out of sight.

Deaves shuddered. "I wish I was safe inside!" he murmured.

Evan took careful note of their surroundings. On the corner where they stood was a stationery store, and across Beechurst street was a saloon. "Someone watching us from in there I'll be bound," thought Evan. If he had been alone he would have gone in. Across Stonewall avenue from the saloon was the church aforementioned, and the fourth corner was vacant.

They turned up Beechurst street, which was swallowed up in unrelieved blackness a few yards ahead.

"I feel as if there were watching eyes on every side of us," said Deaves tremulously.

"They're welcome to look at me if it does them any good," said Evan lightly.

"You carry the package," said Deaves.

"Aren't you afraid I might skip with it?" said Evan teasingly.

Deaves had no humour. He hastily took the package back. Evan chuckled.

The sidewalk ended abruptly, and they took to the centre of the street. Here they found a rough and stony road grown high with weeds on either hand. Mounds of ashes and tin cans obstructed the way; an automobile would have found it well-nigh impassable. It wound across that ugly no-man's land between the pavements and the cultivated land. What with his terrors and the tenderness of his feet, Deaves made heavy going over the stones.

To complete his demoralisation, a shrill whistle presently rang out of the dark behind them. Deaves gasped and clutched Evan.

"That's only their signal that all's well," said Evan.

"This is no place for me!" moaned Deaves.

The road became a little smoother, and alongside they saw the neat rows of a market garden. Evan sniffed that curious odor compounded of growing vegetables and fertilizer. Then the road dipped into a hollow and thick bushes rose on either side. The air was sweet of the open countryside here. It was very dark under the bushes. Deaves clung to Evan's arm.

Suddenly they found themselves surrounded by several figures with masked faces. A crisp voice commanded:

"Hands up, gentlemen!"

Deaves obeyed so quickly that the package rolled on the ground. Somebody sniggered. The first voice sternly bade him to be quiet. Deaves stooped to pick up the precious package. He was ordered to let it lie. Evan and Deaves, their hands aloft, were rapidly and thoroughly frisked for weapons. Deaves gasped with terror when they touched him. The spot was so dark, Evan could make but few observations. He did see though that the men—he counted four of them—were roughly dressed, and from this he deduced that they were from the higher walks of life. Clever and successful crooks nowadays are invariably well-dressed. The rough clothes were in line with the gruff voices the men assumed. Gruffness could not hide the educated forms of speech that they used.

The search was over in a minute. "Pick up the package, gentlemen, and proceed," ordered the voice. The figures melted away in the darkness. Evan and Deaves went on. The road rose out of the hollow, and they had more light to pick their tracks. Again a whistle sounded behind them.

"The word is being passed along to those in front of us," said Evan.

After the market gardens came a patch of woods. Deaves halted at the edge and peered into the shadows.

"I cannot trust myself in there," he muttered. "I simply cannot!"

"Just as you say," said Evan. "I don't suppose they'll let us back now."

With a groan Deaves started ahead. Evan sniffed the trees gratefully.

In the thick of the woods two figures faced them. White cotton masks over their faces gave them an unearthly look. Deaves tremulously held out the package, and it was taken from his hands. No word was spoken. One man snapped on an electric flash, and in the disk of light that it threw the other hastily unwrapped the package and examined the bonds.

Now from the white papers a certain amount of light was reflected back on the man who was holding the flash, and Evan studied him attentively. He was holding a pistol in his other hand. Something familiar in the creases of the suit he wore first arrested Evan's attention. That is to say, these creases suggested the lines of a figure that Evan had often drawn and painted. When in addition he perceived a certain well-remembered involuntary twitching in the figure, amazement and incredulity gave place to certainty.

"Charl!" he cried.

The two masked figures started back. He who held the light took his breath sharply, and Evan knew he was not mistaken. The man with the bonds quickly recovered himself.

"Be quiet!" he sharply commanded.

But Evan in his anger had forgotten prudence. "Charl!" he cried. "What does this mean? Have you turned crook!"

The other man whispered in a passion: "Shoot him if he doesn't shut his mouth!"

"Yes, shoot your partner," cried Evan.

Charley shrunk back.

"Give me the gun and I'll do it," said the other man.

"Weir, for God's sake, for God's sake, for God's sake!" Deaves was gabbling in an ecstasy of terror.

With an effort Evan commanded himself. Nothing was to be gained by making a row there in the woods. Indeed he already saw how foolish he had been to betray his discovery.

The examination of the bonds was concluded. The man who had them spoke to his partner: "These are all right. Hold them here while I start the engine."

Evan, more accustomed now to the darkness of the woods, made out that at the point where they stood the road forked. In the left fork he dimly perceived the form of a car at a few paces distance. The top was down. Presently the engine started, and Evan recognised that it was the same car that had carried him off. The engine had its own rattle.

Charley said in a disguised voice: "Keep straight ahead to the right."

He started to back away from them, keeping the light playing on the agonised, fascinated face of Deaves, who stood rooted to the ground. The hand that held the light trembled a little. Suddenly it was switched off and Charley ran the last few steps that separated him from the car.

Evan involuntarily sprang forward, leaving a speechless and gasping Deaves in the road. But Evan was not thinking of Deaves then. He saw Charley take the driver's seat in the car. The noise of the engine drowned what sounds Evan's feet made. He laid hands on the back of the car as it started to move, and swung himself off the ground. His knees found the gasoline tank. He cautiously turned around and let himself down upon it in a sitting position, his hands still clinging to the folds of the lowered top above his head. As they got under way the man beside Charley blew a blast on a whistle similar to those they had heard before.

They went but slowly for the way was rough. Evan prayed that the tank beneath him might be stoutly swung to the frame. As well as he could he distributed his weight between the tank and the top. After passing over some spring-testing bumps in safety he felt somewhat reassured. If she stood that there would not be much danger on a smoother road when they hit up speed.

Emerging from the woods they turned into a farm road not so bad, and by means of the farm road they gained a dirt highway, ever increasing speed as the way became smoother. All this neighbourhood was quite unknown to Evan of course, and his point of view was somewhat restricted, being directed solely towards the rear. He watched the stars and made out that the car was choosing roads that were gradually bringing it around in a great circle. He supposed that it was bound back for town—for the "club-house," if he was lucky.

Evan had no clear idea of what he meant to do. His one purpose was to get Charley by himself. He knew the ascendancy that he possessed over that mercurial youth.

They finally struck a smooth macadam road upon which they travelled East at thirty-five miles an hour, the best, no doubt, the old car could do. It was a well-travelled road. They passed all cars bound in the same direction, and to the drivers of these cars Evan on his perch was brilliantly revealed in the rays of their headlights. With the idea of suggesting that it was all a joke, Evan waved facetiously to them. They accepted it as intended, or at any rate none of them sought to give him away. They passed through several villages, but the people on the sidewalks rarely noticed Evan, or, if they did, they merely gaped at him.

They crossed the long viaduct over the railway yards in Long Island City, and Evan began to grow anxious. If they were going to traverse the whole length of town how could he hope to avoid having the attention of the two men on the front seat called to him by the sharp-eyed small boys? They crossed the Plaza and swung out on Queensboro Bridge, keeping close to the speed limit, or edging over it a little. The drivers they passed still obligingly accepted Evan's suggestion that he was paying an election bet, or was up to some other foolishness.

They passed a limousine which looked familiar. Evan looked twice and recognized the Deaves turnout. George Deaves sat behind the glass windows, looking pale and shaken. So he had got out of the woods all right! The chauffeur stared at Evan, then grinned widely, and stepped on his accelerator. The big car came up close.

Evan saw Deaves lean forward to rebuke his chauffeur for the speed. The chauffeur called his attention to Evan. Deaves' eyes nearly started out of his head. Evan waved his hand. Deaves, with emphatic adjurations to his chauffeur to slow up, fell back on his seat and closed his eyes. "He wants to forget about me," thought Evan. The limousine gradually dropped back out of sight.

Evan's anxiety about the streets of town was presently relieved. After crossing the Bridge Plaza, where, to be sure, a number of people laughed and pointed at him but without apparently attracting the attention of the two men in front, they turned into the darkest and quietest streets. Evan soon saw that they were not bound for the club-house. Their journey through town was not long; through Fifty-eighth to Lexington; down Lexington in the car tracks to Thirty-ninth, and East again. In Thirty-ninth street the car slowed down and Evan held himself in readiness to drop off.

At the moment of stopping Evan ducked under the side of the car opposite to the curb. He heard the car-door slam and feet run across the pavement. Cautiously peering around the back he saw Charley, fully revealed in the light of a street lamp, run up the steps of a house and let himself in with a latch-key. Just before disappearing he glanced up and down the street; no other car was in sight. Evan said to himself: "He is stopping here. That is something to know."

Evan peeped over the top. To his surprise he found the car empty. The second man had dropped off at some point en route without his seeing him. Evidently he still had the securities for Charley's hands had been empty. Evan was chagrined to think of this prize slipping through his fingers; however he still had a line on Charley.

Unfortunately for Evan at this moment a gruff voice behind him said: "Hey, young man, what do you think you're doin'?"

It was a policeman who, having observed Evan's manoeuvres from across the street, had felt a perhaps not unnatural curiosity and had come over to satisfy it.

Evan, silently cursing his luck, instantly said with a confiding air: "It's just a joke, officer. Fellow I know hired this car to take his girl out, see? I think they're going to run off and be married, and I want to give them the laugh, see? All in fun."

"Well, it may be so," was the heavily facetious reply, "and again it may not. You better leave that guy be, see?"

"Just as you say," said Evan with a shrug.

He was not at all anxious to have Charley come out and find him in talk with the blue-coat, so he sauntered off down the street, the policeman following with a darkly suspicious eye. Glancing over his shoulder, Evan, to his unspeakable chagrin, saw Charley come scampering down the steps, jump in the car and start off in the other direction. In his heart Evan cursed the whole race of blue-coats.

Evan walked around the block and approached the house from the other side. The policeman was now out of sight. It was still only half-past nine, not too late conceivably to pay a call. Evan rang the bell.

The door was opened by a handsome, bold-eyed girl who had a challenging glance for any personable young male. Evan gave her look for look; she was a potential source of valuable information.

"Charley Straiker live here?" he asked.

"Yes, but he's out now."

"Do you know when he'll be in?"

"In half an hour. He's gone to the garage to put the car away."

"Sure he's coming back?"

"He just told me. In case anybody called up."

The trail was not lost then; Evan took heart. "Well, I'll wait for him," he said. "Where's his room?"

The girl gave him a provoking glance. "I don't know if I ought to let you up. I don't know you."

"Well, I'll stop and talk to you and you soon will," retorted Evan.

She tossed her head. "I can't stand here all night talking."

"What's your name?"

"Ethel Barrymore. What's yours?"

"Leo Dietrichstein."

"Some li'l jollier, aren't you?"

"I'm just learning from you, Ethel."

"Are you an artist like Mr. Straker?"

"No, I'm a Wall street broker."

"Yes you are!"

"Any rooms to rent, Ethel? I'd like to hang out where you are."

"All the hall rooms are taken."

"They would be, around you. How about a man's size room?"

"Who do you want it for?"

This sprightly exchange was cut short by a shrill voice from the basement calling: "Sa-a-d-e-e-e!"

"Darn!" muttered the girl. "I've got to go or she'll scream her lungs out!"

"Which is Charley's room?" said Evan. "I'll go up."

"Second floor rear hall," she said as she disappeared.

Her cryptic description was sufficient to anyone who knows New York rooming houses. The room was typical. Charley had not been in it long enough to give it any of his own character. You squeezed past the bed to a tiny rectangular space at the foot where there was just room enough for a bureau, a wash-stand and one chair. If the occupant had a visitor one of them must sit on the bed.

Evan sat down in the chair and filled his pipe, thinking grimly of the surprise that Charley was due to receive when he opened the door. Suppose Charley flatly refused all information, how could he make him speak? It occurred to him that it would be well to be supplied with evidence, and he began to look over Charley's things. After the way Charley had acted he had no scruples in doing so; he would not have been at all put out of countenance had Charley come in.

He scarcely expected to find anything of importance—still Charley was extraordinarily careless. Seeing a book lying on the bureau (a novel by Jack London) Evan was reminded of an old habit of his friend's of putting any paper he wished to save between the leaves of a book. He shook the book and several papers dropped out: to wit: a letter from his mother; ditto from a girl in his home town, and lastly a sheet of thin paper with typewriting upon it. Evan

put the first two back and studied the third. As he grasped the purport of it, he pursed up his lips to whistle and his eyes grew round. This was a prize indeed!

CHAPTER XXI

LATER THAT NIGHT

Evan read:

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR TUESDAY NIGHT

Members P.D. and H.B. will be on the ground not later than five o'clock Tuesday afternoon to make sure that no surprise is planted on us beforehand. P.D. will hang out in the little roadhouse marked A. on the map, where he can see anything that turns the corner, and H.B. will take up his station in the saloon B. at the other end of the road C. These two can communicate with each other by telephone if anything suspicious is observed.

Members J.T., L.A., J.M. and C.C. will proceed in two couples separately by trolley to the saloon at B. where they should stop for a drink for the purpose of showing themselves to H.B. who is watching there, and to give H.B. a chance to warn them if he has observed anything suspicious. All members must bear in mind that no chances must be taken. There is too much at stake. If anybody sees anything out of the way let him warn the others, and the operation be called off for the night. Unless warned by H.B., J.T. and the three others will proceed from the saloon to their station at the clump of bushes marked D. on the road C. They should not get there until eight-thirty as their continued presence in the neighbourhood might arouse suspicion.

Meanwhile T.D. and C.S. are to proceed in the car to the fork E. of the road by the route they have already been over. There is no need of watching the track through the woods to E. as it is not marked on any map, and could not be found except by one entering from A. or B. which will both be watched. The car must be in place, turned around and ready to run back at eight-thirty.

A most important duty devolves on H.B. who must satisfy himself that the man and his companion are not accompanied nor followed by the police. When the two pass the corner B. let member H.B. if all is well blow one long blast on his whistle as a signal to J.T. But if they are followed let H.B. blow five short blasts and take to the fields.

When J.T. gets the O.K. signal let him post his men in readiness to quietly surround the two and search them for weapons. If he gets a warning signal let him pass on a warning to J.T. and all must scatter in the market gardens and make their way home separately. After the two have been searched and sent on, J.T. will give the clear signal to T.D.

When the two arrive at the fork of the road E. member C.S. will keep them covered while T.D. takes the package and examines the contents. It is supposed that the man will bring Evan Weir as his companion, and C.S. must therefore take especial care not to betray himself by his voice.

When T.D. has satisfied himself the package is O.K. let him direct the two men to continue walking by the right-hand fork of the road, and when they have passed on, let T.D. and C.S. make their getaway in the car, signalling all clear as they start. When T.D.'s clear signal is heard let all members make their way separately to their homes. On the way back J.T. can give the word to H.B. None of the members must meet together later that night.

Meanwhile T.D. and C.S. make their way back to town by the same route they went out by, C.S. driving. T.D. after distributing the contents of the package through his various pockets, will drop off the car at any suitable spot according to his judgment, taking care that he is not under observation at the moment. He will return home, taking due precautions against being followed.

C.S. will return to his home in the car. If the car is required, a telephone message will be awaiting him there. If there is no message let him put the car up. If he is followed, it is no great matter, nothing can be brought home to him. After putting the car up let him return to his home for an hour. At the end of that time if no one has been there he can be pretty sure that he has not been traced. At eleven o'clock then, let him proceed to the club-house and report to me on the night's happenings. He can then take the old man home. A pass-word for the night will be communicated to him verbally.

Let every member commit the contents of this paper to memory and destroy his copy.

THE CHIEF.

Evan thought hard. This communication put an entirely new complexion on affairs. Far from wishing to confront Charley, Evan now desired at any cost to avoid him. If he could only succeed in following Charley to the "club-house" and in trapping the elusive chief himself, what a triumph! His heart beat fast at the very thought.

He hastened down-stairs, dreading to hear Charley's key in the door. Nevertheless he had to linger long enough to square the girl, for if Charley encountered her and she told him of his visitor it would spoil all. Evan looked up and down the street. No sign of Charley yet. He rang the bell to bring the girl.

She appeared, saying scornfully: "Oh, it's you, is it?"—but not ill-pleased by the summons.

"I hate waiting around," said Evan.

"He'll be here any minute now."

"I'm not so keen about seeing him anyhow. I'd rather visit with you."

"Quit your kidding, Leo."

"Come on out and have a soda while I'm waiting."

She hesitated, looked up and down—and succumbed. "All right. I'll have to hurry back. I don't need a hat."

Evan was careful to lead her towards Lexington, since it was from the other direction Charley would presumably appear.

They had their soda, never ceasing to "con" each other in the style that has been suggested. Sadie enjoyed it to the full; Evan on the other hand was rather hard put to it to keep up his end, for his thoughts were far away. His fits of abstraction rather added to his attractiveness in the girl's eyes; she couldn't quite make him out.

His problem was how to keep her from seeing Charley before Charley left the house for the last time, and yet be on time himself to follow Charley when he started out.

Issuing from the drug-store, Evan suggested a short walk, to which Sadie was nothing loath. He steered her through another street back to Third avenue, and managed to fetch up as if by accident before a moving-picture palace.

"Let's go in," he said carelessly. "The last show will just be beginning."

Once more Sadie hesitated, made objections—and allowed him to brush them away. Sadie was fascinated. Evan took her by the arm and marched her in in masterful style. For his own ends he chose seats in that part of the house where smoking was permitted.

To Evan's relief the picture proved to be one of which Sadie could wholly approve, and she no longer required to be entertained. She became absorbed in its unrolling. The hard eyes softened a little; clearly she was lifted out of this mundane sphere of rooming-houses and attractive, fresh young men you had to be careful with, into a realm of peculiar magnificence.

Meanwhile Evan watched the illuminated clock with which the proprietor thoughtfully provided his patrons, and made his calculations. He had to figure closely. He knew that all these picture houses let out at eleven, and they were only five minutes' walk from the rooming-house. If the show was over a little early to-night, or if Charley was a little late in starting, all his careful planning would go for nothing.

At ten minutes to eleven the drama was still going strong, with everything as yet unexplained. Evan whispered to his companion.

"I'm out of smokes. Excuse me while I get a pack at the stand."

She nodded without taking her eyes from the screen. She did not mark that he took his hat with him. He stopped not at the cigar-stand, but made his way out of the theatre. There was little chance of her following while any of the fascinating drama remained unrevealed.

He stopped in a haberdasher's and bought three of the largest size handkerchiefs for a grim purpose. Back in Thirty-ninth street he concealed himself in the area-way of a vacant house across the street from the rooming-house. Now, if only Sadie did not come back before Charley went out, and if an inquisitive policeman did not put a crimp in his plans!

A church clock struck eleven, and Charley appeared almost upon the last stroke. He slammed the door after him, and his feet twittered down the steps in style peculiarly his own. He stopped on the pavement to light a cigarette—and incidentally to look warily up and down the street. Reassured, he started quickly towards Lexington. He was an easy man to trail, gait and appearance were both so marked. Evan could hardly lose that cheap Panama hat cocked at a slightly rakish angle.

Evan let him get around the corner before he ventured out of his hiding-place. As Evan himself reached the corner of Lexington he looked back and saw Sadie turning into the block from Third. "A close shave!" he thought.

Charley was still visible hastening North with his loose-jointed stride, his "kangaroo lope" Evan had called it. He turned West in Forty-second street. This was an advantage to Evan, for Forty-second street is crowded at this hour. Charley took the more crowded sidewalk, and Evan kept the Panama in view from across the street.

They crossed the whole central part of town, breasting the current of pedestrians bound from the theatres to the terminal station. At Sixth avenue Charley went up one stairway to the elevated, and Evan up the other. The platform was crowded, obviating the greatest danger of an encounter. When a train came along Evan lost Charley for a while, for he could not risk boarding the same car of the train. But he had little doubt now where Charley was bound for: i.e., Central Bridge, the end of the line.

Up-town, when the crowd began to thin out a little; Evan satisfied himself that Charley was still safe in the next car but one ahead. "Lucky for me," he thought, "they set the only hour at night when the cars are crowded."

At the end of the line there were still many left to get off and Evan safely lost himself amongst them. Most of these people (including the Panama hat) climbed to the viaduct above to take the red trolley cars of various lines.

Charley boarded a Lafayette avenue car, but displayed an inclination to remain out on the back platform. This was a poser for Evan, but he managed with several others to crowd on the front end, which is against the rules. He found a little seat in the corner of the motorman's vestibule, where he sat down in the dark. Looking back through the car he could make out a square of Charley's striped coat through one of the rear windows. He kept his eye on that.

Charley rode clear to the end of the line at Featherbed lane. Evan, by lingering to ask the motorman a question as to his supposed direction, let him get away from the car. Eight people got off at this point. Five waited at the transverse tracks for the Yonkers car, while three, of whom Evan and Charley were two, crossed the tracks and kept on heading North by the automobile highway. They were at the extreme edge of the town in this direction. The last electric lights were behind them; only a house or two remained alongside the road, then tall woods and darkness.

There was no sidewalk; they proceeded up the middle of the road, first Charley, then the suburbanite, then Evan. Charley frequently looked over his shoulder, the pale patch of his face revealed in the receding lights. But Evan kept on boldly, confident that he could not be recognised with the lights at his back. The suburbanite turned in at one of the houses; Charley was presently swallowed by the shadow of the woods. Evan made believe to turn in at the last house, but dropped in the ditch, and crept along until he, too, gained the woods.

Running in the soft stuff at the side, pausing to listen, and running ahead again, Evan continued to follow Charley by the sound of his nervous steps on the hard road. The road turned slightly, and the lights behind them passed out of sight. The tall trees pressed close on either hand, and it was as dark below as in a cavern.

The steps ceased. Evan paused, listening. Had Charley stopped, or had he, too, taken to the soft stuff? They recommenced, grew louder, he was coming back! Evan hastily withdrew close under the bushes at the side. Charley passed him at five yards distance. In the stillness Evan could even hear his agitated breathing. In a queer way Evan felt for him. It was no joke to fancy one's self followed on such a road at such an hour. He showed pluck in thus boldly venturing back.

Evan was obliged to take into account the possibility that this whole excursion up the dark road might be a feint. He dared not let Charley out of sight and hearing. He followed him back to the turn in the road, still creeping in the soft stuff. From this point Charley's figure was outlined against the twinkling lights of the trolley terminus, and Evan waited to see what he would do.

Charley went back to the edge of the woods: stopped, listened, walked back and forth a few times, then returned towards Evan, but now, like the other man, taking care to muffle his steps in the grass alongside. Evan could only see him at moments now. He was on Evan's side of the road. Evan drew back under a thick bush.

Charley came creeping along, bent almost double with the primordial instinct of concealment. He paused to listen so close to Evan that the latter, squatting under his bush, could have reached out and touched Charley's foot. Evan breathed from the top of his lungs, wondering that the beating of his heart did not betray him. He heard Charley's breath come in uneven little jerks.

For seconds Charley stood there. Was it possible he knew an enemy was near? Evan could make out his head turning this way and that. The tension was hard on nerves. Though he lay as still as a snake it seemed incredible to Evan that Charley did not feel his nearness.

Finally he went on, and a soft, blessed breath of relief escaped Evan.

He gave him ten yards and started to follow. Charley was on the alert now; very well, he must be twice as alert and beat him at his own game. Evan followed him by the swish of his feet in the grass, by the soft brushing of leaves against his clothes, by the crackle of an occasional twig under foot, at the same time taking care to betray no similar sounds himself. The advantage was greatly with the one who followed, for he knew the other man was there, while the one in front only feared.

Evan's patient stalking was interrupted by the passage of an automobile. He was obliged to seek cover from the rays of its headlights. It bowled up the road with a gay party, laughing and talking, all unsuspecting of the drama being enacted beside the road. Before it was well by Evan was out again. For a second he had a glimpse of Charley running like a deer up the road. Then he plunged into the bushes. Whatever the automobile party thought of this apparition, they did not stop to investigate.

Evan hastened to the vicinity of the spot where he had seen Charley disappear. Lying low, he concentrated all the power of his will on the act of hearing. He was rewarded by the faintest whisper of a sound from within the woods to the left of the road. It was repeated. Someone was creeping away in that direction. Charley had left the road. A sharp anxiety attacked Evan, for his difficulties were now redoubled.

But when he sought to feel a way into the woods, he discovered a place near by where it was comparatively open. There was no underbrush. In fact a road was suggested, a former road perhaps, for it was rough and tangled underfoot. Evan's heart bounded. Could this be the track that led direct to the abandoned house? He lost all sound of Charley, but continued to press forward full of hope.

At intervals he paused to listen, but no sound such as he wished to hear reached his ears; only the whisper of the night breeze among the leaves, and the faint far-off hum of the living world. A hundred feet or so from the highway the wood-track made a turn, and the trees hemmed him all about. The darkness of the road outside was as twilight to the blackness that surrounded him here.

Suddenly a sixth sense warned Evan of danger from behind. He whirled around only to receive the impact of a leaping figure which bore him to the earth. Dazed by the fall, for a moment he was at a hopeless disadvantage. The whole weight of the other man was on his chest. Evan struck up at him ineffectually.

Charley's voice whispered hoarsely: "I'm armed. Give up, or I'll shoot you like a dog! Will you give up?"

"Never!" muttered Evan.

The effect was surprising. "Evan! You! Oh, my God!" whispered Charley. The tense body slackened for a moment. Evan, gathering his strength, heaved up and threw him off.

But Charley was quick too. When Evan reached for him he was not there. Evan, grinding his teeth with rage, scrambled for him on hands and knees. The other kept just beyond his reach. Both were confused by the utter darkness. Each time one succeeded in getting to his feet, he promptly crashed over a branch again. Evan clutched at Charley's clothes, and Charley wrenched himself free. Charley, seeking to escape Evan, collided with him and recoiled gasping. Meanwhile he never ceased imploring him in a desperate whisper. But it was something more than

the note of personal fear that actuated his pleading.

"Evan, hold up! You don't know what you're doing! Evan, listen! Let me talk to you quietly! I swear I'm on the square! Evan, for God's sake hold up, or I swear I'll have to shoot you!"

But Evan was past listening. "Throw your gun away, and stand up to me like a man!" he said thickly.

In the mad, blind scramble, Charley finally got his bearing and started to run back towards the highway. Evan plunged after him. Charley tripped and fell headlong, and Evan came down on top of him.

Charley was helpless then, for in strength he was no match for Evan. Yet he still struggled desperately. Not to escape though. His hand was in his pocket. Not for his gun, because that was already out. He managed to get the hand to his lips, and then Evan understood. The warning whistle! As Charley drew breath to blow, Evan snatched it out of his hand and flung it into the bush.

While Charley still implored him, Evan shook out a handkerchief in his teeth, and gagged him. With the other handkerchiefs that he had brought against such a contingency, he tied his hands behind his back, and tied his ankles. He then possessed himself of Charley's pocket searchlight, and with its aid found the revolver which had flown from Charley's hand upon his fall.

With his antagonist bound and helpless at his feet, Evan cooled down. He rapidly considered what he must do next. He had no means of knowing how well the old house might be barricaded, and it would be the height of foolhardiness to attempt to storm it single-handed. On the other hand, if he took the time to go for the police, the chief of the gang, warned of danger by Charley's non-arrival, might make his getaway. Perhaps he could commandeer an automobile. Late as it was, an occasional car still passed on the highway. Evan hastened back.

As he turned the bend in the road he saw the lights of a car standing in the main road with engine softly running. Evan prudently slowed down. The occupants could not possibly see him yet. They were talking. Evan listened.

One said: "Well, it's all over now, anyway."

Another replied. "Come on in, and let's see what was the matter?"

"Into that black hole? Not on your life!"

"We have flashlights."

"Yes, and a nice mark they'd make for bullets!"

This was sufficiently reassuring. Evan showed himself. He saw an expensive runabout with two young fellows in it. They burst out simultaneously:

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, I had a fight with a crook in there," said Evan. "They have a hang-out in an old abandoned house."

"Do you want any help?"

"No thanks. I've got him tied up. But I wish you'd go for the police if you don't mind."

"Sure thing! The nearest station's in Tremont, five miles over bad roads. We'll bring 'em back in half an hour!"

In his excitement the young fellow threw his clutch in, and the big car leaped down the road before Evan could give him any further particulars.

On his way back Evan felt certain compunctions at the sight of Charley lying bound in the road. After all, Charley had been his friend for many a year. He wouldn't mind saving him from the consequences of his own folly

if he could. That the police might not discover him when they came, Evan dragged him out of the road, and under a thick leafy bush to one side. Charley made imploring sounds through the gag. Evan continued along the rough track. He had the pocket flash to help him over the rough places now. In a quarter of a mile or more from the highway he came upon the dark mass of the old house rising against the night sky. It stood on a little rise in the midst of its clearing, which could scarcely be called a clearing now, for except in a small space immediately around the building the young trees were rising thickly.

It was a square block of a design somewhat freakish for a country residence, since the principal storey was above the entrance floor. There was a row of tall windows here, and above these windows an attic in the style of the eighteenth century. The tall windows evidently lighted the great room where Evan had suffered his ordeal at the hands of the Ikunahkatsi. It was in one of the back rooms on the same floor that the chief had his sanctum, he told himself. All the windows of the house were dark, but this did not prove that people were not within and awake, for Evan remembered the heavy shutters inside the windows.

He waited for a minute or two, and then began to get restless. In fact he itched for the glory of taking the chief single-handed. The letter of instructions had suggested that the chief would be alone in the building to-night, except for the old negress and the prisoner. And Evan was armed now. If he could find some way to make an entrance without giving an alarm, he believed it could be done.

He stole up to the front door on all fours. It was locked of course. He went around to the back; there were two doors here, both locked. He went from window to window. All of them had panes missing, but within each window the heavy shutters were closed and barred. He thought of cellar windows, sometimes they were forgotten. In certain places thick clumps of sumach had sprung up close to the house. Pushing behind one such clump, he stumbled on an old stone stair leading down. Once it had been closed by inclined doors, but these had rotted and fallen in. The steps led him into the cellar.

With the aid of his light he picked his way over the piles of rubbish and around the brick piers. Immense brick arches supported the chimneys of the house. They built more generously in those days. The rats scuttled out of his way. In the centre of the space there was a steep stair leading up. It looked sound. Pocketing his light, he crept up step by step and with infinite care tried the door at the top. It yielded! He was in!

All was dark and silent throughout the house. He judged that he must be in the central hall. He dared not use his light now, but felt his way towards the front. The sensation was not unlike that when he had been led through the house blindfolded. He touched the edge of the stairway, and guided himself to the foot. As he turned to mount, a sound brought the heart into his throat.

He identified it, and smiled grimly. It was a human snore and it came through the door on his left. This was the room where he had been confined, and it was more than likely old Simeon Deaves was sleeping there now.

He went up, stepping on the sides of the stair-treads to avoid making them creak. The stairway turned on itself in the middle, and at the top he was facing the front of the house again. Here he had to flash his light for a second. Immediately before him a pair of doors gave on the big room. They stood open. There were two more doors, one on each hand, both closed. Evan put out his light. As he did so a tiny ray of light became visible through the keyhole of the door on his left.

Evan dropped the light in his pocket, and took out his gun. Drawing a deep breath to steady himself, he smartly turned the handle and, flinging the door open, stepped back into the darkness. He saw in the centre of the great, bare, ruinous room an old packing case with a common lamp upon it, and a smaller box to sit on. He saw in the corner an army cot with a little figure lying upon it covered by a carriage robe, a figure which turned over and sat up at the sound of the door. He saw—Corinna!

CHAPTER XXII

TOWARDS MORNING

The shock of astonishment unmanned Evan. His pistol arm dropped weakly at his side, his mouth hung open, he stared like an idiot. To have crept into the house heart in mouth and pistol in hand, to have nerved himself to meet and overcome a desperate criminal—and then to find this! The violence of the reaction threw all his machinery out of gear; he stalled. He felt inclined to laugh weakly.

Corinna could not see him clearly, though presumably she was aware of a figure standing in the hall. She was very much affronted by the violence of the intrusion, and not in the least afraid. She sat up with her glorious hair a little tousled, and her eyes flashing like a diminutive empress's.

"Mr. Straiker, is it you? What does this mean?" she demanded.

Evan could not readily find his tongue. Amazement broke over him in succeeding waves like a surf. Corinna! Corinna here! Corinna a member of the blackmailing gang! Corinna, the chief! Oh, impossible! He was in a nightmare!

"Mr. Straiker!" repeated Corinna more sharply. "Come in at once!" She was on her feet now.

Evan's faculties began to work again. In anticipation he tasted the sweets of perfect revenge. This little creature had put an intolerable humiliation upon him. Very well, here she was absolutely in his power! Dropping the gun in his pocket, he stepped into the room smiling.

At sight of him Corinna did not cry out, but the shock she received was dreadfully evident in her eyes. She went back a step, one hand went to her breast, her lips formed the syllable "You!"—but no sound came from them. Every vestige of color faded from her face.

Evan's gaze burned her up; she was so beautiful, and she had injured him so! "So you're a member of the gang!" he said mockingly.

Corinna quickly recovered her forces. She shrugged disdainfully.

"And even the chief, it seems!"

"So it seems."

Amazement overcame him afresh. "You—you little thing!" he cried. "I cannot believe it!"

Corinna affected to look bored.

"So this was the real work of the brotherhood!" Evan went on. "Blackmail. This was why you couldn't fire them when they threatened you. A new way to raise money for philanthropic purposes, I swear! To hold up a usurer with one hand, and feed poor children with the other!"

"A usurer, yes," said Corinna contemptuously. "Your master!"

"That doesn't get under my skin," retorted Evan coolly. "No man is my master a day longer than I choose." He dissolved in amazement again. "But you! To think up such a scheme! To carry it out!"

"Oh, spare me your bleating!" said Corinna impatiently. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Turn you over to the police," he said promptly.

"Three of my friends are sleeping across the hall," she said.

So perfect was her aplomb that Evan was taken aback. He half turned, uncertainly. But as he did so, out of the tail of his eye he saw Corinna's hand go to her bosom. He whirled back with the gun in his hand again. A woman is at a serious disadvantage in drawing.

"Put your gun on the box," commanded Evan.

"I have no gun!" she cried. "I will not be spoken to so."

Evan took a step nearer her. His eyes glittered. "Put your gun on the box. Don't oblige me to use force. I should enjoy it far too well!"

With a sob of rage, she drew a little pistol from her dress and threw it on the box. Evan possessed himself of it.

"Now we'll see about the three friends across the hall," he said mockingly.

He backed out of the room. Corinna followed to the door. In her eye he read her purpose to make a dash for liberty down the stairs, and he took care to give her no opening. He flung open the door opposite and flashed his light inside the room. It was empty of course. He returned across the hall, and Corinna backed into the lighted room before him.

"They have stepped out, it seems," he said mockingly.

Corinna disdained to reply. Like a child, she was not in the least abashed when her bluff was called, but immediately set her wits to work to think of another.

"How do you purpose taking me to the police?" she asked scornfully.

"I'm not going to take you. They're coming here."

Corinna changed color. She studied his face narrowly. Evidently she decided that he was bluffing now, for she tossed her head.

"Go and sit down on the cot," he said coolly, "so we can talk quietly."

"I will not!" cried Corinna. "How dare you speak to me so!"

He was delighted with the spirit she showed. "It's too bad no one did it long ago," he said provokingly.

He approached her, and his eyes glittered again. Corinna, seething with rage, retreated, and plumped herself down on the cot.

"That's better," he said indulgently. He took the small box and, placing it against the wall, sat down and leaned back. Producing his pipe he filled it in leisurely style, affecting to be unconscious of her. Corinna's eyes blazed on him.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself?" he drawled at last. "You pretty little blackmailer!"

"You needn't insult me!" cried Corinna. Her eyes filled with angry tears.

But Evan's heart was hard. "Insult you!" he cried. "I like that! What have you been doing to me lately?"

"If you were capable of thinking, you would see that I could not have acted otherwise!" she said.

"You have me there," said Evan coolly. "For I don't see the necessity of being a blackmailer."

Corinna jumped up and stamped her foot. Her face reddened, and two large tears rolled down her cheeks. "Don't you dare to use that word to me again, you fool!"

Evan laughed delightedly. "Why shy at the word and commit the deed?"

"You know nothing of the circumstances!" she stormed. "You have neither sense nor feeling! You take all your ideas ready made from others. You are as empty as a drum!"

"Bravo!" he cried. "Keep it up if it makes you feel any better!"

"If it is a crime to extort money from a foul old robber and give it to the poor, all right, I'm a criminal! I glory in it! I would do it all over again!"

"I don't deny one has a sneaking sympathy with a life of crime," Evan said, affecting a judicial air. "But after all, law is law. You have to make your choice. I chose to stay inside the law, and naturally I have to uphold it like everybody on my side."

"You're a nice upholder of the law!" she cried. "You're just trying to get back at me!"

Evan grinned. "You're so frank, Corinna. But after all, being on the side of the law gives me an advantage now, doesn't it?"

"Yes, if you want to take the pay of a scoundrel like Deaves."

"Oh, I was fired some days ago. I'm working on my own now."

"You're just angry and jealous!"

"I dare say. I admit I don't mind your blackmailing operations half as much as the other thing."

"What other thing?"

"Those fellows on the *Ernestina*; to take advantage of their wanting you, and use them for your own ends."

"Everything was understood between us. Everything was open and aboveboard."

"Of course. But they were already enslaved, you see. And you forced them to serve your pride and arrogance. You queened it over them. That makes me more indignant than blackmailing a usurer, for the other thing's a crime against a man's best feelings, and I'm a man myself."

"You're only jealous!"

"Why should I be. I wouldn't stand for the brotherhood. I know you gave me—or I took—more than you ever gave them."

"You're a brute!"

"Why sure!"

There was a silence. Corinna kept her eyes down. It was impossible to say of what she was thinking. But her passion of anger visibly subsided. She murmured at last:

"If, as you say, you sympathise with me for getting money out of Simeon Deaves——"

"I didn't quite say that," interrupted Evan. "But it's near enough, go on!"

"Why do you want to hand me over to the police?"

It was fun to torment Corinna, and it satisfied his deep need for vengeance. But the sight of her quiet, with the curved lashes lying on her cheeks, and the soft lips drooping, went to his breast like a knife. Vengeance was suddenly appeased. Such a gallant little crook! He realised that not for a moment had he really intended to hand her over. He jumped up.

"I'm not going to send you to jail," he said. "You're going to make restitution."

Corinna stared.

"What do you mean?"

"Give me an order on Dordess for the bonds—if it is Dordess who has them, and give me your word that you will lead an honest life hereafter." He was smiling.

Corinna blazed up afresh. "Never!" she cried. "I'd die rather!"

"You *must* do it!"

"Why must I?"

"Because you're going to marry me, and naturally I want an honest woman to wife."

Corinna laughed a peal. "I'd die rather! And you know it now!"

Indeed in his heart he was not at all sure but that her Satanic pride might break her before she would give in, but he bluffed it out.

"Come on!" he said. "There's no time to lose. I have sent for the police though you make out not to believe it. I see you've been writing on the table. Sit down and write me an order for the bonds."

"Break up our organisation on your say-so? Never!"

"If you don't the police will. Come now, whatever happens you can't go on using those infatuated boys to further your own ends. That's low, Corinna; that's like offering a starving man husks."

"You have your gun in your pocket," she cried passionately. "Use it, for you'll never break my will!"

"It's not a bullet that waits you, but jail," said Evan grimly. "No grand-stand finish, but endless dragging days in a four-by-ten cell! Come on, give up the loot. You'll have to anyhow, and go to jail in the bargain!"

"It's not loot!" she cried. "It's mine! By every rule of justice and right, it's mine. Simeon Deaves robbed my father. Begged him and brought him to his grave!"

"Ha!" cried Evan, "I might have guessed there was something personal here! But someone has to lose in the warfare of business."

"This was not the chance of warfare. This was malice, cold and calculated. I'll tell you. It spoiled my childhood. Deaves and my father were workers in the same church. You didn't know, did you, that Deaves was a religious man. Oh, yes, always a pillar of some church until his avarice grew so upon him that he could no longer bring himself to subscribe. My father learned that he was using his position in our church to lend money to other members at usurious interest, and to collect it under threats of exposure. My father showed him up, and Deaves was put out of the church. He set about a cold and patient scheme of revenge, but we didn't learn this until the crash came a couple of years afterwards. He bought up,—what do you call it?—all my father's paper, the notes every merchant has to give to carry on his business. At last he presented all my father's outstanding indebtedness at once with a demand for instant payment, and when my father couldn't meet it, Deaves sold him out, and we were ruined. It killed my father and embittered my mother's few remaining years.

"That was what I grew up with. I don't know when it started, but the determination to punish him grew and grew in my mind until it crowded out every other thought. I planned for years before I did anything. I followed him. I learned all about him. His avarice went to such lengths at last that I began to see my chance to show him up. I met Dordess and the others, and the idea of the Avengers slowly took shape. There was something fine to us in the idea of making him pay to bring pleasure and health to the poor. None of us would spend a cent of his filthy money on ourselves. What have I done to Deaves to repay the crushing blows he dealt to me and mine?—a few pin-pricks, that's all. Well, it is my life. I cannot change it now."

Evan was more softened than he cared to show. "I understand," he said. "It excuses your heart, but not your head. It was so foolish to try to buck the law!"

"I can't help it," she said. "I would rather die than return what I have made that old robber disgorge. I have worked too long for this!"

Evan inwardly groaned. To reason with her seemed so hopeless. "You can't live outside the pale of the law," he said. "No man can, let alone a woman. Only wretchedness can come of it!"

"I'll take my chance," she said with curling lip. "Thank God, I have friends who are not so timid."

Evan changed his tone. "Well, never mind the right and the wrong of it," he said earnestly. "Do it because I love you. I love you with all my heart. We quarrel, but my heart speaks to yours. You must hear it. I have endured from you what I believe no man ever forgave a woman. But I forgive you. If you go to jail my life will be a desert. But go to jail you shall, unless you make restitution!"

Corinna laughed mirthlessly. "Funny kind of love!" she said.

"It is the best kind of love. I have sense enough left to realise that if I give in to you on a clear question of right it would ruin us both. We would despise each other."

"I have promised to trouble the Deaves no further," she said. "They're satisfied."

"The bonds must go back."

"I had already decided to break up the Avengers, too. Isn't that enough?"

He shook his head.

She turned away. "You ask the impossible," she said. "I'd rather die!"

"But to go to jail," he said relentlessly, "to have your beautiful hair cut off" (he was not at all sure of this, but he supposed she was not either), "to wear the hideous prison dress, to have the sickly prison pallor in your clear cheeks, and your eyes dimmed. Your best years, Corinna!"

This went home. She paled; her breath came unevenly. "You say you love me," she murmured, "and you'd hand me over to that."

"I must!"

Corinna said very low: "I love you. Isn't that enough? Costs me something to say it. Costs me my pride. It would have been more merciful to beat me with a club. I cannot entreat you. I never learned how. But—but I am entreating you. Love me, Evan. Let us begin from now. Let the past be past."

Evan was tempted then. His senses reeled. But something held fast. "I can't!" he said.

She shrank sharply. "It is useless, then," she muttered. "I will not be a repentant sinner!"

"For the sake of our love, Corinna!"

"You do not love me. You want to master me."

He groaned in his helplessness.

Suddenly an ominous peremptory knock on the front door rang through the empty house.

"The police!" gasped Evan.

"Then it's over!" said Corinna, desperately calm.

"No!" he cried. "Quick! Write! I'll get you out!"

She dragged him towards the door. "Ah, come! come!" she beseeched him.

The very heart was dragged out of his breast, but he resisted her. "Choose!" he whispered. "A living death or happiness!"

For an instant their desperate eyes contended. Corinna read in his that he would never give in. She ran to the box and scribbled three lines. The knock was repeated below.

She handed him the sheet with averted head. Evan blew out the lamp. Hand in hand they ran softly down-stairs. The knock was repeated for the third time and a gruff voice commanded:

"Open the door or we'll break it down!"

Aunt Liza was in the lower hall whimpering: "Lawsy! What you gwine do, Miss?" And behind her they heard Simeon Deaves muttering confusedly: "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

Evan breathed in Corinna's ear. "The cellar door under the stairs. You lead the woman."

He felt for Simeon Deaves, and got his hand. "Follow me," he whispered. "I'll save you."

Deaves came unresistingly, his old wits in a daze. As Evan got the cellar door open the blows were falling on the front door. He flashed his light to show his little party the way down. He came last and closed the door. As he did so the front door went in with a crash. Joining the others, Evan whispered:

"Take it easy. They'll search the rooms first."

The old man whispered tremulously: "What's the matter? I don't understand."

"Be very quiet," returned Evan. "We're taking you home now. Be quiet and there will be no publicity."

It was a magical suggestion. They heard no more from Deaves.

Meanwhile heavy feet were tramping overhead. Doors were flung open. One man ran up-stairs. There were at least three men. Evan did not think it possible they had come in sufficient force to completely surround the house. It was safe enough to flash his light in the depths of the cellar. He led the way to the foot of the stone steps. The stars showed through the broken door overhead.

Making them wait behind him, he cautiously parted the thick screen of bushes and looked out. Nothing was stirring on this side of the house. The grass and weeds were waist high down to the edge of the woods. It was less than fifty yards to shelter. Evan whispered to his little party:

"Hands and knees through the grass. Take it slow. Each one keep a hand on the ankle of the one in front. Corinna, you go first."

It was done as he ordered. Surely a more oddly-assorted party of fugitives never acted in concert to escape the law: girl, negress, multi-millionaire, and artist. Like a snake with four articulations, they wound through the grass. In the most sophisticated man lingers a wild strain; the stiff-jointed millionaire took to this means of locomotion as naturally as the negress.

As they left the house behind them they came more within the range of vision of those who were presumably watching the front and back. At any rate, while they were still fifty feet from the trees, a hoarse voice was raised from the front: "There they go!" And an answering shout came from the rear.

The four fugitives of one accord rose to their feet and dashed for the trees. Gaining the shadows, Corinna whispered:

"We must separate. You take Deaves."

Evan pressed her own revolver back in her hand, whispering: "Fire it off if you are in danger."

Seizing Deaves' hand, Evan pulled him away to the right. Corinna and Aunt Liza melted in the other direction. The old man came through the underbrush like a reaping machine, and of course the police took after them. For a moment Evan considered abandoning him. He would come to no harm, of course. But on the other hand, Evan now ardently desired to have the whole affair hushed up. He got Deaves across the rough road in safety, and on the other side, coming to an immense spruce tree with drooping branches, he dragged him under it, and they sank down on a fragrant bed of needles.

The pursuing policemen, coming to the road, instinctively turned off upon it, and Evan knew they were safe for the moment. Presently they came back, aimlessly thrashing the woods and flashing their lights, but they had lost the trail now. They were looking for a needle in a hay-stack. Evan's only fear was that they might stumble on Charley, but he heard no sounds from that direction that indicated they had done so. The sounds of searching moved off to the other side of the road, and Evan determined to go to Charley himself.

Leaving the old man with a whispered admonition to silence, Evan set off. He found Charley where he had left him under the leafy bush. Evan whispered in his ear:

"I found her. I am on your side now. The police are all around us. Make no sound!"

He unbound Charley. The latter sat up and rubbed his ankles. Whatever he thought of the new turn of affairs, he said nothing.

Evan said: "I have Deaves back here. Follow me."

Foot by foot they crept back in a course parallel to the rough road. Hearing footsteps approach, they hugged the earth. Two men passed in the road. One was saying:

"Send Wilson back in the car to the road house to telephone for enough men to surround this patch of woods. You patrol the road outside."

Evan and Charley crept away through the underbrush like foxes at the sight of the hunter.

They reached the big spruce tree without further accident. The old man greeted them with a moan of relief. Evan and Charley drew away from him a little while they consulted.

Evan said: "Corinna and Aunt Liza are somewhere in the woods across the road. We had to separate. How can we get in touch with them?"

"They'll be all right," muttered Charley. "Corinna knows this place. They're safer than we are."

"I can't leave here until I am more sure," said Evan. "Will you take the old man and put him on the way home?"

"All right."

"How will you go? I'll have to follow you later."

"The Lafayette trolley line will be watched, and the Yonkers line stops at one o'clock. We'll have to walk to Yonkers. Follow the road through the woods in the other direction, and it will put you on a regular road. Keep going in a westerly direction."

"I get you," said Evan. "Where does Corinna live?"

"What do you want to know for?" growled Charley.

"If I hear nothing from her here, I want to go to make sure she got home all right."

"Well, I won't tell you."

"Everything is changed now. I am on your side and hers."

"I hear you say it," Charley said sullenly.

Evan's sense of justice forced him to admit that Charley was justified. "Well, will you do this?" he said. "When you've got the old man off your hands, go to her place yourself, and then come to me and tell me if she's all right."

"I'll do it if she wants me to," Charley said.

"Here's your flashlight," said Evan. "I'll keep the gun a little while, in case Corinna calls for my help."

Charley pocketed the light in silence and led the old man forth from under the tree. Simeon Deaves that night was like a pet dog on a leader, passed impatiently from hand to hand.

Evan, fancying that the thick branches hindered him from hearing, crept out and lay down on the grass. The woods were not so thick in this place. This had evidently been part of the grounds surrounding the old house in its palmy days, and the spruce was a relic of those times. He heard an automobile approach in the highway, and stop at the end of the woods track. This would be the man returning from having telephoned. All sounds of the search through the woods had ceased. Evidently they had decided that the better way was to watch all outlets.

No sound from any quarter betrayed the whereabouts of Corinna and the old negress. They were swallowed up as completely as if they had taken to their burrows like rabbits. Evan's heart was with her, wherever she was. He had not the same anxious solicitude for her that one would have for an ordinary woman hunted in the dark woods, for he was well assured that Corinna was not a prey to imaginary terrors. She would be no less at home in the woods at night than he was. Still no sound came from her. He was not at all sure that she would summon him if hard pressed, but they could not take her without his hearing it.

In the end the greying sky in the East bade him consider his own retreat if he wished to avoid capture. He had committed no crime, of course, but he was very sensible of the awkwardness of trying to explain his own share in the night's doings, should he be taken. He had good hopes that Corinna had escaped by now. He started to make his way westward.

He made a wide detour around the house and struck into the rough track on the other side, travelling softly, and keeping his ears open. He had heard no searchers on this side. After a half mile or so he saw light through the trees ahead. He saw a road bounding the woods on this side, and open fields beyond.

He struck into the woods again, and took a cautious reconnaissance of the road from the underbrush before venturing upon it—the world was filled with ghostly light now. It was well that he did so, for he saw a burly individual loafing in the highway, with his eye on the end of the wood track. He wore civilian clothes, but "policeman" was written all over him.

Evan had to get across that road somehow, but it was so straight the watcher could see half a mile in either direction. And on the other side there was no cover, only cultivated fields. There was one spot some hundreds of yards north where the road dipped into a hollow and was lost to view for a short space. Evan, keeping well within the woods, made for that.

There was a stream with a bridge over it. By hugging the edge of the stream and ducking under the bridge he made the other side of the road. A field of growing corn received him.

That was his last serious hazard. In the sweet coolness of the dawn he made his way over field after field, keeping the sunrise at his back. He crossed the roads circumspectly and gave the villages a wide berth. Finally he climbed a wooded hill, and from the other side looked down into the city of Yonkers. Here he ventured to show himself openly, took a car for town, and an hour and a half later was climbing the stairs to his own room. His heart was heavy with anxiety.

When he entered he saw Charley sitting at his table with his head on his arms, asleep. Evan's heart leaped. He

shook the sleeper.

"Is she all right?" he cried.

Charley lifted a sullen and resentful face. "She got home all right," he muttered, and immediately started for the door, still swaying with sleep.

"Wait a minute," said Evan. "Here's your gun."

Charley held out his hand for it without looking at the other.

Evan no longer blamed Charley for what had seemed like treachery. Indeed, his heart was warm now towards his old friend. "Don't you want to stop and talk things over?" he said.

"I have nothing to say to you," Charley said sorely, and went on out.

Evan, with a sigh, turned bedwards.

CHAPTER XXIII

SIMEON DEAVES TURNS PHILANTHROPIST

During his long vigil beside the spruce tree a scheme for dealing out poetic justice all around had occurred to Evan. Of course one can never tell in advance how people are going to take things, but he had chuckled and resolved to try it anyhow. So full was he of his scheme, even in sleep, that he awoke in an hour, and bathed, dressed and breakfasted at his usual time.

On the slip of paper that Corinna had given Evan was written:

Thomas Dordess,
— Broadway,
Give Weir the bonds.

C. PLAYFAIR.

Evan presented himself at this address at a few minutes past nine, when offices were just opening. Dordess, it appeared, was not a journalist, as Evan had once guessed, but an architect; that is to say, an elderly architectural draughtsman, one of the race of slaves who help build other men's reputations.

Early as it was, Dordess had already been apprised of Evan's coming. Evan had only to look at him to know that. The ironic smile of the man of the world was on his lips, in his eyes the resentful hatred of a youth for his successful rival. The package of bonds was already done up and waiting, it appeared. With scarcely a glance at Corinna's note, which Evan offered him, Dordess handed it over.

"Better open it and look them over," he said bitterly.

"Time enough for that," said Evan. "I want to talk to you."

Dordess' eyebrows went up.

"Oh, I know you hate me like the devil," said Evan. "But I'm hoping you'll know me better some day. Anyhow, I want to talk to you privately for a few minutes. Is it safe here? I want to put up a scheme to you."

Dordess indicated the package. "What more is there to say?" he asked with his bitter smile.

"Better hear it," said Evan. "It may make it easier all around. Won't hurt you to listen, anyway."

"All right," said Dordess. "Can't talk here. Too many going in and out. I'll come out with you."

They ensconced themselves in an alcove of the café across the street.

"What's your scheme?" said Dordess. "Shoot!"

"Well, I gather from your generally humorous style," said Evan, "that it was you who wrote the letters for the *Ikunahkatsi*. By the way, what does *Ikunahkatsi* mean?"

"An Indian word for avengers. Yes, I wrote the letters. What of it?"

"I want you to write one more. Also another article for the *Clarion*."

"I would have to consult Miss Playfair."

"No. She mustn't know anything about it until later."

"Nothing doing, then."

"But listen——!"

Their heads drew close over the table, and for five minutes Evan talked uninterruptedly. As Dordess listened his expression changed oddly; a conflict of feelings was visible in his face; incredulity, chagrin, an unwilling admiration, and laughter.

"Damn you!" he cried at last. "It's true I hate you! I wish to God you were an out and out bad one so I could hate you right. But now you're trying to bluff me that you're a decent head! I don't believe you!"

Evan laughed. "Call my bluff," he said. "I'd do the writing myself, only it would lose all its effect in another handwriting. And I never could imitate your style."

"Very well, I'll do it," said Dordess. "Come back to my office in an hour and a half and they'll be ready."

He was as good as his word. He and Evan laughed grimly together over the result of his labours.

"Send it up by messenger," said Evan. "It will save time. I'll be on hand when it arrives."

It was past eleven when Evan rang the bell of the Deaves house. He was not without anxiety as to the reception he would receive. It was possible that the old man, when he had quieted down, might begin to remember things, and to put two and two together. However, he had to take that chance.

He learned that Simeon Deaves was not yet up, that Mrs. George Deaves was out, and her husband in the library. The latter received him with no friendly face.

"You shouldn't have come here," he said.

Evan excused himself on the score of his anxiety about the old man.

"Papa got home all right," said George Deaves. "What happened to you last night?"

Evan led him to suppose that his chase had ended in nothing. He asked a cautious question.

"Oh," said the other. "Papa told a confused story about the house where he was confined being raided by the police, and a chase through the woods. I thought maybe you were mixed up in it."

The old man had not recognized him, then. Evan was relieved. He affected to be greatly astonished.

"The police!" he said. "Who could have put them on to it? There was nothing in the paper this morning."

"No, thank Heaven!" said Deaves fervently. "Maybe his mind was wandering. I couldn't make sense of his story. I hope and pray the thing is done with now."

But poor George Deaves was due to receive a shock when the second man presently entered.

"Letter by messenger, sir. No answer."

At the sight of the superscription Deaves turned livid and fell back in his chair. He stared at the envelope like a man bewitched. He moistened his lips and essayed to speak, but no sound came out.

"What's the matter?" asked Evan when the servant had left.

"Another letter—already!" whispered Deaves huskily. "And only yesterday—four hundred thousand! What a fool I was to believe in their promises!"

"But open it!" said Evan.

"I can't—I can't face any more!"

"Let me."

Deaves feebly shoved it towards him.

Evan tore open the envelope. His cue was to express surprise, and he did not neglect it.

"Listen!" he cried. "This is extraordinary! This is not what you expect!" He read:

"Dear Mr. Deaves:

The securities came safely to hand. Many thanks for your promptness and courtesy in the matter. To be sure, your employee did not obey instructions, but as it happened, no harm came of it. We trust your father got home all right. We so much enjoyed having him with us.

Well, Mr. Deaves, this terminates our very pleasant business relations; that is to say it will terminate them, unless you are disposed to fall in with the new proposition we are about to put up to you——"

George Deaves groaned at this point.

"Wait!" said Evan. "It is not what you think!" He resumed:

"As a testimonial of our gratitude for your favours, we purpose with your approval, to apply your father's great contribution to a worthy charitable cause in his name. Let Mr. Deaves write a letter to Mr. Cornelius Verplanck, president of the Amsterdam Trust Company, according to the form marked enclosure No. 1. This to be mailed him at once. If this is done in time, the enclosure marked No. 2 will appear in all the New York evening papers.

Very sincerely,
THE IKUNAHKATSI.

P. S. It is scarcely necessary to state that Mr. Verplanck does not know the writer or any of his associates. We have chosen him simply because of his national reputation for philanthropy."

"I don't understand," murmured Deaves in a daze. "What are the enclosures?"

Evan read: "Enclosure No. 1: form of letter to be sent to Mr. Verplanck."

"Dear Mr. Verplanck:

In the course of the day you will receive from me the sum of four hundred thousand dollars in U. S. Government bonds. My wish is that you establish with this sum a fund to be known as the Simeon Deaves Trust, the income of which is to be applied to providing outings on the water for the convalescent poor children of the city. Draw the deed of trust in such a way that the donor cannot at any time later withdraw his gift. Let there be three trustees yourself (if you will be so good as to serve) myself, and a third to be selected by the other two."

Deaves stared. "And the newspaper story?" he murmured.

Evan read:

"It appears that Simeon Deaves has been the victim of an undeserved unpopularity. Instead of being the soulless money-changer, as the popular view had it, an individual without a thought or desire in life except to heap up riches, he has placed himself in the ranks of our most splendid philanthropists by the creation of the Deaves Trust, the facts of which became known to-day. A sum approximating half a million dollars has been set aside for the purpose of providing fresh air

excursions for the convalescent children of the poor. In the administration of the fund Mr. Deaves has associated with himself Mr. Cornelius Verplanck whose name is synonymous with good works. There is to be a third trustee not yet named.

"The convalescent children of the poor! It would be difficult to think of a more praiseworthy object. To bring roses back to little pale cheeks, and the sparkle to dull eyes! Those who have thought harshly of Simeon Deaves owe him a silent apology. Perhaps while people reviled him, he has been carrying out many a good work in secret. Perhaps that was his way of enjoying a joke at the expense of his detractors.

"When approached to-day Mr. Deaves with characteristic modesty, refused to say a word on the subject, referring all inquiries to his associate Mr. Verplanck. Mr. Verplanck said: (*Add interview Verplanck.*)"

Deaves rose out of his chair. His gaze was a little wild. "Do you suppose—they would really print that—about my father?" he gasped.

"They say they will," said Evan with a disinterested air.

"I—I can't believe it! It's a joke of some kind!"

"It's worth trying. They don't ask for anything."

"What am I to do?" cried Deaves distractedly.

"Put it up to your father."

"He would never consent!"

"Why not? The money's gone anyway. He might as well have the reputation of a philanthropist. Won't cost any more."

"He *would* consent! That's the worst of it. He'd write that letter to Verplanck. Then as soon as Verplanck got the bonds he'd go to him and demand them back. There'd be a horrible scandal then!"

This was a possibility that had not occurred to Evan. His spirits went down. At the moment no way of getting around the difficulty occurred to him.

But George Deaves visibly nerved himself to make a resolution. "I'll write the letter myself!" he said. "I'll create the trust in Papa's name. I won't tell him anything about it until it's too late for him to withdraw. He couldn't get the money back anyhow, if I sent it to Verplanck as from myself."

Evan was quick to see the advantages of this arrangement, but he took care not to show too much eagerness. "Very good," he said, "if you are willing to take the responsibility."

A round pink spot showed in either of Deaves' waxy cheeks. "Willing!" he said, with more spirit than Evan had ever seen him display. "I'd do anything, *anything*, to get such a story in the papers! It will make the family! And how pleased Mrs. Deaves will be!"

Evan had his own ideas as to that, but he did not voice them.

Deaves wrote the letter.

"Would you mind posting it on your way out?" he said.

"I'll take it directly to Mr. Verplanck's office, since time is an object," said Evan casually.

"If you will be so good," said Deaves. A sudden terrified thought arrested him in the act of turning over the letter. "But suppose the bonds are not forthcoming?" he said. "Could Verplanck come down on me for them?"

"Certainly not," said Evan. "His concern in the matter doesn't begin until he gets the securities."

"Well, I'll take a chance," said Deaves, handing over the letter.

It is hardly necessary to state that Mr. Verplanck received both the letter and the bonds in short order.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

The Simeon Deaves story began to appear in the editions that came out at four o'clock that afternoon. Every paper in New York featured it. The clever re-write men did their best on it, and the accounts varied, though the main facts remained the same. Many of the papers ran a two-column cut. Evan bought them all and retired to his room to await developments.

The first came in the shape of a note from George Deaves, reading:

"The bonds were delivered to Mr. Verplanck shortly after my note. He telephoned me, and I have just returned from seeing him. I suggested you as the third member of the trust, to which he was agreeable. You will be in charge of the administration, and a proper salary will be paid you out of the fund. If you are agreeable please see Mr. Verplanck tomorrow at eleven. Papa has been out since lunch. I shall not mention to him that you had any foreknowledge of the affair, so he won't suspect any collusion between us.

G. D."

Evan answered:

"I accept with pleasure."

Shortly after this, Simeon Deaves turned up at Evan's room. It was evident as soon as he spoke that he had not yet read the afternoon papers. He had been drawn to Evan's room on his wanderings by his insatiable curiosity. Nothing in the room escaped his sharp, furtive glances. The newspapers were lying about. Evan made no attempt to put them away. The old man had to learn soon anyhow.

His glance was caught by his photograph in one of the sheets. He pounced on it. Evan watched him slyly. The old man's face was a study in astonishment.

"What's this!" he cried. "Do you know about it? Half a million for charity! Who got up this lie!" He was as indignant as if he had been accused of stealing the money.

"One of the papers mentioned the exact sum as four hundred thousand," said Evan innocently.

"It's a hoax."

"And they said U.S. government bonds, so I supposed the blackmailers must have turned over what they got from you."

"Why should they go to all that trouble just to give it to charity?"

Evan was careful to maintain his detached air. "Well, I thought maybe they were not common crooks, but socialists or anarchists or something like that, who believed in dividing things up, you know."

"The scoundrels!" cried the old man. "I'll put a stop to their game. I'll see Verplanck and get the bonds back."

"You can't see him to-day," said Evan carelessly. "It's after five. He lives in the country."

"I'll see him in the morning, then."

"You'll have a chance to talk it over with your son in the meantime."

"What's George got to do with it? The money's mine!"

"Of course," said Evan carelessly.

He let the old man rage on without interruption. When he saw his opportunity he said offhand: "Too bad to spoil this elegant publicity, though."

"What do you mean?"

"It's in all the papers. Every man in the country will read it before to-morrow morning. It will make over your reputation in a night."

"What do I care about my reputation?"

"If you call the scheme off, think how they'll get after you! Not only an obscure sheet like the *Clarion*, but the entire press of the country. Like a pack of hounds. They'll never let the story drop."

This thought gave the old man pause. He scowled at Evan.

Evan was making a pretence of cleaning a palette. "You'd hardly care to venture out in the street after that. You'd be hooted; stoned, perhaps. It's bad enough already. The reason you hired me was to prevent unpleasant experiences. But if every paper in town got after you—well, you couldn't go out except in a closed car."

The old man made a queer noise in his throat, and pulled at his seamy cheek.

Evan went on without appearing to notice him: "It's a swindle, of course, to try to make you out a philanthropist in spite of yourself. They must have a funny sense of humour. But I couldn't help but be struck by the opportunities for the right kind of publicity. You could turn it so easily to your own advantage."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"Take this philanthropic trust, or whatever they call it; excursions for poor children! Good Lord! Every sob sister on the press would be good for a column once a week. It's up to you to see that the publicity is properly organised. Every time they give an excursion have the stuff sent out. It's cheap at the price, if you ask me. You couldn't buy it at any price. You'll be received with cheers on the street then. No need to hire a body-guard. And you still do more or less business. Think how it would help you in your business!"

The old man was greatly impressed. "Well, I'll think it over," he said. "It's too much money. I'll offer to compromise with Verplanck on half."

Evan saw that even this was an immense concession. "Talk it over with Mr. George," he said.

"Oh, George is a fool!"

Evan, fearful of overdoing it, let the matter drop. Everything depended on George now. The old man presently departed.

It may be mentioned here, out of its proper place chronologically, that later that night Evan got another note from George Deaves:

"I have had it out with Papa. It took me two hours. But I won. There will be no interference with the Deaves Trust. In the future I mean to be firmer with Papa. I have given in to him too much.

G. D."

At six o'clock Evan heard a quick light step on the stairs and the heart began to thump in his breast. He had been longing for this—and dreading it. Corinna presented herself at his open door. She had newspapers in her hand, and there was no doubt but that she had read them. But if Evan had expected her to be pleased, he was sadly disappointed. Her eyes were flashing.

"What does this mean?" she demanded, waving the papers.

"Dordess wrote the story," said Evan, sparring for time.

"I know he did. I have seen him. He referred me to you."

"Well, the story tells all," said Evan. "I didn't return the bonds, but created a philanthropist out of Simeon Deaves."

"And rehabilitated him in the eyes of the public!" she cried bitterly. "The unrepentant old scoundrel!"

"He'll find popularity so sweet he'll have to live up to it."

"He doesn't deserve it!"

Evan was moved to protest. "Look here, Corinna, you've nourished your grudge against him for so long that you've positively fallen in love with it. You're just sore now because it has been removed!"

"I might have expected you to say that!"

"Be fair, Corinna. I threshed my brains to find a way out that would do everybody good. And this is all the thanks I get!"

"Much obliged, but I don't care to have anybody play Providence to me. I expect to be consulted in matters that concern me. Good for everybody, you say. How is the Deaves Trust good for me?"

"Why, the sum for supporting the excursions remains intact; the very sum you asked for."

"But you've ousted me!"

"Not at all. What the papers do not state is that I have been appointed the third trustee with power to administer the fund."

"What good will that do me?"

Evan said very off-hand: "Well, I thought you were going to administer me."

He did not look at her as he said it. She gave him no sign. She was silent for so long that a great anxiety arose within him. Yet he felt that to speak again would only be to weaken his plea. He looked at her. The shining head was studiously averted, the long lashes down.

Finally she said, low and firmly: "It is impossible."

"Why?" he demanded.

"You want a clinging vine," she said scornfully. "A tame woman who will look up to you as the source of all wisdom!"

"If I did would I be asking you?" he said dryly.

"You hope to tame me."

"Never! The shoe is on the other foot. You want a husband whose neck you can tread on."

"What difference does it make whose fault it is?" she said wearily. "The fact remains we would quarrel endlessly and hatefully. It would be degrading!"

"People who love each other always quarrel," said Evan cheerfully. "There's no harm in it."

She stared at him.

"Let us quarrel—and continue to respect each other!"

She shook her head. "You speak about it too coldly."

"Cold—I?" he said. "You silence me when you say that! You know I am not cold!"

"It is better for us to part," she said, moving towards the door.

He hastened to get between her and the door. "Corinna, the reason I am obliged to fight you is because you wield such a dreadful power! In reality I am terrified of you! If you married me I would have no defences at all! I would be at your mercy because I love you so!"

"You're always laughing at me," she murmured.

"I swear I am not! People who love do not make bargains, Corinna. All that I am or ever will be is yours. Take me and make what you can of it!"

Corinna, who had not looked at him all this while, now turned a comical face of remonstrance. "But you mustn't!" she said. "You mustn't give in to me like that! You must oppose my temper and my wilfulness, whatever I say!"

It was Evan's turn to stare. Then he understood that this was surrender—Corinna's way. He laughed in pure delight and opened his arms. "Come here, you wretch!"

She sidled towards him, blushing deeply, intolerably confused.

POSTSCRIPT

Two weeks later. The Executive Committee of the Deaves Trust was holding an informal meeting. Said Evan:

"The *Ernestina* is in commission again, but of course we don't want her as long as the present skipper is in charge. I have found a new boat, the *Thomas Higgins*, safe and comfortable. The only thing against her is her name, and I propose to change that to *Corinna*."

"Silly!" said the other member of the committee.

"The owners have made me a fair price, and the other trustees have authorized me to purchase her outright."

"Won't that take all our money?"

"No, indeed. I have arranged to run her three days a week to the town of Redport, which wants a steam-boat service with the city. The merchants of the town have guaranteed an amount of business sufficient to pay operating expenses and interest on the investment. In addition, on Thursdays and Sundays she will be available for charter. On Sundays we can always get a big price for her. So you see, we'll not only have our own steamboat, but our income, too."

"How clever you are!" said Corinna.

"After I arranged about that I went to see Dordess——"

"Was he friendly?"—this anxiously.

"Yes, indeed. We understand each other. I always was attracted to him, and he is resigned to the inevitable now. He says he's content to be an uncle to our children."

"Evan!"

"He was to sound the other fellows, you know, and find out how they were disposed towards the new trips. Well, Anway and Tenderden decline with thanks. That was to be expected. But the others, Domville, Burgess, Minturn, and that odd little chap in the grey suit with the big eyes——"

"Paul Roman."

"Yes, they're all crazy to come. They have accepted me as a necessary evil. The little fellow, Roman, came into Dordess's office while I was there. Shook hands with me like a little man. He has pluck, that kid. I will never forget the dogged way he trailed me. By the way, why did you never take him on the *Ernestina*?"

"We did sometimes, and sometimes he remained on shore to trail Simeon Deaves. He made up as a girl, and you never spotted him. When you came aboard the *Ernestina* we had to hide him."

"The deuce you did!"

"What about Charley Straiker, Evan?"

"He's coming, too. Dear old Char! We have had a heart-to-heart talk. Everything is fixed up between us. You have never told me how you got hold of him that day. I didn't like to ask him. Too sore a subject."

"There's nothing much to tell. I was in the library reading-room that morning, not to get the money but just to watch out for danger. Paul Roman got the books out. I saw Charley come in and sit down beside him, and I knew what was up. I immediately went and sat down on the other side of Charley. He was glad to see me. I was quite frank with him. I introduced Paul Roman to him. I told him my story. It won his heart, that's all."

"It wasn't the story, but your eyes, confound them!"

"Oh, you never will believe that anybody can be influenced by disinterested motives!"

"How did you find out that other time that the bills were marked?"

"Tenterden has a brother in a bank. He told us about the warning sent out by the Mid-City Bank."

"Corinna, how did you ever come to chum up with a woman like Maud Deaves?"

"I didn't chum up with her. I never laid eyes on the woman. It came about gradually. I found out early in the game that when we sent letters to her it had the effect of exerting a tremendous pressure on her husband to pay. Later, through the servants, whom Paul Roman had bribed for me, I found out that she was in money difficulties. After that every time we got the money I sent her part, and she worked for us like one of ourselves. We never failed to get the money one way or another, as you know."

"I know," said Evan ruefully.

"But don't let us talk of those times any more. It's a sore subject with me, too."

"One more question, and I'll drop it forever. Confess that you came and took a room at 45A Washington Square for the especial purpose of seducing me."

"Evan! What a word to use!"

"I used it merely in a figurative sense, my child. Confess!"

"Well, of course when Paul Roman reported all that had happened that day, and where you lived, and later when I learned through the Deaves' servants that you had been engaged to go around with the old man, my first thought was to win you to our side. Paul reported that you were a gentleman, and seemed like a good sort of fellow."

"Oh, he did, did he?"

"In such a position, of course, if you were against us you could ruin everything; while if you were on our side you would be invaluable. So I went to that house and took a room, hoping to become acquainted with you."

"You didn't stay long."

She looked at him through her lashes. "No, I fell in love with you, confound you! It spoiled everything!"

"Corinna!" he cried delightedly. "I am beginning to think I shall yet succeed in grafting a sense of humour on you!"

THE END

[The end of The Deaves Affair by Footner, Hulbert]