

COUNSEL  
FOR THE  
DEFENSE



LEROY SCOTT

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# **Counsel for the Defense**

**By**

# Leroy Scott

Author of

“The Shears of Destiny,” “To Him That Hath,”  
“The Walking Delegate”

Frontispiece by  
Charles M. Chapman

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“THRILLING WITH AN UNEXPECTED HOPE, KATHERINE ROSE AND  
TRIED TO KEEP HERSELF BEFORE THE EYES OF DOCTOR SHERMAN  
LIKE AN ACCUSING CONSCIENCE”

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AND TRIED TO KEEP HERSELF BEFORE THE EYES OF DOCTOR  
SHERMAN LIKE AN ACCUSING CONSCIENCE”**

---

**TO**

**HELEN**

---

## PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

KATHERINE WEST.

DR. DAVID WEST, her father.

ARNOLD BRUCE, editor of the *Express*.

HARRISON BLAKE, ex-lieutenant-governor.

MRS. BLAKE, his mother.

“BLIND CHARLIE” PECK, a political boss.

HOSEA HOLLINGSWORTH, an old attorney.

BILLY HARPER, reporter on the *Express*.

THE REVEREND DR. SHERMAN, of the  
Wabash Avenue Church.

MRS. SHERMAN, his wife.

MRS. RACHEL GRAY, Katherine’s aunt.

ROGER KENNEDY, prosecuting attorney.

JUDGE KELLOG.

MR. BROWN, of the National Electric &  
Water Company.

MR. MANNING, a detective.

ELIJAH STONE, a detective.

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# **COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENSE**

# CHAPTER I

## WESTVILLE PREPARES TO CELEBRATE

The room was thick with dust and draped with ancient cobwebs. In one corner dismally reposed a literary junk heap—old magazines, broken-backed works of reference, novels once unanimously read but now unanimously forgotten. The desk was a helter-skelter of papers. One of the two chairs had its burst cane seat mended by an atlas of the world; and wherever any of the floor peered dimly through the general débris it showed a complexion of dark and ineradicable greasiness. Altogether, it was a room hopelessly unfit for human habitation; which is perhaps but an indirect manner of stating that it was the office of the editor of a successful newspaper.

Before a typewriter at a small table sat a bare-armed, solitary man. He was twenty-eight or thirty, abundantly endowed with bone and muscle, and with a face——But not to soil this early page with abusive terms, it will be sufficient to remark that whatever the Divine Sculptor had carved his countenance to portray, plainly there had been no thought of re-beautifying the earth with an Apollo. He was constructed not for grace, but powerful, tireless action; and there was something absurdly disproportionate between the small machine and the broad and hairy hands which so heavily belaboured its ladylike keys.

It was a custom with Bruce to write the big local news story of the day himself, a feature that had proved a stimulant to his paper's circulation and prestige. Tomorrow was to be one of the proudest days of Westville's history, for to-morrow was the formal opening of the city's greatest municipal enterprise, its thoroughly modern water-works; and it was an extensive and vivid account of the next day's programme that the editor was pounding so rapidly out of his machine for that afternoon's issue of the *Express*. Now and then, as he paused an instant to shape an effective sentence in his mind, he glanced through the open window beside him across Main Street to where, against the front of the old Court House, a group of shirt-sleeved workmen were hanging their country's colours about a speakers' stand; then his big, blunt fingers thumped swiftly on.

He had jerked out the final sheet, and had begun to revise his story, making corrections with a very black pencil and in a very large hand, when there

sauntered in from the general editorial room a pale, slight young man of twenty-five. The newcomer had a reckless air, a humorous twist to the left corner of his mouth, and a negligent smartness in his dress which plainly had its origin elsewhere than in Westville.

The editor did not raise his eyes.

“In a minute, Billy,” he said shortly.

“Nothing to hurry about, Arn,” drawled the other.

The young fellow drew forward the atlas-bottomed chair, leisurely enthroned himself upon the nations of the earth, crossed his feet upon the window-sill, and lit a cigarette. About his lounging form there was a latent energy like that of a relaxed cat. He gazed rather languidly over at the Square, its sides abustle with excited preparation. Across the fronts of stores bunting was being tacked; from upper windows crisp cotton flags were being unscrolled. As for the Court House yard itself, to-day its elm-shaded spaces were lifeless save for the workmen about the stand, a litigant or two going up the walk, and an occasional frock-coated lawyer, his vest democratically unbuttoned to the warm May air. But tomorrow——

The young fellow had turned his head slowly toward the editor’s copy, and, as though reading, he began in an emotional, declamatory voice:

“To-morrow the classic shades of Court House Square will teem with a tumultuous throng. In the emblazoned speakers’ stand the Westville Brass Band, in their new uniforms, glittering like so many grand marshals of the empire, will trumpet forth triumphant music fit to burst; and aloft from this breeze-fluttered throne of oratory——”

“Go to hell!” interrupted Bruce, eyes still racing through his copy.

“And down from this breeze-fluttered throne of oratory,” continued Billy, with a rising quaver in his voice, “Mr. Harrison Blake, Westville’s favourite son; the Reverend Doctor Sherman, president of the Voters’ Union, and the Honourable Hiram Cogshell, Calloway County’s able-bodiest orator, will pour forth prodigal and perfervid eloquence upon the populace below. And Dr. David West, he who has directed this magnificent work from its birth unto the present, he who has laid upon the sacred altar of his city’s welfare a matchless devotion and a lifetime’s store of scientific knowledge, he who——”

“See here, young fellow!” The editor slammed down the last sheet of his revised story, and turned upon his assistant a square, bony, aggressive face that gave a sense of having been modelled by a clinched fist, and of still glowering at the blow. He had gray eyes that gleamed dogmatically from behind thick glasses, and hair that brush could not subdue. “See here, Billy Harper, will you please go to hell!”

“Sure; follow you anywhere, Arn,” returned Billy pleasantly, holding out his cigarette case.

“You little Chicago alley cat, you!” growled Bruce. He took a cigarette, broke it open and poured the tobacco into a black pipe, which he lit. “Well—turn up anything?”

“Governor can’t come,” replied the reporter, lighting a fresh cigarette.

“Hard luck. But we’ll have the crowd anyhow. Blake tell you anything else?”

“He didn’t tell me that. His stenographer did; she’d opened the Governor’s telegram. Blake’s in Indianapolis to-day—looking after his chances for the Senate, I suppose.”

“See Doctor West?”

“Went to his house first. But as usual he wouldn’t say a thing. That old boy is certainly the mildest mannered hero of the day I ever went up against. The way he does dodge the spot-light!—it’s enough to make one of your prima donna politicians die of heart failure. To do a great piece of work, and then be as modest about it as he is—well, Arn, I sure am for that old doc!”

“Huh!” grunted the editor.

“When it comes time to hang the laurel wreath upon his brow to-morrow I’ll bet you and your spavined old Arrangements Committee will have to push him on to the stand by the scruff of his neck.”

“Did you get him to promise to sit for a new picture?”

“Yes. And you ought to raise me ten a week for doing it. He didn’t want his picture printed; and if we did print it, he thought that prehistoric thing of the eighties we’ve got was good enough.”

“Well, be sure you get that photo, if you have to use chloroform. I saw him go

into the Court House a little while ago. Better catch him as he comes out and lead him over to Dodson's gallery."

"All right." The young fellow recrossed his feet upon the window-sill. "But, Arn," he drawled, "this certainly is a slow old burg you've dragged me down into. If one of your leading citizens wants to catch the seven-thirty to Indianapolis to-morrow morning, I suppose he sets his alarm to go off day before yesterday."

"What's soured on your stomach now?" demanded the editor.

"Oh, the way it took this suburb of Nowhere thirty years to wake up to Doctor West! Every time I see him I feel sore for hours afterward at how this darned place has treated the old boy. If your six-cylinder, sixty-horse power, seven-passenger tongues hadn't remembered that his grandfather had founded Westville, I bet you'd have talked him out of the town long ago."

"The town didn't understand him."

"I should say it didn't!" agreed the reporter.

"And I guess you don't understand the town," said the editor, a little sharply. "Young man, you've never lived in a small place."

"Till this, Chicago was my smallest—the gods be praised!"

"Well, it's the same in your old smokestack of the universe as it is here!" retorted Bruce. "If you go after the dollar, you're sane. If you don't, you're cracked. Doctor West started off like a winner, so they say; looked like he was going to get a corner on all the patients of Westville. Then, when he stopped practising \_\_\_\_\_"

"You never told me what made him stop."

"His wife's death—from typhoid; I barely remember that. When he stopped practising and began his scientific work, the town thought he'd lost his head."

"And yet two years ago the town was glad enough to get him to take charge of installing its new water system!"

"That's how it discovered he was somebody. When the city began to look around for an expert, it found no one they could get had a tenth of his knowledge of water supply."

“That’s the way with your self-worshipping cross-roads towns! You raise a genius—laugh at him, pity his family—till you learn how the outside world respects him. Then—hurrah! Strike up the band, boys! When I think how that old party has been quietly studying typhoid fever and water supply all these years, with you bunch of hayseeds looking down on him as a crank—I get so blamed sore at the place that I wish I’d chucked your letter into the waste-basket when you wrote me to come!”

“It may have been a dub of a town, Billy, but it’ll be the best place in Indiana before we get through with it,” returned the editor confidently. “But whom else did you see?”

“Ran into the Honourable Hiram Cogshell on Main Street, and he slipped me this precious gem.” Billy handed Bruce a packet of typewritten sheets. “Carbon of his to-morrow’s speech. He gave it to me, he said, to save us the trouble of taking it down. The Honourable Hiram is certainly one citizen who’ll never go broke buying himself a bushel to hide his light under!”

The editor glanced at a page or two of it with wearied irritation, then tossed it back.

“Guess we’ll have to print it. But weed out some of his flowers of rhetoric.”

“Pressed flowers,” amended Billy. “Swipe the Honourable Hiram’s copy of ‘Bartlett’s Quotations’ and that tremendous orator would have nothing left but his gestures.”

“How about the grand jury, Billy?” pursued the editor. “Anything doing there?”

“Farmer down in Buck Creek Township indicted for kidnapping his neighbour’s pigs,” drawled the reporter. “Infants snatched away while fond mother slept. Very pathetic. Also that second-story man was indicted that stole Alderman Big Bill Perkins’s clothes. Remember it, don’t you? Big Bill’s clothes had so much diameter that the poor, hard-working thief couldn’t sell the fruits of his industry. Pathos there also. Guess I can spin the two out for a column.”

“Spin ’em out for about three lines,” returned Bruce in his abrupt manner. “No room for your funny stuff to-day, Billy; the celebration crowds everything else out. Write that about the Governor, and then help Stevens with the telegraph—and see that it’s carved down to the bone.” He picked up the typewritten sheets he had finished revising, and let out a sharp growl of “Copy!”

“That’s your celebration story, isn’t it?” asked the reporter.

“Yes.” And Bruce held it out to the “devil” who had appeared through the doorway from the depths below.

“Wait a bit with it, Arn. The prosecuting attorney stopped me as I was leaving, and asked me to have you step over to the Court House for a minute.”

“What’s Kennedy want?”

“Something about the celebration, he said. I guess he wants to talk with you about some further details of the programme.”

“Why the deuce didn’t he come over here then?” growled Bruce. “I’m as busy as he is!”

“He said he couldn’t leave.”

“Couldn’t leave?” said Bruce, with a snap of his heavy jaw. “Well, neither can I!”

“You mean you won’t go?”

“That’s what I mean! I’ll go to the very gates of hell to get a good piece of news, but when it comes to general affairs the politicians, business men, and the etceteras of this town have got to understand that there’s just as much reason for their coming to me as for my going to them. I’m as important as any of them.”

“So-ho, we’re on our high horse, are we?”

“You bet we are, my son! And that’s where you’ve got to be if you want this town to respect you.”

“All right. She’s a great nag, if you can keep your saddle. But I guess I’d better tell Kennedy you’re not coming.”

Without rising, Billy leaned back and took up Bruce’s desk telephone, and soon was talking to the prosecuting attorney. After a moment he held out the instrument to the editor.

“Kennedy wants to speak with you,” he said.

Bruce took the ’phone.

“Hello, that you Kennedy?... No, I can’t come—too busy. Suppose you run over here.... Got some people there? Well, bring ’em along.... Why can’t they come? Who are they?... Can’t you tell me what the situation is?... All right, then; in a couple of minutes.”

Bruce hung up the receiver and arose.

“So you’re going after all?” asked Billy.

“Guess I’d better,” returned the editor, putting on his coat and hat. “Kennedy says something big has just broken loose. Sounds queer. Wonder what the dickens it can be.” And he started out.

“But how about your celebration story?” queried Billy. “Want it to go down?”

Bruce looked at his watch.

“Two hours till press time; I guess it can wait.” And taking the story back from the boy he tossed it upon his desk.

He stepped out into the local room, which showed the same kindly tolerance of dirt as did his private office. At a long table two young men sat before typewriters, and in a corner a third young man was taking the clicking dictation of a telegraph sounder.

“Remember, boys, keep everything but the celebration down to bones!” Bruce called out. And with that he passed out of the office and down the stairway to the street.





## CHAPTER II

### THE BUBBLE REPUTATION

Despite its thirty thousand population—"Forty thousand, and growing, sir!" loyally declared those disinterested citizens engaged in the sale of remote fields of ragweed as building lots—Westville was still but half-evolved from its earlier state of an overgrown country town. It was as yet semi-pastoral, semi-urban. Automobiles and farm wagons locked hubs in brotherly embrace upon its highways; cowhide boots and patent leather shared its sidewalks. There was a stockbroker's office that was thoroughly metropolitan in the facilities it afforded the élite for relieving themselves of the tribulation of riches; and adjoining it was Simpson Brothers & Company, wherein hick'ry-shirted gentlemen bartered for threshing machines, hayrakes, axle grease, and such like baubles of Arcadian pastime.

There were three topics on which one could always start an argument in Westville—politics, religion, and the editor of the *Express*. A year before Arnold Bruce, who had left Westville at eighteen and whom the town had vaguely heard of as a newspaper man in Chicago and New York but whom it had not seen since, had returned home and taken charge of the *Express*, which had been willed him by the late editor, his uncle. The *Express*, which had been a slippared, dozing, senile sheet under old Jimmie Bruce, burst suddenly into a volcanic youth. The new editor used huge, vociferous headlines instead of the mere whispering, timorous types of his uncle; he wrote a rousing, rough-and-ready English; occasionally he placed an important editorial, set up in heavy-faced type and enclosed in a black border, in the very centre of his first page; and from the very start he had had the hardihood to attack the "established order" at several points and to preach unorthodox political doctrines. The wealthiest citizens were outraged, and hotly denounced Bruce as a "yellow journalist" and a "red-mouthed demagogue." It was commonly held by the better element that his ultra-democracy was merely a mask, a pose, an advertising scheme, to gather in the gullible subscriber and to force himself sensationally into the public eye.

But despite all hostile criticism of the paper, people read the *Express*—many staid ones surreptitiously—for it had a snap, a go, a tang, that at times almost

took the breath. And despite the estimate of its editor as a charlatan, the people had yielded to that aggressive personage a rank of high importance in their midst.

Bruce stepped forth from his stairway, crossed Main Street, and strode up the shady Court House walk. On the left side of the walk, a-tiptoe in an arid fountain, was poised a gracious nymph of cast-iron, so chastely garbed as to bring to the cheek of elderly innocence no faintest flush. On the walk's right side stood a rigid statue, suggesting tetanus in the model, of the city's founder, Col. Davy West, wearing a coonskin cap and leaning with conscious dignity upon a long deer rifle.

Bruce entered the dingy Court House, mounted a foot-worn wooden stairway, browned with the ambrosial extract of two generations of tobacco-chewing litigants, and passed into a damp and gloomy chamber. This room was the office of the prosecuting attorney of Calloway County. That the incumbent might not become too depressed by his environment, the walls were cheered up by a steel engraving of Daniel Webster, frowning with multitudinous thought, and by a crackled map of Indiana—the latter dotted by industrious flies with myriad nameless cities.

Three men arose from about the flat-topped desk in the centre of the room, the prosecutor, the Reverend Doctor Sherman, and a rather smartly dressed man whom Bruce remembered to have seen once or twice but whom he did not know. With the first two the editor shook hands, and the third was introduced to him as Mr. Marcy, the agent of the Acme Filter Company, which had installed the filtering plant of the new water-works.

Bruce turned in his brusque manner to the prosecuting attorney.

“What's the matter?” he asked.

“Suppose we all sit down first,” suggested the prosecutor.

They did so, and Kennedy regarded Bruce with a solemn, weighty stare. He was a lank, lantern-jawed, frock-coated gentleman of thirty-five, with an upward rolling forelock and an Adam's-apple that throbbed in his throat like a petrified pulse. He was climbing the political ladder, and he was carefully schooling himself into that dignity and poise and appearance of importance which should distinguish the deportment of the public man.

“Well, what is it?” demanded Bruce shortly. “About the water-works?”

“Yes,” responded Kennedy. “The water-works, Mr. Bruce, is, I hardly need say, a source of pride to us all. To you especially it has had a large significance. You have made it a theme for a continuous agitation in your paper. You have argued and urged that, since the city’s new water-works promised to be such a great success, Westville should not halt with this one municipal enterprise, but should refuse the new franchise the street railway company is going to apply for, take over the railway, run it as a municipal——”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Bruce impatiently. “But who’s dead? Who wants the line of march changed to go by his grocery store?”

“What I was saying was merely to recall how very important the water-works has been to us,” the prosecutor returned, with increased solemnity. He paused, and having gained that heightened stage effect of a well-managed silence, he continued: “Mr. Bruce, something very serious has occurred.”

For all its ostentation the prosecutor’s manner was genuinely impressive. Bruce looked quickly at the other two men. The agent was ill at ease, the minister pale and agitated.

“Come,” cried Bruce, “out with what you’ve got to tell me!”

“It is a matter of the very first importance,” returned the prosecutor, who was posing for a prominent place in the *Express’s* account of this affair—for however much the public men of Westville affected to look down upon the *Express*, they secretly preferred its superior presentment of their doings. “Doctor Sherman, in his capacity of president of the Voters’ Union, has just brought before me some most distressing, most astounding evidence. It is evidence upon which I must act both as a public official and as a member of the Arrangements Committee, and evidence which concerns you both as a committeeman and as an editor. It is painful to me to break——”

“Let’s have it from first hands,” interrupted Bruce, irritated by the verbal excelsior which the prosecutor so deliberately unwrapped from about his fact.

He turned to the minister, a slender man of hardly more than thirty, with a high brow, the wide, sensitive mouth of the born orator, fervently bright eyes, and the pallor of the devoted student—a face that instantly explained why, though so young, he was Westville’s most popular divine.

“What’s it about, Doctor Sherman?” the editor asked. “Who’s the man?”

There was no posing here for Bruce’s typewriter. The minister’s concern was deep and sincere.

“About the water-works, as Mr. Kennedy has said,” he answered in a voice that trembled with agitation. “There has been some—some crooked work.”

“Crooked work?” ejaculated the editor, staring at the minister. “Crooked work?”

“Yes.”

“You are certain of what you say?”

“Yes.”

“Then you have evidence?”

“I am sorry—but—but I have.”

The editor was leaning forward, his nostrils dilated, his eyes gleaming sharply behind their thick glasses.

“Who’s mixed up in it? Who’s the man?”

The minister’s hands were tightly interlocked. For an instant he seemed unable to speak.

“Who’s the man?” repeated Bruce.

The minister swallowed.

“Doctor West,” he said.

Bruce sprang up.

“Doctor West?” he cried. “The superintendent of the water-works?”

“Yes.”

If the editor’s concern for the city’s welfare was merely a political and business pose, if he was merely an actor, at least he acted his part well. “My God!” he breathed, and stood with eyes fixed upon the young minister. Then suddenly he sat down again, his thick brows drew together, and his heavy jaws set.

“Let’s have the whole story,” he snapped out. “From the very beginning.”

“I cannot tell you how distressed I am by what I have just been forced to do,” began the young clergyman. “I have always esteemed Doctor West most highly, and my wife and his daughter have been the closest friends since girlhood. To make my part in this affair clear, I must recall to you that of late the chief attention of the Voters’ Union has naturally been devoted to the water-works. I never imagined that anything was wrong. But, speaking frankly, after the event, I must say that Doctor West’s position was such as made it a simple matter for him to defraud the city should he so desire.”

“You mean because the council invested him with so much authority?” demanded Bruce.

“Yes. As I have said, I regarded Doctor West above all suspicion. But a short time ago some matters—I need not detail them—aroused in me the fear that Doctor West was using his office for—for——”

“For graft?” supplied Bruce.

The minister inclined his head.

“Later, only a few weeks ago, a more definite fear came to me,” he continued in his low, pained voice. “It happens that I have known Mr. Marcy here for years; we were friends in college, though we had lost track of one another till his business brought him here. A few small circumstances—my suspicion was already on the alert—made me guess that Mr. Marcy was about to give Doctor West a bribe for having awarded the filter contract to his company. I got Mr. Marcy alone—taxed him with his intention—worked upon his conscience——”

“Mr. Marcy has stated,” the prosecutor interrupted to explain, “that Doctor Sherman always had great influence over him.”

Mr. Marcy corroborated this with a nod.

“At length Mr. Marcy confessed,” Doctor Sherman went on. “He had arranged to give Doctor West a certain sum of money immediately after the filtering plant had been approved and payment had been made to the company. After this confession I hesitated long upon what I should do. On the one hand, I shrank from disgracing Doctor West. On the other, I had a duty to the city. After a long struggle I decided that my responsibility to the people of Westville should overbalance any feeling I might have for any single individual.”

“That was the only decision,” said Bruce. “Go on!”

“But at the same time, to protect Doctor West’s reputation, I decided to take no one into my plan; should his integrity reassert itself at the last moment and cause him to refuse the bribe, the whole matter would then remain locked up in my heart. I arranged with Mr. Marcy that he should carry out his agreement with Doctor West. Day before yesterday, as you know, the council, on Doctor West’s recommendation, formally approved the filtering plant, and yesterday a draft was sent to the company. Mr. Marcy was to call at Doctor West’s home this morning to conclude their secret bargain. Just before the appointed hour I dropped in on Doctor West, and was there when Mr. Marcy called. I said I would wait to finish my talk with Doctor West till they were through their business, took a book, and went into an adjoining room. I could see the two men through the partly opened door. After some talk, Mr. Marcy drew an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Doctor West, saying in a low voice, ‘Here is that money we spoke about.’”

“And he took it?” Bruce interrupted.

“Doctor West slipped the envelope unopened into his pocket, and replied, ‘Thank you very much; it will come in very handy just now.’”

“My God!” breathed the editor.

“Though I had suspected Doctor West, I sat there stunned,” the minister continued. “But after a minute or two I slipped out by another door. I returned with a policeman, and found Doctor West still with Mr. Marcy. The policeman arrested Doctor West, and found the envelope upon his person. In it was two thousand dollars.”

“Now, what do you think of that?” Kennedy demanded of the editor. “Won’t the town be thunderstruck!”

Bruce turned to the agent, who had sat through the recital, a mere corroborative presence.

“And this is all true?”

“That is exactly the way it happened,” replied Mr. Marcy.

Bruce looked back at the minister.

“But didn’t he have anything to say for himself?”

“I can answer that,” put in Kennedy. “I had him in here before I sent him over to the jail. He admits practically every point that Doctor Sherman has made. The only thing he says for himself is that he never thought the money Mr. Marcy gave him was intended for a bribe.”

Bruce stood up, his face hard and glowering, and his fist crashed explosively down upon the table.

“Of all the damned flimsy defenses that ever a man made, that’s the limit!”

“It certainly won’t go down with the people of Westville,” commented the prosecutor. “And I can see the smile of the jury when he produces that defense in court.”

“I should say they would smile!” cried Bruce. “But what was his motive?”

“That’s plain enough,” answered the prosecutor. “We both know, Mr. Bruce, that he has earned hardly anything from the practice of medicine since we were boys. His salary as superintendent of the water-works was much less than he has been spending. His property is mortgaged practically to its full value. Everything has gone on those experiments of his. It’s simply a case of a man being in a tight fix for money.”

Bruce was striding up and down the room, scowling and staring fiercely at the worn linoleum that carpeted the prosecutor’s office.

“I thought you’d take it rather hard,” said Kennedy, a little slyly. “It sort of puts a spoke in that general municipal ownership scheme of yours—eh?”

Bruce paused belligerently before the prosecutor.

“See here, Kennedy,” he snapped out. “Because a man you’ve banked on is a crook, does that prove a principle is wrong?”

“Oh, I guess not,” Kennedy had to admit.

“Well, suppose you cut out that kind of talk then. But what are you going to do about the doctor?”

“The grand jury is in session. I’m going straight before it with the evidence. An hour from now and Doctor West will be indicted.”

“And what about to-morrow’s show?”

“What do you think we ought to do?”

“What ought we to do!” Again the editor’s fist crashed upon the desk. “The celebration was half in Doctor West’s honour. Do we want to meet and hurrah for the man that sold us out? As for the water-works, it looks as if, for all we know, he might have bought us a lot of old junk. Do we want to hold a jubilee over a junk pile? You ask what we ought to do. God, man, there’s only one thing to do, and that’s to call the whole damned performance off!”

“That’s my opinion,” said the prosecutor. “What do you think, Doctor Sherman?”

The young minister wiped his pale face.

“It’s a most miserable affair. I’m sick because of the part I’ve been forced to play—I’m sorry for Doctor West—and I’m particularly sorry for his daughter—but I do not see that any other course would be possible.”

“I suppose we ought to consult Mr. Blake,” said Kennedy.

“He’s not in town,” returned Bruce. “And we don’t need to consult him. We three are a majority of the committee. The matter has to be settled at once. And it’s settled all right!”

The editor jerked out his watch, glanced at it, then reached for his hat.

“I’ll have this on the street in an hour—and if this town doesn’t go wild, then I don’t know Westville!”

He was making for the door, when the newspaper man in him recalled a new detail of his story. He turned back.

“How about this daughter of Doctor West?” he asked.

The prosecutor looked at the minister.

“Was she coming home for the celebration, do you know?”

“Yes. She wrote Mrs. Sherman she was leaving New York this morning and would get in here to-morrow on the Limited.”

“What’s she like?” asked Bruce.

“Haven’t you seen her?” asked Kennedy.



“She hasn’t been home since I came back to Westville. When I left here she was a tomboy—mostly legs and freckles.”

The prosecutor’s lean face crinkled with a smile.

“I guess you’ll find she’s grown right smart since then. She went to one of those colleges back East; Vassar, I think it was. She got hold of some of those new-fangled ideas the women in the East are crazy over now—about going out in the world for themselves, and——”

“Idiots—all of them!” snapped Bruce.

“After she graduated, she studied law. When she was back home two years ago she asked me what chance a woman would have to practise law in Westville. A woman lawyer in Westville—oh, Lord!”

The prosecutor leaned back and laughed at the excruciating humour of the idea.

“Oh, I know the kind!” Bruce’s lips curled with contempt. “Loud-voiced—aggressive—bony—perfect frights.”

“Let me suggest,” put in Doctor Sherman, “that Miss West does not belong in that classification.”

“Yes, I guess you’re a little wrong about Katherine West,” smiled Kennedy.

Bruce waved his hand peremptorily. “They’re all the same! But what’s she doing in New York? Practising law?”

“No. She’s working for an organization something like Doctor Sherman’s—The Municipal League, I think she called it.”

“Huh!” grunted Bruce. “Well, whatever she’s like, it’s a pretty mess she’s coming back into!”

With that the editor pulled his hat tightly down upon his forehead and strode out of the Court House and past the speakers’ stand, across whose front twin flags were being leisurely festooned. Back in his own office he picked up the story he had finished an hour before. With a sneer he tore it across and trampled it under foot. Then, jerking a chair forward to his typewriter, his brow dark, his jaw set, he began to thump fiercely upon the keys.



## CHAPTER III

### KATHERINE COMES HOME

Next morning when the Limited slowed down beside the old frame station—a new one of brick was rising across the tracks—a young woman descended from a Pullman at the front of the train. She was lithe and graceful, rather tall and slender, and was dressed with effective simplicity in a blue tailored suit and a tan straw hat with a single blue quill. Her face was flushed, and there glowed an expectant brightness in her brown eyes, as though happiness and affection were upon the point of bubbling over.

Standing beside her suit-case, she eagerly scanned the figures about the station. Three or four swagger young drummers had scrambled off the smoker, and these ambassadors of fashion as many hotel bus drivers were inviting with importunate hospitality to honour their respective board and bed. There was the shirt-sleeved figure of Jim Ludlow, ticket agent and tenor of the Presbyterian choir. And leaning cross-legged beneath the station eaves, giving the effect of supporting the low roof, were half a dozen slowly masticating, soberly contemplative gentlemen—loose-jointed caryatides, whose lank sculpture forms the sole and invariable ornamentation of the façades of all Western stations. But nowhere did the young woman's expectant eyes alight upon the person whom they sought.

The joyous response to welcome, which had plainly trembled at the tips of her being, subsided, and in disappointment she picked up her bag and was starting for a street car, when up the long, broad platform there came hurrying a short-legged little man, with a bloodshot, watery eye. He paused hesitant at a couple of yards, smiled tentatively, and the remnant of an old glove fumbled the brim of a rumpled, semi-bald object that in its distant youth had probably been a silk hat.

The young woman smiled back and held out her hand.

“How do you do, Mr. Huggins.”

“How de do, Miss Katherine,” he stammered.

“Have you seen father anywhere?” she asked anxiously.

“No. Your aunt just sent me word I was to meet you and fetch you home. She couldn’t leave Doctor West.”

“Is father ill?” she cried.

The old cabman fumbled his ancient headgear.

“No—he ain’t—he ain’t exactly sick. He’s just porely. I guess it’s only—only a bad headache.”

He hastily picked up her suit-case and led her past the sidling admiration of the drummers, those sovereign critics of Western femininity, to the back of the station where stood a tottering surrey and a dingy gray nag, far gone in years, that leaned upon its shafts as though on crutches. Katherine clambered in, and the drooping animal doddered along a street thickly overhung with the exuberant May-green of maples.

She gazed with ardent eyes at the familiar frame cottages, in some of which had lived school and high-school friends, sitting comfortably back amid their little squares of close-cropped lawn. She liked New York with that adoptive liking one acquires for the place one chooses from among all others for the passing of one’s life; but her affection remained warm and steadfast with this old town of her girlhood.

“Oh, but it feels good to be back in Westville again!” she cried to the cabman.

“I reckon it must. I guess it’s all of two years sence you been home.”

“Two years, yes. It’s going to be a great celebration this afternoon, isn’t it?”

“Yes’m—very big”—and he hastily struck the ancient steed. “Get-ep there, Jenny!”

Mr. Huggins’s mare turned off Station Avenue, and Katharine excitedly stared ahead beneath the wide-boughed maples for the first glimpse of her home. At length it came into view—one of those big, square, old-fashioned wooden houses, built with no perceptible architectural idea beyond commodious shelter. She had thought her father might possibly stumble out to greet her, but no one stood waiting at the paling gate.

She sprang lightly from the carriage as it drew up beside the curb, and leaving Mr. Huggins to follow with her bag she hurried up the brick-paved path to the

house. As she crossed the porch, a slight, gray, Quakerish little lady, with a white kerchief folded across her breast, pushed open the screen door. Her Katherine gathered into her arms and kissed repeatedly.

“I’m so glad to see you, auntie!” she cried. “How are you?”

“Very well,” the old woman answered in a thin, tremulous voice. “How is thee?”

“Me? Oh, you know nothing’s ever wrong with me!” She laughed in her buoyant young strength. “But you, auntie?” She grew serious. “You look very tired—and very, very worn and worried. But I suppose it’s the strain of father’s headache—poor father! How is he?”

“I—I think he’s feeling some better,” the old woman faltered. “He’s still lying down.”

They had entered the big, airy sitting-room. Katherine’s hat and coat went flying upon the couch.

“Now, before I so much as ask you a question, or tell you a thing, Aunt Rachel, I’m going up to see dear old father.”

She made for the stairway, but her aunt caught her arm in consternation.

“Wait, Katherine! Thee musn’t see him yet.”

“Why, what’s the matter?” Katherine asked in surprise.

“It—it would be better for him if thee didn’t disturb him.”

“But, auntie—you know no one can soothe him as I can when he has a headache!”

“But he’s asleep just now. He didn’t sleep a minute all night.”

“Then of course I’ll wait.” Katherine turned back. “Has he suffered much——”

She broke off. Her aunt was gazing at her in wide-eyed, helpless misery.

“Why—why—what’s the matter, auntie?”

Her aunt did not answer her.

“Tell me! What is it? What’s wrong?”

Still the old woman did not speak.

“Something has happened to father!” cried Katherine. She clutched her aunt’s thin shoulders. “Has something happened to father?”

The old woman trembled all over, and tears started from her mild eyes.

“Yes,” she quavered.

“But what is it?” Katherine asked frantically. “Is he very sick?”

“It’s—it’s worse than that.”

“Please! What is it then?”

“I haven’t the heart to tell thee,” she said piteously, and she sank into a chair and covered her face.

Katherine caught her arm and fairly shook her in the intensity of her demand.

“Tell me! I can’t stand this another instant!”

“There—there isn’t going to be any celebration.”

“No celebration?”

“Yesterday—thy father—was arrested.”

“Arrested!”

“And indicted for accepting a bribe.”

Katherine shrank back.

“Oh!” she whispered. “Oh!” Then her slender body tensed, and her dark eyes flashed fire. “Father accept a bribe! It’s a lie! A lie!”

“It hardly seems true to me, either.”

“It’s a lie!” repeated Katherine. “But is he—is he locked up?”

“They let me go his bail.”

Again Katherine caught her aunt’s arm.

“Come—tell me all about it!”

“Please don’t make me. I—I can’t.”

“But I must know!”

“It’s in the newspapers—they’re on the centre-table.”

Katherine turned to the table and seized a paper. At sight of the sheet she had picked up, the old woman hurried across to her in dismay.

“Don’t read that *Express!*” she cried, and she sought to draw the paper from Katherine’s hands. “Read the *Clarion*. It’s ever so much kinder.”

But Katherine had already seen the headline that ran across the top of the *Express*. It staggered her. She gasped at the blow, but she held on to the paper.

“I’ll read the worst they have to say,” she said.

Her aunt dropped into a chair and covered her eyes to avoid sight of the girl’s suffering. The story, in its elements, was a commonplace to Katherine; in her work with the Municipal League she had every few days met with just such a tale as this. But that which is a commonplace when strangers are involved, becomes a tragedy when loved ones are its actors. So, as she read the old, old story, Katherine trembled as with mortal pain.

But sickening as was the story in itself, it was made even more agonizing to her by the manner of the *Express*’s telling. Bruce’s typewriter had never been more impassioned. The story was in heavy-faced type, the lines two columns wide; and in a “box” in the very centre of the first page was an editorial denouncing Doctor West and demanding for him such severe punishment as would make future traitors forever fear to sell their city. Article and editorial were rousing and vivid, brilliant and bitter—as mercilessly stinging as a salted whip-lash cutting into bare flesh.

Katherine writhed with the pain of it. “Oh!” she cried. “It’s brutal! Brutal! Who could have had the heart to write like that about father?”

“The editor, Arnold Bruce,” answered her aunt.

“Oh, he’s a brute! If I could tell him to his face——” Her whole slender being flamed with anger and hatred, and she crushed the paper in a fierce hand and flung it to the floor.

Then, slowly, her face faded to an ashen gray. She steadied herself on the back of

a chair and stared in desperate, fearful supplication at the bowed figure of the older woman.

“Auntie?” she breathed.

“Yes?”

“Auntie”—eyes and voice were pleading—“auntie, the—the things—this paper says—they never happened, did they?”

The old head nodded.

“Oh! oh!” she gasped. She wavered, sank stricken into a chair, and buried her face in her arms. “Poor father!” she moaned brokenly. “Poor father!”

There was silence for a moment, then the old woman rose and gently put a hand upon the quivering young shoulder.

“Don’t, dear! Even if it did happen, I can’t believe it. Thy father——”

At that moment, overhead, there was a soft noise, as of feet placed upon the floor. Katherine sprang up.

“Father!” she breathed. There began a restless, slippered pacing. “Father!” she repeated, and sprang for the stairway and rapidly ran up.

At her father’s door she paused, hand over her heart. She feared to enter to her father—feared lest she should find his head bowed in acknowledged shame. But she summoned her strength and noiselessly opened the door. It was a large room, a hybrid of bedroom and study, whose drawn shades had dimmed the brilliant morning into twilight. An open side door gave a glimpse of glass jars, bellying retorts and other paraphernalia of the laboratory.

Walking down the room was a tall, stooping, white-haired figure in a quilted dressing-gown. He reached the end of the room, turned about, then sighted her in the doorway.

“Katherine!” he cried with quavering joy, and started toward her; but he came abruptly to a pause, hesitating, accused man that he was, to make advances.

Her sickening fear was for the instant swept away by a rising flood of love. She sprang forward and threw her arms about his neck.

“Father!” she sobbed. “Oh, father!”

She felt his tears upon her forehead, felt his body quiver, and felt his hand gently stroke her back.

“You’ve heard—then?” he asked, at length.

“Yes—from the papers.”

He held her close, but for a moment did not speak.

“It isn’t a—a very happy celebration—I’ve prepared for you.”

She could only cry convulsively, “Poor father!”

“You never dreamt,” he quavered, “your old father—could do a thing like this—did you?”

She did not answer. She trembled a moment longer on his shoulder; then, slowly and with fear, she lifted her head and gazed into his face. The face was worn—she thrilled with pain to see how sadly worn it was!—but though tear-wet and working with emotion, it met her look with steadiness. It was the same simple, kindly, open face that she had known since childhood.

There was a sudden wild leaping within her. She clutched his shoulders, and her voice rang out in joyous conviction:

“Father—you are not guilty!”

“You believe in me, then?”

“You are not guilty!” she cried with mounting joy.

He smiled faintly.

“Why, of course not, my child.”

“Oh, father!” And again she caught him in a close embrace.

After a moment she leaned back in his arms.

“I’m so happy—so happy! Forgive me, daddy dear, that I could doubt you even for a minute.”

“How could you help it? They say the evidence against me is very strong.”



“I should have believed you innocent against all the evidence in the world! And I do, and shall—no matter what they may say!”

“Bless you, Katherine!”

“But come—tell me how it all came about. But, first, let’s brighten up the room a little.”

So great was her relief that her spirits had risen as though some positive blessing had befallen her. She crossed lightly to the big bay window, raised the shades and threw up the sashes. The sunlight slanted down into the room and lay in a dazzling yellow square upon the floor. The soft breeze sighed through the two tall pines without and bore into them the perfumed freshness of the spring.

“There now, isn’t that better?” she said, smiling brightly.

“That’s just what your home-coming has done for me,” he said gratefully—“let in the sunlight.”

“Come, come—don’t try to turn the head of your offspring with flattery! Now, sir, sit down,” and she pointed to a chair at his desk, which stood within the bay window.

“First,”—with his gentle smile—“if I may, I’d like to take a look at my daughter.”

“I suppose a father’s wish is a daughter’s command,” she complained. “So go ahead.”

He moved to the window, so that the light fell full upon her, and for a long moment gazed into her face. The brow was low and broad. Over the white temples the heavy dark hair waved softly down, to be fastened in a simple knot low upon the neck, showing in its full beauty the rare modelling of her head. The eyes were a rich, warm, luminous brown, fringed with long lashes, and in them lurked all manner of fathomless mysteries. The mouth was soft, yet full and firm—a real mouth, such as Nature bestows upon her real women. It was a face of freshness and youth and humour, and now was tremulous with a smiling, tear-wet tenderness.

“I think,” said her father, slowly and softly, “that my daughter is very beautiful.”

“There—enough of your blarney!” She flushed with pleasure, and pressed her

fresh cheek against his withered one. "You dear old father, you!"

She drew him to his desk, which was strewn with a half-finished manuscript on the typhoid bacillus, and upon which stood a faded photograph of a young woman, near Katherine's years and made in her image, dressed in the tight-fitting "basque" of the early eighties. Westville knew that Doctor West had loved his wife dearly, but the town had never surmised a tenth of the grief that had closed darkly in upon him when typhoid fever had carried her away while her young womanhood was in its freshest bloom.

Katherine pressed him down into his chair at the desk, sat down in one beside it, and took his hand.

"Now, father, tell me just how things stand."

"You know everything already," said he.

"Not everything. I know the charges of the other side, and I know your innocence. But I do not know your explanation of the affair."

He ran his free hand through his silver hair, and his face grew troubled.

"My explanation agrees with what you have read, except that I did not know I was being bribed."

"H'm!" Her brow wrinkled thoughtfully and she was silent for a moment. "Suppose we go back to the very beginning, father, and run over the whole affair. Try to remember. In the early stages of negotiations, did the agent say anything to you about money?"

He did not speak for a minute or more.

"Now that I think it over, he did say something about its being worth my while if his filter was accepted."

"That was an overture to bribe you. And what did you say to him?"

"I don't remember. You see, at the time, his offer, if it was one, did not make any impression on me. I believe I didn't say anything to him at all."

"But you approved his filter?"

"Yes."

“Mr. Marcy says in the *Express*, and you admit it, that he offered you a bribe. You approved his filter. On the face of it, speaking legally, that looks bad, father.”

“But how could I honestly keep from approving his filter, when it was the very best on the market for our water?” demanded Doctor West.

“Then how did you come to accept that money?”

The old man’s face cleared.

“I can explain that easily. Some time ago the agent said something about the Acme Filter Company wishing to make a little donation to our hospital. I’m one of the directors, you know. So, when he handed me that envelope, I supposed it was the contribution to the hospital—perhaps twenty-five or fifty dollars.”

“And that is all?”

“That’s the whole truth. But when I explained the matter to the prosecuting attorney, he just smiled.”

“I know it’s the truth, because you say it.” She affectionately patted the hand that she held. “But, again speaking legally, it wouldn’t sound very plausible to an outsider. But how do you explain the situation?”

“I think the whole affair must be just a mistake.”

“Possibly. But if so, you’ll have to be able to prove it.” She thought a space. “Could it be that this is a manufactured charge?”

Doctor West’s eyes widened with amazement.

“Why, of course not! You have forgotten that the man who makes the charge is Mr. Sherman. You surely do not think he would let himself be involved in anything that he did not believe to be in the highest degree honourable?”

“I do not know him very well. During the four years he has been here, I have met him only a few times.”

“But you know what your dearest friend thinks of him.”

“Yes, I know Elsie considers her husband to be an ecclesiastical Sir Galahad. And I must admit that he has seemed to me the highest type of the modern young minister.”

“Then you agree with me, that Mr. Sherman is thoroughly honest in this affair? That his only motive is a sense of public duty?”

“Yes. I cannot conceive of him knowingly doing a wrong.”

“That’s what has forced me to think it’s only just a mistake,” said her father.

“You may be right.” She considered the idea. “But what does your lawyer say?”

His pale cheeks flushed.

“I have no lawyer,” he said slowly.

“I see. You were waiting to consult me about whom to retain.”

He shook his head.

“Then you have approached some one?”

“I have spoken to Hopkins, and Williams, and Freeman. They all——” He hesitated.

“Yes?”

“They all said they could not take my case.”

“Could not take your case!” she cried. “Why not?”

“They made different excuses. But their excuses were not their real reason.”

“And what was that?”

The old man flushed yet more painfully.

“I guess you do not fully realize the situation, Katherine. I don’t need to tell you that a wave of popular feeling against political corruption is sweeping across the country. This is the first big case that has come out in Westville, and the city is stirred up over this as it hasn’t been stirred in years. The way the *Express*—— You saw the *Express*?”

Her hands instinctively clenched.

“It was awful! Awful!”

“The way the *Express* has handled it has especially—well, you see——”

“You mean those lawyers are afraid to take the case?”

Doctor West nodded.

Katherine’s dark eyes glowed with wrath.

“Did you try any one else?”

“Mr. Green came to see me. But——”

“Of course not! It would kill your case to have a shyster represent you.” She gripped his hand, and her voice rang out: “Father, I’m glad those men refused you. We’re going to get for you the biggest man, the biggest lawyer, in Westville.”

“You mean Mr. Blake?”

“Yes, Mr. Blake.”

“I thought of him at first, of course. But I—well, I hesitated to approach him.”

“Hesitated? Why?”

“Well, you see,” he stammered, “I remembered about your refusing him, and I felt——”

“That would never make any difference to him,” she cried. “He’s too much of a gentleman. Besides, that was five years ago, and he has forgotten it.”

“Then you think he’ll take the case?”

“Of course, he’ll take it! He’ll take it because he’s a big man, and because you need him, and because he’s no coward. And with the biggest man in Westville on your side, you’ll see how public opinion will right-about face!”

She sprang up, aglow with energy. “I’m going to see him this minute! With his help, we’ll have this matter cleared up before you know it, and”—smiling lightly—“just you see, daddy, all Westville will be out there in the front yard, tramping

over Aunt Rachel's sweet williams, begging to be allowed to come and kiss your hand!"

He kissed her own. He rose, and a smile broke through the clouds of his face.

"You've been home only an hour, and I feel that a thousand years have been lifted off me."

"That's right—and just keep on feeling a thousand years younger." She smiled caressingly, and began to twist a finger in a buttonhole of his coat. "U'm—don't you think, daddy, that such a very young gentleman as you are, such a regular roaring young blade, might—u'm—might——"

"Might what, my dear?"

"Might——" She leaned forward and whispered in his ear.

A hand went to his throat.

"Eh, why, is this one——"

"I'm afraid it is, daddy—very!"

"We've been so upset I guess your aunt must have forgotten to put out a clean one for me."

"And I suppose it never occurred to the profound scientific intellect that it was possible for one to pull out a drawer and take out a collar for one's self." She crossed to the bureau and came back with a clean collar. "Now, sir—up with your chin!" With quick hands she replaced the offending collar with the fresh one, tied the tie and gave it a perfecting little pat. "There—that's better! And now I must be off. I'll send around a few policemen to keep the crowds off Aunt Rachel's flower-beds."

And pressing on his pale cheek another kiss, and smiling at him from the door, she hurried out.



## CHAPTER IV

### DOCTOR WEST'S LAWYER

Katherine's refusal of Harrison Blake's unforeseen proposal, during the summer she had graduated from Vassar, had, until the present hour, been the most painful experience of her life.

Ever since that far-away autumn of her fourteenth year when Blake had led an at-first forlorn crusade against "Blind Charlie" Peck and swept that apparently unconquerable autocrat and his corrupt machine from power, she had admired Blake as the ideal public man. He had seemed so fine, so big already, and loomed so large in promise—it was the fall following his proposal that he was elected lieutenant-governor—that it had been a humiliation to her that she, so insignificant, so unworthy, could not give him that intractable passion, love. But though he had gone very pale at her stammered answer, he had borne his disappointment like a gallant gentleman; and in the years since then he had acquitted himself to perfection in that most difficult of rôles, the lover who must be content to be mere friend.

Katherine still retained her girlish admiration of Mr. Blake. Despite his having been so conspicuous at the forefront of public affairs, no scandal had ever soiled his name. His rectitude, so said people whose memories ran back a generation, was due mainly to fine qualities inherited from his mother, for his father had been a good-natured, hearty, popular politician with no discoverable bias toward over-scrupulosity. In fact, twenty years ago there had been a great to-do touching the voting, through a plan of the elder Blake's devising, of a gang of negroes half a dozen times down in a river-front ward. But his party had rushed loyally to his rescue, and had vindicated him by sending him to Congress; and his sudden death on the day after taking his seat had at the time abashed all accusation, and had suffused his memory with a romantic afterglow of sentiment.

Blake lived alone with his mother in a house adjoining the Wests', and a few moments after Katherine had left her father she turned into the Blakes' yard. The house stood far back in a spacious lawn, shady with broad maples and aspiring pines, and set here and there with shrubs and flower-beds and a fountain whose misty spray hung a golden aureole upon the sunlight. It was quite worthy of

Westville's most distinguished citizen—a big, roomy house of brick, its sterner lines all softened with cool ivy, and with a wide piazza crossing its entire front and embracing its two sides.

The hour was that at which Westville arose from its accustomed mid-day dinner—which was the reason Katherine was calling at Blake's home instead of going downtown to his office. She was informed that he was in. Telling the maid she would await him in his library, where she knew he received all clients who called on business at his home, she ascended the well-remembered stairway and entered a large, light room with walls booked to the ceiling.

Despite her declaration to her father that that old love episode had been long forgotten by Mr. Blake, at this moment it was not forgotten by her. She could not subdue a fluttering agitation over the circumstance that she was about to appeal for succour to a man she had once refused.

She had but a moment to wait. Blake's tall, straight figure entered and strode rapidly across the room, his right hand outstretched.

“What—you, Katherine! I'm so glad to see you!”

She had risen. “And I to see you, Mr. Blake.” For all he had once vowed himself her lover, she had never overcome her girlhood awe of him sufficiently to use the more familiar “Harrison.”

“I knew you were coming home, but I had not expected to see you so soon. Please sit down again.”

She resumed her soft leather-covered chair, and he took the swivel chair at his great flat-topped library desk. His manner was most cordial, but lurking beneath it Katherine sensed a certain constraint—due perhaps, to their old relationship—perhaps due to meeting a friend involved in a family disgrace.

Blake was close upon forty, with a dark, strong, handsome face, penetrating but pleasant eyes, and black hair slightly marked with gray. He was well dressed but not too well dressed, as became a public man whose following was largely of the country. His person gave an immediate impression of a polished but not over-polished gentleman—of a man who in acquiring a large grace of manner, has lost nothing of virility and bigness and purpose.

“It seems quite natural,” Katherine began, smiling, and trying to speak lightly, “that each time I come home it is to congratulate you upon some new honour.”



“New honour?” queried he.

“Oh, your name reaches even to New York! We hear that you are spoken of to succeed Senator Grayson when he retires next year.”

“Oh, that!” He smiled—still with some constraint. “I won’t try to make you believe that I’m indifferent about the matter. But I don’t need to tell you that there’s many a slip betwixt being ‘spoken of’ and actually being chosen.”

There was an instant of awkward silence. Then Katherine went straight to the business of her visit.

“Of course you know about father.”

He nodded. “And I do not need to say, Katherine, how very, very sorry I am.”

“I was certain of your sympathy. Things look black on the surface for him, but I want you to know that he is innocent.”

“I am relieved to be assured of that,” he said, hesitatingly. “For, frankly, as you say, things do look black.”

She leaned forward and spoke rapidly, her hands tightly clasped.

“I have come to see you, Mr. Blake, because you have always been our friend—my friend, and a kinder friend than a young girl had any right to expect—because I know you have the ability to bring out the truth no matter how dark the circumstantial evidence may seem. I have come, Mr. Blake, to ask you, to beg you, to be my father’s lawyer.”

He stared at her, and his face grew pale.

“To be your father’s lawyer?” he repeated.

“Yes, yes—to be my father’s lawyer.”

He turned in his chair and looked out to where the fountain was flinging its iridescent drapery to the wind. She gazed at his strong, clean-cut profile in breathless expectation.

“I again assure you he is innocent,” she urged pleadingly. “I know you can clear him.”

“You have evidence to prove his innocence?” asked Blake.

“That you can easily uncover.”

He slowly swung about. Though with all his powerful will he strove to control himself, he was profoundly agitated, and he spoke with a very great effort.

“You have put me in a most embarrassing situation, Katherine.”

She caught her breath.

“You mean?”

“I mean that I should like to help you, but—but——”

“Yes? Yes?”

“But I cannot.”

“Cannot! You mean—you refuse his case?”

“It pains me, but I must.”

She grew as white as death.

“Oh!” she breathed. “Oh!” She gazed at him, lips wide, in utter dismay.

Suddenly she seized his arm. “But you have not yet thought it over—you have not considered,” she cried rapidly. “I cannot take no for your answer. I beg you, I implore you, to take the case.”

He seemed to be struggling between two desires. A slender, well-knit hand stretched out and clutched a ruler; his brow was moist; but he kept silent.

“Mr. Blake, I beg you, I implore you, to reconsider,” she feverishly pursued. “Do you not see what it will mean to my father? If you take the case, he is as good as cleared!”

His voice came forth low and husky. “It is because it is beyond my power to clear him that I refuse.”

“Beyond your power?”

“Listen, Katherine,” he answered. “I am glad you believe your father innocent. The faith you have is the faith a daughter ought to have. I do not want to hurt you, but I must tell you the truth—I do not share your faith.”

“You refuse, then, because you think him guilty?”

He inclined his head. “The evidence is conclusive. It is beyond my power, beyond the power of any lawyer, to clear him.”

This sudden failure of the aid she had so confidently counted as already hers, was a blow that for the moment completely stunned her. She sank back in her chair and her head dropped down into her hands.

Blake wiped his face with his handkerchief. After a moment, he went on in an agitated, persuasive voice:

“I do not want you to think, because I refuse, that I am any less your friend. If I took the case, and did my best, your father would be convicted just the same. I am going to open my heart to you, Katherine. I should like very much to be chosen for that senatorship. Naturally, I do not wish to do any useless thing that will impair my chances. Now for me, an aspirant for public favour, to champion against the aroused public the case of a man who has—forgive me the word—who has betrayed that public, and in the end to lose that case, as I most certainly should—it would be nothing less than political suicide. Your father would gain nothing. I would lose—perhaps everything. Don’t you see?”

“I follow your reasons,” she said brokenly into her hands, “I do not blame you—I accept your answer—but I still believe my father innocent.”

“And for that faith, as I told you, I admire and honour you.”

She slowly rose. He likewise stood up.

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

“I do not know,” she answered dully. “I was so confident of your aid, that I had thought of no alternative.”

“Your father has tried other lawyers?”

“Yes. They have all refused. You can guess their reason.”

He was silent for an instant.

“Why not take the case yourself?”

“I take the case!” cried Katherine, amazed.

“Yes. You are a lawyer.”

“But I have never handled a case in court! I am not even admitted to the bar of the state. And, besides, a woman lawyer in Westville—— No, it’s quite out of the question.”

“I was only suggesting it, you know,” he said apologetically.

“Oh, I realized you did not mean it seriously.”

Her face grew ashen as her failure came to her afresh. She gazed at him with a final desperation.

“Then your answer—it is final?”

“I am sorry, but it is final,” said he.

Her head dropped.

“Thank you,” she said dully. “Good-by.” And she started away.

“Wait, Katherine.”

She paused, and he came to her side. His features were gray-hued and were twitching strangely; for an instant she had the wild impression that his old love for her still lived.

“I am sorry that—that the first time you asked aid of me—I should fail you. But but——”

“I understand.”

“One word more.” But he let several moments pass before he spoke it, and he wet his lips continually. “Remember, I am still your friend. Though I cannot take the case, I shall be glad, in a private way, to advise you upon any matters you may care to lay before me.”

“You are very good.”

“Then you accept?”

“How can I refuse? Thank you.”

He accompanied her down the stairway and to the door. Heavy-hearted, she returned home. This was sad news to bring her father, whom but half an hour

before she had so confidently cheered; and she knew not in what fresh direction to turn for aid.

She went straight up to her father's room. With him she found a stranger, who had a vague, far-distant familiarity.

The two men rose.

"This is my daughter," said Doctor West.

The stranger bowed slightly.

"I have heard of Miss West," he said, and in his manner Katherine's quick instinct read strong preconceived disapprobation.

"And, Katherine," continued her father, "this is Mr. Bruce."

She stopped short.

"Mr. Bruce of the *Express*?"

"Of the *Express*," Bruce calmly repeated.

Her dejected figure grew suddenly tense, and her cheeks glowed with hot colour. She moved up before the editor and gazed with flashing eyes into his square-jawed face.

"So you are the man who wrote those brutal things about father?"

He bristled at her hostile tone and manner, and there was a quick snapping behind the heavy glasses.

"I am the man who wrote those true things about your father," he said with cold emphasis.

"And after that you dare come into this house!"

"Pardon me, Miss West, but a newspaper man dares go wherever his business takes him."

She was trembling all over.

"Then let me inform you that you have no business here. Neither my father nor myself has anything whatever to say to yellow journalists!"

“Katherine! Katherine!” interjected her father.

Bruce bowed, his face a dull red.

“I shall leave, Miss West, just as soon as Doctor West answers my last question. I called to see if he wished to make any statement, and I was asking him about his lawyer. He told me he had as yet secured none, but that you were applying to Mr. Blake.”

Doctor West stepped toward her eagerly.

“Yes, Katherine, what did he say? Will he take the case?”

She turned from Bruce, and as she looked into the white, worn face of her father, the fire of her anger went out.

“He said—he said——”

“Yes—yes?”

She put her arms about him.

“Don’t you mind, father dear, what he said.”

Doctor West grew yet more pale.

“Then—he said—the same as the others?”

She held him tight.

“Dear daddy!”

“Then—he refused?”

“Yes—but don’t you mind it,” she tried to say bravely.

Without a sound, the old man’s head dropped upon his chest. He held to Katherine a moment; then he moved waveringly to an old haircloth sofa, sank down upon it and bowed his face into his hands.

Bruce broke the silence.

“I am to understand, then, that your father has no lawyer?”

Katherine wheeled from the bowed figure, and her anger leaped instantly to a

white heat.

“And why has he no lawyer?” she cried. “Because of the inhuman things you wrote about him!”

“You forget, Miss West, that I am running a newspaper, and it is my business to print the news.”

“The news, yes; but not a malignant, ferocious distortion of the news! Look at my father there. Does it not fill your soul with shame to think of the black injustice you have done him?”

“Mere sentiment! Understand, I do not let conventional sentiment stand between me and my duty.”

“Your duty!” There was a world of scorn in her voice. “And, pray, what is your duty?”

“Part of it is to establish, and maintain, decent standards of public service in this town.”

“Don’t hide behind that hypocritical pretence! I’ve heard about you. I know the sort of man you are. You saw a safe chance for a yellow story for your yellow newspaper, a safe chance to gain prominence by yelping at the head of the pack. If he had been a rich man, if he had had a strong political party behind him, would you have dared assail him as you have? Never! Oh, it was brutal—infamous—cowardly!”

There was an angry fire behind the editor’s thick glasses, and his square chin thrust itself out. He took a step nearer.

“Listen to me!” he commanded in a slow, defiant voice. “Your opinion is to me a matter of complete indifference. I tell you that a man who betrays his city is a traitor, and that I would treat an old traitor exactly as I would treat a young traitor, I tell you that I take it as a sign of an awakening public conscience when reputable lawyers refuse to defend a man who has done what your father has done. And, finally, I predict that, try as you may, you will not be able to find a decent lawyer who will dare to take his case. And I glory in it, and consider it the result of my work!” He bowed to her. “And now, Miss West, I wish you good afternoon.”

She stood quivering, gasping, while he crossed to the door. As his hand fell upon

the knob she sprang forward.

“Wait!” she cried. “Wait! He has a lawyer!”

He paused.

“Indeed! And whom?”

“One who is going to make you take back every cowardly word you have printed!”

“Who is it, Katherine?” It was her father who spoke.

She turned. Doctor West had raised his head, and in his eyes was an eager, hopeful light. She bent over him and slipped an arm about his shoulders.

“Father dear,” she quavered, “since we can get no one else, will you take me?”

“Take you?” he exclaimed.

“Because,” she quavered on, “whether you will or not, I’m going to stay in Westville and be your lawyer.”





## CHAPTER V

### KATHERINE PREPARES FOR BATTLE

For a long space after Bruce had gone Katherine sat quivering upon the old haircloth sofa beside her father, holding his hands tightly, caressingly. Her words tumbled hotly from her lips—words of love of him—of resentment of the injustice which he suffered—and, fiercest of all, of wrath against Editor Bruce, who had so ruthlessly, and for such selfish ends, incited the popular feeling against him. She would make such a fight as Westville had never seen! She would show those lawyers who had been reduced to cowards by Bruce's demagoguery! She would bring the town humiliated to her father's feet!

But emotion has not only peaks, but plains, and dark valleys. As she cooled and her passion descended to a less exalted level, she began to see the difficulties of, and her unfitness for, the rôle she had so impulsively accepted. An uneasiness for the future crept upon her. As she had told Mr. Blake, she had never handled a case in court. True, she had been a member of the bar for two years, but her duties with the Municipal League had consisted almost entirely in working up evidence in cases of municipal corruption for the use of her legal superiors. An untried lawyer, and a woman lawyer at that—surely a weak reed for her father to lean upon!

But she had thrown down the gage of battle; she had to fight, since there was no other champion; and even in this hour of emotion, when tears were so plenteous and every word was accompanied by a caress, she began to plan the preliminaries of her struggle.

"I shall write to-night to the league for a leave of absence," she said. "One of the things I must see to at once is to get admitted to the state bar. Do you know when your case is to come up?"

"It has been put over to the September term of court."

"That gives me four months."

She was silently thoughtful for a space. "I've got to work hard, hard! upon your case. As I see it now, I am inclined to agree with you that the situation has arisen

from a misunderstanding—that the agent thought you expected a bribe, and that you thought the bribe a small donation to the hospital.”

“I’m certain that’s how it is,” said her father.

“Then the thing to do is to see Doctor Sherman, and if possible the agent, have them repeat their testimony and try to search out in it the clue to the mistake. And that I shall see to at once.”

Five minutes later Katherine left the house. After walking ten minutes through the quiet, maple-shaded back streets she reached the Wabash Avenue Church, whose rather ponderous pile of Bedford stone was the most ambitious and most frequented place of worship in Westville, and whose bulk was being added to by a lecture room now rising against its side.

Katherine went up a gravelled walk toward a cottage that stood beneath the church’s shadow. The house’s front was covered with a wide-spreading rose vine, a tapestry of rich green which June would gorgeously embroider with sprays of heart-red roses. The cottage looked what Katherine knew it was, a bower of lovers.

Her ring was answered by a fair, fragile young woman whose eyes were the colour of faith and loyalty. A faint colour crept into the young woman’s pale cheeks.

“Why—Katherine—why—why—I don’t know what you think of us, but—but ——” She could stammer out no more, but stood in the doorway in distressed uncertainty.

Katherine’s answer was to stretch out her arms. “Elsie!” Instantly the two old friends were in a close embrace.

“I haven’t slept, Katherine,” sobbed Mrs. Sherman, “for thinking of what you would think——”

“I think that, whatever has happened, I love you just the same.”

“Thank you for saying it, Katherine.” Mrs. Sherman gazed at her in tearful gratitude. “I can’t tell you how we have suffered over this—this affair. Oh, if you only knew!”

It was instinctive with Katherine to soothe the pain of others, though suffering

herself. "I am certain Doctor Sherman acted from the highest motives," she assured the young wife. "So say no more about it."

They had entered the little sitting-room, hung with soft white muslin curtains. "But at the same time, Elsie, I cannot believe my father guilty," Katherine went on. "And though I honour your husband, why, even the noblest man can be mistaken. My hope of proving my father's innocence is based on the belief that Doctor Sherman may somehow have made a mistake. At any rate, I'd like to talk over his evidence with him."

"He's trying to work on his sermon, though he's too worn to think. I'll bring him right in."

She passed through a door into the study, and a moment later reëntered with Doctor Sherman. The present meeting would have been painful to an ordinary person; doubly so was it to such a hyper-sensitive nature. The young clergyman stood hesitant just within the doorway, his usual pallor greatly deepened, his thin fingers intertwined—in doubt how to greet Katherine till she stretched out her hand to him.

"I want you to understand, Katherine dear," little Mrs. Sherman put in quickly, with a look of adoration at her husband, "that Edgar reached the decision to take the action he did only after days of agony. You know, Katherine, Doctor West was always as kind to me as another father, and I loved him almost like one. At first I begged Edgar not to do anything. Edgar walked the floor for nights—suffering!—oh, how you suffered, Edgar!"

"Isn't it a little incongruous," said Doctor Sherman, smiling wanly at her, "for the instrument that struck the blow to complain, in the presence of the victim, of *his* suffering?"

"But I want her to know it!" persisted the wife. "She must know it to do you justice, dear! It seemed at first disloyal—but finally Edgar decided that his duty to the city——"

"Please say no more, Elsie." Katherine turned to the pale young minister. "Doctor Sherman, I have not come to utter one single word of recrimination. I have come merely to ask you to tell me all you know about the case."

"I shall be glad to do so."

"And could I also talk with Mr. Marcy, the agent?"

“He has left the city, and will not return till the trial.”

Katherine was disappointed by this news. Doctor Sherman, though obviously pained by the task, rehearsed in minutest detail the charges he had made against Doctor West, which charges he would later have to repeat upon the witness stand. Also he recounted Mr. Marcy’s story. Katherine scrutinized every point in these two stories for the loose end, the loop-hole, the flaw, she had thought to find. But flaw there was none. The stories were perfectly straightforward.

Katherine walked slowly away, still going over and over Doctor Sherman’s testimony. Doctor Sherman was telling the indubitable truth—yet her father was indubitably innocent. It was a puzzling case, this her first case—a puzzling, most puzzling case.

When she reached home she was told by her aunt that a gentleman was waiting to see her. She entered the big, old-fashioned parlour, fresh and tasteful despite the stiff black walnut that, in the days of her mother’s marriage, had been spread throughout the land as beauty by the gentlemen who dealt conjointly in furniture and coffins.

From a chair there rose a youthful and somewhat corpulent presence, with a chubby and very serious pink face that sat in a glossy high collar as in a cup. He smiled with a blushful but ingratiating dignity.

“Don’t you remember me? I’m Charlie Horn.”

“Oh!” And instinctively, as if to identify him by Charlie Horn’s well-remembered strawberry-marks, Katherine glanced at his hands. But they were clean, and the warts were gone. She looked at him in doubt. “You can’t be Nellie Horn’s little brother?”

“I’m not so little,” he said, with some resentment. “Since you knew me,” he added a little grandiloquently, “I’ve graduated from Bloomington.”

“Please pardon me! It was kind of you to call, and so soon.”

“Well, you see I came on business. I suppose you have seen this afternoon’s *Express*?”

She instinctively stiffened.

“I have not.”

He drew out a copy of the *Express*, opened it, and pointed a plump, pinkish forefinger at the beginning of an article on the first page.

“You see the *Express* says you are going to be your father’s lawyer.”

Katharine read the indicated paragraphs. Her colour heightened. The statement was blunt and bare, but between the lines she read the contemptuous disapproval of the “new woman” that a few hours since Bruce had displayed before her. Again her anger toward Bruce flared up.

“I am a reporter for the *Clarion*,” young Charlie Horn announced, striving not to appear too proud. “And I’ve come to interview you.”

“Interview me?” she cried in dismay. “What about?”

“Well, you see,” said he, with his benign smile, “you’re the first woman lawyer that’s ever been in Westville. It’s almost a bigger sensation than your fath—you see, it’s a big story.”

He drew from his pocket a bunch of copy paper. “I want you to tell me about how you are going to handle the case. And about what you think a woman lawyer’s prospects are in Westville. And about what you think will be woman’s status in future society. And you might tell me,” concluded young Charlie Horn, “who your favourite author is, and what you think of golf. That last will interest our readers, for our country club is very popular.”

It had been the experience of Nellie Horn’s brother that the good people of Westville were quite willing—nay, even had a subdued eagerness—to discourse about themselves, and whom they had visited over Sunday, and who was “Sundaying” with them, and what beauties had impressed them most at Niagara Falls; and so that confident young ambassador from the *Clarion* was somewhat dazed when, a moment later, he found himself standing alone on the West doorstep with a dim sense of having been politely and decisively wished good afternoon.

But behind him amid the stiff, dark, solemn-visaged furniture (Calvinists, every chair of them!) he left a person far more dazed than himself. Charlie Horn’s call had brought sharply home to Katherine a question that, in the press of affairs, she hardly had as yet considered—how was Westville going to take to a woman lawyer being in its midst? She realized, with a chill of apprehension, how profoundly this question concerned her next few months. Dear, bustling,

respectable Westville, she well knew, clung to its own idea of woman's sphere as to a thing divinely ordered, and to seek to leave which was scarcely less than rebellion against high God. In patriarchal days, when heaven's justice had been prompter, such a disobedient one would suddenly have found herself rebuked into a bit of saline statuary.

Katherine vividly recalled, when she had announced her intention to study law, what a raising of hands there was, what a loud regretting that she had not a mother. But since she had not settled in Westville, and since she had not been actively practising in New York, the town had become partially reconciled. But this step of hers was new, without a precedent. How would Westville take it?

Her brain burned with this and other matters all afternoon, all evening, and till the dawn began to edge in and crowd the shadows from her room. But when she met her father at the breakfast table her face was fresh and smiling.

"Well, how is my client this morning?" she asked gaily. "Do you realize, daddy, that you are my first really, truly client?"

"And I suppose you'll be charging me something outrageous as a fee!"

"Something like this"—kissing him on the ear. "But how do you feel?"

"Certain that my lawyer will win my case." He smiled. "And how are you?"

"Brimful of ideas."

"Yes? About the——"

"Yes. And about you. First, answer a few of your counsel's questions. Have you been doing much at your scientific work of late?"

"The last two months, since the water-works has been practically completed, I have spent almost my whole time at it."

"And your work was interesting?"

"Very. You see, I think I am on the verge of discovering that the typhoid bacillus \_\_\_\_\_"

"You'll tell me all about that later. Now the first order of your attorney is, just as soon as you have finished your coffee and folded your napkin, back you go to your laboratory."

“But, Katherine, with this affair——”

“This affair, worry and all, has been shifted off upon your eminent counsel. Work will keep you from worry, so back you go to your darling germs.”

“You’re mighty good, dear, but——”

“No argument! You’ve got to do just what your lawyer tells you. And now,” she added “as I may have to be seeing a lot of people, and as having people about the house may interrupt your work, I’m going to take an office.”

He stared at her.

“Take an office?”

“Yes. Who knows—I may pick up a few other cases. If I do, I know who can use the money.”

“But open an office in Westville! Why, the people——Won’t it be a little more unpleasant——” He paused doubtfully. “Did you see what the *Express* had to say about you?”

She flushed, but smiled sweetly.

“What the *Express* said is one reason why I’m going to open an office.”

“Yes?”

“I’m not going to let fear of that Mr. Bruce dictate my life. And since I’m going to be a lawyer, I’m going to be the whole thing. And what’s more, I’m going to act as though I were doing the most ordinary thing in the world. And if Mr. Bruce and the town want to talk, why, we’ll just let ’em talk!”

“But—but—aren’t you afraid?”

“Of course I’m afraid,” she answered promptly. “But when I realize that I’m afraid to do a thing, I’m certain that that is just exactly the thing for me to do. Oh, don’t look so worried, dear”—she leaned across and kissed him—“for I’m going to be the perfectest, properest, politest lady that ever scuttled a convention. And nothing is going to happen to me—nothing at all.”

Breakfast finished, Katherine despotically led her father up to his laboratory. A little later she set out for downtown, looking very fresh in a blue summer dress that had the rare qualities of simplicity and grace. Her colour was perhaps a little

warmer than was usual, but she walked along beneath the maples with tranquil mien, seemingly unconscious of some people she passed, giving others a clear, direct glance, smiling and speaking to friends and acquaintances in her most easy manner.

As she turned into Main Street the intelligence that she was coming seemed in some mysterious way to speed before her. Those exemplars of male fashion, the dry goods clerks, craned furtively about front doors. Bare-armed and aproned proprietors of grocery stores and their hirelings appeared beneath the awnings and displayed an unprecedented concern in trying to resuscitate, with aid of sprinkling-cans, bunches of expiring radishes and young onions. Owners of amiable steeds that dozed beside the curb hurried out of cavernous doors, the fear of run-away writ large upon their countenances, to see if a buckle was not loose or a tug perchance unfastened. Behind her, as she passed, Main Street stood statted in mid-action, strap in motionless hand, sprinkling-can tilting its entire contents of restorative over a box of clothes-pins, and gaped and stared. This was epochal for Westville. Never before had a real, live, practising woman lawyer trod the cement walk of Main Street.

When Katherine came to Court House Square, she crossed to the south side, passed the *Express* Building, and made for the Hollingsworth Block, whose first floor was occupied by the New York Store's "glittering array of vast and profuse fashion." Above this alluring pageant were two floors of offices; and up the narrow stairway leading thereunto Katherine mounted. She entered a door marked "Hosea Hollingsworth. Attorney-at-Law. Mortgages. Loans. Farms." In the room were a table, three chairs, a case of law books, a desk, on the top of the desk a "plug" hat, so venerable that it looked a very great-grandsire of hats, and two cuspidors marked with chromatic evidence that they were not present for ornament alone.

From the desk there rose a man, perhaps seventy, lean, tall, smooth-shaven, slightly stooped, dressed in a rusty and wrinkled "Prince Albert" coat, and with a countenance that looked a rank plagiarism of the mask of Voltaire. In one corner of his thin mouth, half chewed away, was an unlighted cigar.

"I believe this is Mr. Hollingsworth?" said Katherine. The question was purely formal, for his lank figure was one of her earliest memories.

"Yes. Come right in," he returned in a high, nasal voice.

She drew a chair away from the environs of the cuspidors and sat down. He



resumed his place at his desk and peered at her through his spectacles, and a dry, almost imperceptible smile played among the fine wrinkles of his leathery face.

“And I believe this is Katherine West—our lady lawyer,” he remarked. “I read in the *Express* how you——”

Bruce was on her nerves. She could not restrain a sudden flare of temper. “The editor of that paper is a cad!”

“Well, he ain’t exactly what you might call a hand-raised gentleman,” the old lawyer admitted. “At least, I never heard of his exerting himself so hard to be polite that he strained any tendons.”

“You know him, then?”

“A little. He’s my nephew.”

“Oh! I remember.”

“And we live together,” the old man loquaciously drawled on, eyeing her closely with a smile that might have been either good-natured or satirical. “Batch it— with a nigger who saves us work by stealing things we’d otherwise have to take care of. We scrap most of the time. I make fun of him, and he gets sore. The trouble with the editor of the *Express* is, he had a doting ma. He should have had an almighty lot of thrashing when a boy, and instead he never tasted beech limb once. He’s suffering from the spared rod.”

Katherine had a shrinking from this old man; an aversion which in her mature years she had had no occasion to examine, but which she had inherited unanalyzed from her childhood, when old Hosie Hollingsworth had been the chief scandal of the town—an infidel, who had dared challenge the creation of the earth in seven days, and yet was not stricken down by a fiery bolt from heaven! She did not pursue the subject of Bruce, but went directly to her business.

“I understand that you have an office to rent.”

“So I have. Like to see it?”

“That is what I called for.”

“Just come along with me.”

He rose, and Katherine followed him to the floor above and into a room furnished much as the one she had just left.

“This office was last used,” commented old Hosie, “by a young fellow who taught school down in Buck Creek Township and got money to study law with. He tried law for a while.” The old man’s thin prehensile lips shifted his cigar to the other side of his mouth. “He’s down in Buck Creek Township teaching school to get money to pay his back office rent.”

“How about the furniture?” asked Katherine.

“That was his. He left it in part payment. You can use it if you want to.”

“But I don’t want those things about”—pointing gingerly to a pair of cuspidors.

“All right. Though I don’t see how you expect to run a law office in Westville without ’em.” He bent over and took them in his hands. “I’ll take ’em along. I need a few more, for my business is picking up.”

“I suppose I can have possession at once.”

“Whenever you please.”

Standing with the cuspidors in his two hands the old lawyer looked her over. He slowly grinned, and a dry cackle came out of his lean throat.

“I was born out there in Buck Creek Township myself,” he said. “Folks all Quakers, same as your ma’s and your Aunt Rachel’s. I was brought up on plowing, husking corn and going to meeting. Never smiled till after I was twenty; wore a halo, size too large, that slipped down and made my ears stick out. My grandfather’s name was Elijah, my father’s Elisha. My father had twelve sons, and beginning with me, Hosea, he named ’em all in order after the minor prophets. Being brought up in a houseful of prophets, naturally a lot of the gift of prophecy sort of got rubbed off on me.”

“Well?” said Katherine impatiently, not seeing the pertinence of this autobiography.

Again he shifted his cigar. “Well, when I prophesy, it’s inspired,” he went on. “And you can take it as the word that came unto Hosea, that a woman lawyer settling in Westville is going to raise the very dickens in this old town!”



## CHAPTER VI

### THE LADY LAWYER

When old Hosie had withdrawn with his expectorative plunder, Katherine sat down at the desk and gazed thoughtfully out of her window, taking in the tarnished dome of the Court House that rose lustreless above the elm tops and the heavy-boned farmhorses that stood about the iron hitch-racks of the Square, stamping and switching their tails in dozing warfare against the flies.

Once more, she began to go over the case. Having decided to test all possible theories, she for the moment pigeon-holed the idea of a mistake, and began to seek for other explanations. For a space she vacantly watched the workmen tearing down the speakers' stand. But presently her eyes began to glow, and she sprang up and excitedly paced the little office.

Perhaps her father had unwittingly and innocently become involved in some large system of corruption! Perhaps this case was the first symptom of the existence of some deep-hidden municipal disease!

It seemed possible—very possible. Her two years with the Municipal League had taught her how common were astute dishonest practices. The idea filled her. She began to burn with a feverish hope. But from the first moment she was sufficiently cool-headed to realize that to follow up the idea she required intimate knowledge of Westville political conditions.

Here she felt herself greatly handicapped. Owing to her long residence away from Westville she was practically in ignorance of public affairs—and she faced the further difficulty of having no one to whom she could turn for information. Her father she knew could be of little service; expert though he was in his specialty, he was blind to evil in men. As for Blake, she did not care to ask aid from him so soon after his refusal of assistance. And as for others, she felt that all who could give her information were either hostile to her father or critical of herself.

For days the idea possessed her mind. She kept it to herself, and, her suspicious eyes sweeping in all directions, she studied as best she could to find some evidence or clue to evidence, that would corroborate her conjecture. In her

excited hope, she strove, while she thought and worked, to be indifferent to what the town might think about her. But she was well aware that Old Hosie's prophecy was swift in coming true—that a storm was raging, a storm of her own sex. It should be explained, however, in justice to them, that they forgot the fact, or never really knew it, that she had been forced to take her father's case. To be sure, there was no open insult, no direct attack, no face-to-face denunciation; but piazzas buzzed indignantly with her name, and at the meeting of the Ladies' Aid the poor were forgotten, as at the Missionary Society were the unbibled heathen upon the foreign shore.

Fragments of her sisters' pronouncements were wafted to Katherine's ears. "No self-respecting, womanly woman would ever think of wanting to be a lawyer"—"A forward, brazen, unwomanly young person"—"A disgrace to the town, a disgrace to our sex"—"Think of the example she sets to impressionable young girls; they'll want to break away and do all sorts of unwomanly things"—"Everybody knows her reason for being a lawyer is only that it gives her a greater chance to be with the men."

Katherine heard, her mouth hardened, a certain defiance came into her manner. But she went straight ahead seeking evidence to support her suspicion.

Every day made her feel more keenly her need of intimate knowledge about the city's political affairs; then, unexpectedly, and from an unexpected quarter, an informant stepped out upon her stage. Several times Old Hosie Hollingsworth had spoken casually when they had chanced to pass in the building or on the street. One day his lean, stooped figure appeared in her office and helped itself to a chair.

"I see you haven't exactly made what Charlie Horn, in his dramatic criticisms, calls an uproarious and unprecedented success," he remarked, after a few preliminaries.

"I have not been sufficiently interested to notice," was her crisp response.

"That's right; keep your back up," said he. "I've been agin about everything that's popular, and for everything that's unpopular, that ever happened in this town. I've been an 'agin-er' for fifty years. They'd have tarred and feathered me long ago if there'd been any leading citizen unstingy enough to have donated the tar. Then, too, I've had a little money, and going through the needle's eye is easy business compared to losing the respect of Westville so long as you've got money—unless, of course," he added, "you're a female lawyer. I tell you, there's

no more fun than stirring up the animals in this old town. Any one unpopular in Westville is worth being friends with, and so if you're willing——”

He held out his thin, bony hand. Katherine, with no very marked enthusiasm, took it. Then her eyes gleamed with a new light; and obeying an impulse she asked:

“Are you acquainted with political conditions in Westville?”

“Me acquainted with——” He cackled. “Why, I've been setting at my office window looking down on the political circus of this town ever since Noah run aground on Mount Ararat.”

She leaned forward eagerly.

“Then you know how things stand?”

“To a T.”

“Tell me, is there any rotten politics, any graft or corruption going on?” She flushed. “Of course, I mean except what's charged against my father.”

“When Blind Charlie Peck was in power, there was more graft and dirty——”

“Not then, but now?” she interrupted.

“Now? Well, of course you know that since Blake run Blind Charlie out of business ten years ago, Blake has been the big gun in this town.”

“Yes, I know.”

“Then you must know that in the last ten years Westville has been text, sermon, and doxology for all the reformers in the state.”

“But could not corruption be going on without Mr. Blake knowing it? Could not Mr. Peck be secretly carrying out some scheme?”

“Blind Charlie? Blind Charlie ain't dead yet, not by a long sight—and as long as there's a breath in his carcass, that good-natured old blackguard is likely to be a dangerous customer. But though Charlie's still the boss of his party, he controls no offices, and has got no real power. He's as helpless as Satan was after he'd been kicked out of heaven and before he'd landed that big job he holds on the floor below. Nowadays, Charlie just sits in his side office over at the Tippecanoe House playing seven-up from breakfast till bedtime.”

“Then you think there’s no corrupt politics in Westville?” she asked in a sinking voice.

“Not an ounce of ’em!” said Old Hosie with decision.

This agreed with the conviction that had been growing upon Katherine during the last few days. While she had entertained suspicion of there being corruption, she had several times considered the advisability of putting a detective on the case. But this idea she now abandoned.

After this talk with the old lawyer, Katherine was forced back again upon misunderstanding. She went carefully over the records of her father’s department, on file in the Court House, seeking some item that would cast light upon the puzzle. She went over and over the indictment, seeking some loose end, some overlooked inconsistency, that would yield her at least a clue.

For days she kept doggedly at this work, steeling herself against the disapprobation of the town. But she found nothing. Then, in a flash, an overlooked point recurred to her. The trouble, so went her theory, was all due to a confusion of the bribe with the donation to the hospital. Where was that donation?

Here was a matter that might at last lead to a solution of the difficulty. Again on fire with hope, she interviewed her father. He was certain that a donation had been promised, he had thought the envelope handed him by Mr. Marcy contained the gift—but of the donation itself he knew no more. She interviewed Doctor Sherman; he had heard Mr. Marcy refer to a donation but knew nothing about the matter. She tried to get in communication with Mr. Marcy, only to learn that he was in England studying some new filtering plants recently installed in that country. Undiscouraged, she one day stepped off the train in St. Louis, the home of the Acme Filter, and appeared in the office of the company.

The general manager, a gentleman who ran to portliness in his figure, his jewellery and his courtesy, seemed perfectly acquainted with the case. In exculpation of himself and his company, he said that they were constantly being held up by every variety of official from a county commissioner to a mayor, and they were simply forced to give “presents” in order to do business.

“But my father’s defense,” put in Katherine, “was that he thought this ‘present’ was in reality a donation to the hospital. Was anything said to my father about a

donation?”

“I believe there was.”

“That corroborates my father!” Katherine exclaimed eagerly. “Would you make that statement at the trial—or at least give me an affidavit to that effect?”

“I’ll be glad to give you an affidavit. But I should explain that the ‘present’ and the donation were two distinctly separate affairs.”

“Then what became of the donation?” Katherine cried triumphantly.

“It was sent,” said the manager.

“Sent?”

“I sent it myself,” was the reply.

Katherine left St. Louis more puzzled than before. What had become of the check, if it had really been sent? Home again, she ransacked her father’s desk with his aid, and in a bottom drawer they found a heap of long-neglected mail.

Doctor West at first scratched his head in perplexity. “I remember now,” he said. “I never was much of a hand to keep up with my letters, and for the few days before that celebration I was so excited that I just threw everything——”

But Katherine had torn open an envelope and was holding in her hands a fifty dollar check from the Acme Filter Company.

“What was the date of your arrest?” she asked sharply. “The date Mr. Marcy gave you that money?”

“The fifteenth of May.”

“This check is dated the twelfth of May. The envelope shows it was received in Westville on the thirteenth.”

“Well, what of that?”

“Only this,” said Katherine slowly, and with a chill at her heart, “that the prosecution can charge, and we cannot disprove the charge, that the real donation was already in your possession at the time you accepted what you say you believed was the donation.”

Then, with a rush, a great temptation assailed Katherine—to destroy this piece of evidence unfavourable to her father which she held in her hands. For several moments the struggle continued fiercely. But she had made a vow with herself when she had entered law that she was going to keep free from the trickery and dishonourable practices so common in her profession. She was going to be an honest lawyer, or be no lawyer at all. And so, at length, she laid the check before her father.

“Just indorse it, and we’ll send it in to the hospital,” she said.

Afterward it occurred to her that to have destroyed the check would at the best have helped but little, for the prosecution, if it so desired, could introduce witnesses to prove that the donation had been sent. Suspicion of having destroyed or suppressed the check would then inevitably have rested upon her father.

This discovery of the check was a heavy blow, but Katherine went doggedly back to the first beginnings; and as the weeks crept slowly by she continued without remission her desperate search for a clue which, followed up, would make clear to every one that the whole affair was merely a mistake. But the only development of the summer which bore at all upon the case—and that bearing seemed to Katherine indirect—was that, since early June, the service of the water-works had steadily been deteriorating. There was frequently a shortage in the supply, and the filtering plant, the direct cause of Doctor West’s disgrace, had proved so complete a failure that its use had been discontinued. The water was often murky and unpleasant to the taste. Moreover, all kinds of other faults began to develop in the plant. The city complained loudly of the quality of the water and the failure of the system. It was like one of these new-fangled toys, averred the street corners, that runs like a miracle while the paint is on it and then with a whiz and a whir goes all to thunder.

But to this mere by-product of the case Katherine gave little thought. She had to keep desperately upon the case itself. At times, feeling herself so alone, making no inch of headway, her spirits sank very low indeed. What made the case so wearing on the soul was that she was groping in the dark. She was fighting an invisible enemy, even though it was no more than a misunderstanding—an enemy whom, strive as she would, she could not clutch, with whom she could not grapple. Again and again she prayed for a foe in the open. Had there been a fight, no matter how bitter, her part would have been far, far easier—for in fight there is action and excitement and the lifting hope of victory.



It took courage to work as she did, weary week upon weary week, and discover nothing. It took courage not to slink away at the town's disapprobation. At times, in the bitterness of her heart, she wished she were out of it all, and could just rest, and be friends with every one. In such moods it would creep coldly in upon her that there could be but one solution to the case—that after all her father must be guilty. But when she would go home and look into his thoughtful, unworldly old face, that solution would instantly become impossible; and she would cast out doubt and despair and renew her determination.

The weeks dragged heavily on—hot and dusty after the first of July, and so dry that out in the country the caked earth was a fine network of zigzagging fissures, and the farmers, gazing despondently upon their shrivelling corn, watched with vain hope for a rescuing cloud to darken the clear, hard, brilliant heavens. At length the summer burned to its close; the opening day of the September term of court was close at hand. But still the case stood just as on the day Katherine had stepped so joyously from the Limited. The evidence of Sherman was unshaken. The charges of Bruce had no answer.

One afternoon—her father's case was set for two days later—as Katherine left her office, desperate, not knowing which way to turn, her nerves worn fine and thin by the long strain, she saw her father's name on the front page of the *Express*. She bought a copy. In the centre of the first page, in a "box" and set in heavy-faced type, was an editorial in Bruce's most rousing style, trying her father in advance, declaring him flagrantly guilty, and demanding for him the law's extremest penalty.

That editorial unloosed her long-collected wrath—wrath that had many a reason. In Bruce's person Katherine had from the first seen the summing up, the leader, of the bitterness against her father. All summer he had continued his sharp attacks, and the virulence of these had helped keep the town wrought up against Doctor West. Moreover, Katherine despised Bruce as a powerful, ruthless, demagogic hypocrite. And to her hostility against him in her father's behalf and to her contempt for his quack radicalism, was added the bitter implacability of the woman who feels herself scorned. The town's attitude toward her she resented. But Bruce she hated, and him she prayed with all her soul that she might humble.

She crushed the *Express*, flung it from her into the gutter, and walked home all a-tremble. Her aunt met her in the hall as she was laying off her hat. A spot burned faintly in either withered cheek of the old woman.

“Who does thee think is here?” she asked.

“Who?” Katherine repeated mechanically, her wrath too high for interest in anything else.

“Mr. Bruce. Upstairs with thy father.”

“What!” cried Katherine.

Her hat missed the hook and fell to the floor, and she went springing up the stairway. The next instant she flung open her father’s door, and walked straight up to Bruce, before whom she paused, bosom heaving, eyes on fire.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded.

His powerful figure rose, and his square-hewn face looked directly into her own.

“Interviewing your father,” he returned with his aggressive calm.

“He was asking me to confess,” explained Doctor West.

“Confess?” cried Katherine.

“Just so,” replied Bruce. “His guilt is undoubted, so he might as well confess.”

Scorn flamed at him.

“I see! You are trying to get a confession out of him, in advance of the trial, as a big feature for your terrible paper!”

She moved a pace nearer him. All the suppressed anger, all the hidden anguish, of the last three months burst up volcanically.

“Oh! oh!” she cried breathlessly. “I never dreamt till I met you that a man could be so low, so heartless, as to hound an old man as you have hounded my father—and all for the sake of a yellow newspaper sensation. But he’s a safe man for you to attack. Yes, he’s safe—old, unpopular, helpless!”

Bruce’s heavy brows lowered. He did not give back a step before her ireful figure.

“And because he’s old and unpopular I should not attack him, eh?” he demanded. “Because he’s down, I should not hit him? That’s your woman’s reasoning, is it? Well, let me tell you,” and his gray eyes flashed, and his voice

had a crunching tone—“that I believe when you’ve got an enemy of society down, don’t, because you pity him, let him up to go and do the same thing again. While you’ve got him down, keep on hitting him till you’ve got him finished!”

“Like the brute that you are!” she cried. “But, like the coward you are, you first very carefully choose your ‘enemy of society.’ You were careful to choose one who could not hit back!”

“I did not choose your father. He thrust himself upon the town’s attention. And I consider neither his weakness nor his strength. I consider only the fact that your father has done the city a greater injury than any man who ever lived in Westville.”

“It’s a lie! I tell you it’s a lie!”

“It’s the truth!” he declared harshly, dominantly. “His swindling Westville by giving us a worthless filtering-plant in return for a bribe—why, that is the smallest evil he has done the town. Before that time, Westville was on the verge of making great municipal advances—on the verge of becoming a model and a leader for the small cities of the Middle West. And now all that grand development is ruined—and ruined by that man, your father!” He excitedly jerked a paper from his pocket and held it out to her. “If you want to see what he has brought us to, read that editorial in the *Clarion*!”

She fixed him with glittering eyes.

“I have read one cowardly editorial to-day in a Westville paper. That is enough.”

“Read that, I say!” he commanded.

For answer she took the *Clarion* and tossed it into the waste-basket. She glared at him, quivering all over, in her hands a convulsive itch for physical vengeance.

“If I thought that in all your fine talk about the city there was one single word of sincerity, I might respect you,” she said with slow and scathing contempt. “But your words are the words of a mere poseur—of a man who twists the truth to fit his desires—of a man who deals in the ideas that seem to him most profitable—of a man who cares not how poor, how innocent, is the body he uses as a stepping stone for his clambering greed and ambition. Oh, I know you—I have watched you—I have read you. You are a mere self-seeker! You are a demagogue! You are a liar! And, on top of that, you are a coward!”

Whatever Arnold Bruce was, he was a man with a temper. Fury was blazing behind his heavy spectacles.

“Go on! I care *that* for the words of a woman who has so little taste, so little sense, so little modesty, as to leave the sphere——”

“You boor!” gasped Katharine.

“Perhaps I am. At least I am not afraid to speak the truth straight out even to a woman. You are all wrong. You are unwomanly. You are unsexed. Your pretensions as a lawyer are utterly preposterous, as the trial on Thursday will show you. And the condemnation of the town is not half as severe a rebuke \_\_\_\_\_”

“Stop!” gasped Katherine. A wild defiance surged up and overmastered her, her nerves broke, and her hot words tumbled out hysterically. “You think you are a God-anointed critic of humanity, but you are only a heartless, conceited cad! Just wait—I’ll show you what your judgment of me is worth! I am going to clear my father! I am going to make this Westville that condemns me kneel at my feet! and as for you—you can think what you please! But don’t you ever dare to speak to my father again—don’t you ever dare speak to me again—don’t you ever dare enter this house again! Now go! Go! I say. Go! Go! Go!”

His face had grown purple; he seemed to be choking. For a space he gazed at her. Then without answering he bowed slightly and was gone.

She glared a moment at the door. Then suddenly she collapsed upon the floor, her head and arms on the old haircloth sofa, and her whole body shook with silent sobs. Doctor West, first gazing at her a little helplessly, sat down upon the sofa, and softly stroked her hair. For a time there were no words—only her convulsive breathing, her choking sobs.

Presently he said gently:

“I’m sure you’ll do everything you said.”

“No—that’s the trouble,” she moaned. “What I said—was—was just a big bluff. I won’t do any—of those things. Your trial is two days off—and, father, I haven’t one bit of evidence—I don’t know what we’re going to do—and the jury will have to—oh, father, father, that man was right; I’m just—just a great big failure!”

Again she shook with sobs. The old man continued to sit beside her, softly stroking her thick brown hair.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE MASK FALLS

But presently the sobs subsided, as though shut off by main force, and Katherine rose to her feet. She wiped her eyes and looked at her father, a wan smile on her reddened, still tremulous face.

“What a hope-inspiring lawyer you have, father!”

“I would not want a truer,” said he loyally.

“We won’t have one of these cloud-bursts again, I promise you. But when you have been under a strain for months, and things are stretched tighter and tighter, and at last something makes things snap, why you just can’t help—well,” she ended, “a man would have done something else, I suppose, but it might have been just as bad.”

“Worse!” avowed her father.

“Anyhow, it’s all over. I’ll just repair some of the worst ravages of the storm, and then we’ll talk about our programme for the trial.”

As she was arranging her hair before her father’s mirror, she saw, in the glass, the old man stoop and take something from the waste-basket. Turning his back to her, he cautiously examined the object.

She left the mirror and came up behind him.

“What are you looking at, dear?”

He started, and glanced up.

“Oh—er—that editorial Mr. Bruce referred to.” He rubbed his head dazedly. “If that should happen, with me even indirectly the cause of it—why, Katherine, it really would be pretty bad!” He held out the *Clarion*. “Perhaps, after all, you had better read it.”

She took the paper. The *Clarion* had from the first opposed the city’s owning the water-works, and the editorial declared that the present situation gave the paper,

and all those who had held a similar opinion, their long-awaited triumph and vindication. “This failure is only what invariably happens whenever a city tries municipal ownership,” declared the editorial. “The situation has grown so unbearably acute that the city’s only hope of good water lies in the sale of the system to some private concern, which will give us that superior service which is always afforded by private capital. Westville is upon the eve of a city election, and we most emphatically urge upon both parties that they make the chief plank of their platforms the immediate sale of our utterly discredited water-works to some private company.”

The editorial did not stir Katherine as it had appeared to stir Bruce, nor even in the milder degree it had stirred Doctor West. She was interested in the water-works only in so far as it concerned her father, and the *Clarion*’s proposal had no apparent bearing on his guilt or innocence.

She laid the *Clarion* on the table, without comment, and proceeded to discuss the coming trial. The only course she had to suggest was that they plead for a postponement on the ground that they needed more time in which to prepare their defense. If that plea were denied, then before them seemed certain conviction. On that plea, then, they decided to place all their hope.

When this matter had been talked out Doctor West took the *Clarion* from the table and again read the editorial with troubled face, while Katherine walked to and fro across the floor, her mind all on the trial.

“If the town does sell, it will be too bad!” he sighed.

“I suppose so,” said Katherine mechanically.

“It has reached me that people are saying that the system isn’t worth anything like what we paid for it.”

“Is that so?” she asked absently.

Doctor West drew himself up and his faded cheeks flushed indignantly.

“No, it is not so. I don’t know what’s wrong, but it’s the very best system of its size in the Middle West!”

She paused.

“Forgive me—I wasn’t paying any attention to what I was saying. I’m sure it is.”

She resumed her pacing.

“But if they sell out to some company,” Doctor West continued, “the company will probably get it for a third, or less, of what it is actually worth.”

“So, if some corporation has been secretly wanting to buy it,” commented Katherine, “things could not have worked out better for the corporation if they had been planned.”

She came to a sudden pause, and stood gazing at her father, her lips slowly parting.

“It could not have worked out better for the corporation if it had been planned,” she repeated.

“No,” said Doctor West.

She picked up the *Clarion*, quickly read the editorial, and laid the paper aside.

“Father!” Her voice was a low, startled cry.

“Yes?”

She moved slowly toward him, in her face a breathless look, and caught his shoulders with tense hands.

“*Perhaps it was planned!*”

“What?”

Her voice rang out more loudly:

“*Perhaps it was planned!*”

“But Katherine—what do you mean?”

“Let me think. Let me think.” She began feverishly to pace the room. “Oh, why did I not think of this before!” she cried to herself. “I thought of graft—political corruption—everything else. But it never occurred to me that there might be a plan, a subtle, deep-laid plan, to steal the water-works!”

Doctor West watched her rather dazedly as she went up and down the floor, her brows knit, her lips moving in self-communion. Her connection with the Municipal League in New York had given her an intimate knowledge of the



devious means by which public service corporations sometimes gain their end. Her mind flashed over all the situation's possibilities.

Suddenly she paused before her father, face flushed, triumph in her eyes.

"Father, *it was planned!*"

"Eh?" said he.

"Father," she demanded excitedly, "do you know what the great public service corporations are doing now?" Her words rushed on, not waiting for an answer. "They have got hold of almost all the valuable public utilities in the great cities, and now they are turning to a fresh field—the small cities. Westville is a rich chance in a small way. It has only thirty thousand inhabitants now. But it is growing. Some day it will have fifty thousand—a hundred thousand."

"That's what people say."

"If a private company could get hold of the water-works, the system would not only be richly profitable at once, but it would be worth a fortune as the city grows. Now if a company, a clever company, wanted to buy in the water-works, what would be their first move?"

"To make an offer, I suppose."

"Never! Their first step would be to try to make the people want to sell. And how would they try to make the people want to sell?"

"Why—why——"

"By making the water-works fail!" Her excitement was mounting; she caught his shoulders. "Fail so badly that the people would be disgusted, just as they now are, and willing to sell at any price. And now, father—and now, father—" he could feel her quivering all over—"listen to me! We're coming to the point! How would they make the water-works fail?"

He could only blink at her.

"They'd make it fail by removing from office, and so disgracing him that everything he had done would be discredited, the one incorruptible man whose care and knowledge had made it a success! Don't you see, father? Don't you see?"

“Bless me,” said the old man, “if I know what you’re talking about!”

“With you out of the way, whom they knew they could not corrupt, they could buy under officials to attend to the details of making the water bad and the plant itself a failure—just exactly what has been done. You are not the real victim. You are just an obstruction—something that they had to get out of the way. The real victim is Westville! It’s a plan to rob the city!”

His gray eyes were catching the light that blazed from hers.

“I begin to see,” he said. “It hardly seems possible people would do such things. But perhaps you’re right. What are you going to do?”

“Fight!”

“Fight?” He looked admiringly at her glowing figure. “But if there is a strong company behind all this, for you to fight it alone—it will be an awful big fight!”

“I don’t care how big the fight is!” she cried exultantly. “What has almost broken my heart till now is that there has been no one to fight!”

A shadow fell on the old man’s face.

“But after all, Katherine, it is all only a guess.”

“Of course it is only a guess!” she cried. “But I have tested every other possible solution. This is the only one left, and it fits every known circumstance of the case. It is only a guess—but I’ll stake my life on its being the right guess!” Her voice rose. “Oh, father, we’re on the right track at last! We’re going to clear you! Don’t you ever doubt that. We’re going to clear you!”

There was no resisting the ringing confidence in her voice, the fire of her enthusiasm.

“Katherine!” he cried, and opened his arms.

She rushed into them. “We’re going to clear you, father! And, oh, won’t it be fine! Won’t it be fine!”

For a space they held each other close, then they parted.

“What are you going to do first?” he asked.

“Try to find the person, or corporation, behind the scheme.”

“And how will you do that?”

“First, I shall talk it over with Mr. Blake. You know he told me to come to him if I ever wished his advice. He knows the situation here—he has the interests of Westville at heart—and I know he will help us. I’m not going to lose a second, so I’m off to see him now.”

She rushed downstairs. But she did have to lose a second, and many of them, for when she called up Mr. Blake’s office on the telephone, the answer came back that Mr. Blake was in the capital and would not return till the following day on the one forty-five. It occurred to Katherine to advise with old Hosie Hollingsworth, for during the long summer her blind, childish shrinking had changed to warm liking of the dry old lawyer; and she had discovered, too, that the heresies it had been his delight to utter a generation before—and on which he still prided himself—were now a part of the belief of many an orthodox divine.

But she decided against conferring with Old Hosie. Her adviser and leader must be a man more actively in the current of modern affairs. No, Blake was her great hope, and precious and few as were the hours before the trial, there was nothing for it but to wait for his return.

She went up to her room, and her excited mind, now half inspired, went feverishly over the situation and all who were in any wise concerned in it. She thought of the fifty dollar check from the Acme Filter Company. With her new viewpoint she now understood the whole bewildering business of that check. The company, or at least one of its officers, was somehow in on the deal, and there had been some careful scheming behind the sending of that fifty dollars. The company had been confronted with two obvious difficulties. First, it had to make certain that the check would not be received until after the two thousand dollars was in the hands of her father. Second, the date of the check and the date of the Westville postmark must be earlier than the day the two thousand dollars was delivered—else Doctor West could produce check and envelope to prove that the check had not arrived until after he had already accepted what he thought was the donation, and thus perhaps ruin the whole scheme. What had been done, Katherine now clearly perceived, was that some one, most probably an assistant of her father, had been bought over to look out for the arrival of the letter, to hold it back until the critical day had passed, and then slip it into her father’s neglected mail.

Her mind raced on to further matters, further persons, connected with the

situation. When she came to Bruce her hands clenched the arms of her wicker rocking chair. In a flash the whole man was plain to her, and her second great discovery of the day was made.

Bruce was an agent of the hidden corporation!

The motive behind his fierce desire to destroy her father was at last apparent. To destroy Doctor West was his part in the conspiracy. As for his rabid advocacy of municipal ownership, and all his fine talk about the city's betterment, that was mere sham—merely the virtuous front behind which he could work out his purpose unsuspected. No one could quote the scripture of civic improvement more loudly than the civic despoiler. She always had distrusted him. Now she knew him. Many a time through the night her mind flashed back to him from other matters and she thrilled with a vengeful joy at the thought of tearing aside his mask.

It was a long and feverish night to Katherine, and a long and feverish forenoon. At a quarter to two she was in Blake's office, which was furnished with just that balance between simplicity and richness appropriate to a growing great man with a constituency half of the city and half of the country. She had sat some time at a window looking down upon the Square, its foliage now a dusty, shrivelled brown, when Blake came in. He had not been told that she was waiting, and at sight of her he came to a sudden pause. But the next instant he had crossed the room and was shaking her hand.

For that first instant Katherine's eyes and mind, which during the last twenty-four hours had had an almost more than mortal clearness, had an impression that he was strangely agitated. But the moment over, the impression was gone.

He placed a chair for her at the corner of his desk and himself sat down, his dark, strong, handsome face fixed on hers.

"Now, how can I serve you, Katherine?"

There were rings about her eyes, but excitement gave her colour.

"You know that to-morrow is father's trial?"

"Yes. You must have a hard, hard fight before you."

"Perhaps not so hard as you may think." She tried to keep her tugging excitement in leash.

“I hope not,” said he.

“I think it may prove easy—if you will help me.”

“Help you?”

“Yes. I have come to ask you that again.”

“Well—you see—as I told you——”

“But the situation has changed since I first came to you,” she put in quickly, not quite able to restrain a little laugh. “I have found something out!”

He started. “You have found—you say——”

“I have found something out!”

She smiled at him happily, triumphantly.

“And that?” said he.

She leaned forward.

“I do not need to tell you, for you know it, that the big corporations have discovered a new gold mine—or rather, thousands of little gold mines. That all over the country they have gained control, and are working to gain control, of the street-car lines, gas works and other public utilities in the smaller cities.”

“Well?”

She spoke excitedly, putting the case more definitely than it really was, to better the chance of winning his aid.

“Well, I have just discovered that there is a plan on foot, directed by a hidden some one, to seize the water-works of Westville. I have discovered that my father is not guilty. He is the victim of a trick to ruin the water-works and make the people willing to sell. The first thing to do is to find the man behind the scheme. I want you to help me find this man.”

A greenish pallor had overspread his features.

“And you want me—to find this man?” he repeated.

“Yes. I know you will take this up, simply because of your interest in the city. But there is another reason—it would help you in your larger ambition. If you

could disclose this scheme, save the city, become the hero of a great popular gratitude, think how it would help your senatorial chances!”

He did not at once reply, but sat staring at her.

“Don’t you see?” she cried.

“I—I see.”

“Why, it would turn your chance for the Senate into a certainty! It would—but, Mr. Blake, what’s the matter?”

“Matter,” he repeated, huskily. “Why—why nothing.”

She gazed at him with deep concern. “But you look almost sick.”

In his eyes there struggled a wild look. Her gaze became fixed upon his face, so strangely altered. In her present high-wrought state all her senses were excited to their intensest keenness.

There was a moment of silence—eyes into eyes. Then she stood slowly up, and one hand reached slowly out and clutched his arm.

“Mr. Blake!” she whispered, in an awed and terrified tone. She continued to stare into his eyes. “Mr. Blake!” she repeated.

She felt a tensing of his body, as of a man who seeks to master himself with a mighty effort. He tried to smile, though his greenish pallor did not leave him.

“It is my turn,” he said, “to ask what is the matter with you, Katherine.”

“Mr. Blake!” She loosed her hold upon his arm, and shrank away.

He rose.

“What is the matter?” he repeated. “You seem upset. I suppose it is the nervous strain of to-morrow’s trial.”

In her face was stupefied horror.

“It is what—what I have discovered.”

“What you call your discovery would be most valuable, if true. But it is just a dream, Katherine—a crazy, crazy dream.”

She still was looking straight into his eyes.

“Mr. Blake, it is true,” she said slowly, almost breathlessly. “For I have found the man behind the plan.”

“Indeed! And who?”

“I think you know him, Mr. Blake.”

“I?”

“Better than any one else.”

His smile had left him.

“Who?”

She continued to stare at him for a moment in silence. Then she slowly raised her arm and pointed at him.

The silence continued for several moments, each gazing at the other. He had put one hand upon his desk and was leaning heavily upon it. He looked like a man sick unto death. But soon a shiver ran through him; he swallowed, gripped himself in a strong control, and smiled again his strained, unnatural smile.

“Katherine, Katherine,” he tried to say it reprovably and indulgently, but there was a quaver in his voice. “You have gone quite out of your head!”

“It is true!” she cried. “All unintentionally I have followed one of the oldest of police expedients. I have suddenly confronted the criminal with his crime, and I have surprised his guilt upon his face!”

“What you say is absurd. I can explain it only on the theory that you are quite out of your mind.”

“Never before was I so much in it!”

In this moment when she felt that the hidden enemy she had striven so long to find was at last revealed to her, she felt more of anguish than of triumph.

“Oh, how could you do such a thing, Mr. Blake?” she burst out. “How could you do it?”

He shook his head, and tried to smile at her perversity—but the smile was a wan

failure.

“I see—I see!” she cried in her pain. “It is just the old story. A good man rises to power through being the champion of the people—and, once in power, the opportunities, the temptation, are too much for him. But I never—no, never!—thought that such a thing would happen with you!”

He strove for the injured air of the misjudged old friend.

“Again I must say that I can only explain your charges by supposing that you are out of your head.”

“Here in Westville you believe it is not woman’s business to think about politics,” Katherine went on, in her voice of pain. “But I could not help thinking about them, and watching them. I have lost my faith in the old parties, but I had kept my faith in some of their leaders. I believe some of them honest, devoted, indomitable. And of them all, the one I admired most, ranked highest, was you. And now—and now—oh, Mr. Blake!—to learn that you——”

“Katherine! Katherine!” And he raised his hands with the manner of exasperated, yet indulgent, helplessness.

“Mr. Blake, you know you are now only playing a part! And you know that I know it!” She moved up to him eagerly. “Listen to me,” she pleaded rapidly. “You have only started on this, you have not gone too far to turn back. You have done no real wrong as yet, save to my father, and I know my father will forgive you. Drop your plan—let my father be honourably cleared—and everything will be just as before!”

For a space he seemed shaken by her words. She watched him, breathless, awaiting the outcome of the battle she felt was waging within him.

“Drop the plan—do!—do!—I beg you!” she cried.

His dark face twitched; a quivering ran through his body. Then by a mighty effort he partially regained his mastery.

“There is no plan for me to drop,” he said huskily.

“You still cling to the part you are playing?”

“I am playing no part; you are all wrong about me,” he continued. “Your charges are so absurd that it would be foolish to deny them. They are merely the ravings



of an hysterical woman.”

“And this is your answer?”

“That is my answer.”

She gazed at him for a long moment. Then she sighed.

“I’m so sorry!” she said; and she turned away and moved toward the door.

She gave him a parting look, as he stood pale, quivering, yet controlled, behind his desk. In this last moment she remembered the gallant fight this man had made against Blind Charlie Peck; she remembered that fragrant, far-distant night of June when he had asked her to marry him; and she felt as though she were gazing for the last time upon a dear dead face.

“I’m sorry—oh, so sorry!” she said tremulously. “Good-by.” And turning, she walked with bowed head out of his office.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE EDITOR OF THE *EXPRESS*

Katherine stumbled down into the dusty, quivering heat of the Square. She was still awed and dumfounded by her discovery; she could not as yet realize its full significance and whither it would lead; but her mind was a ferment of thoughts that were unfinished and questions that did not await reply.

How had a man once so splendid come to sell his soul for money or ambition? What would Westville think and do, Westville who worshipped him, if it but knew the truth? How was she to give battle to an antagonist, so able in himself, so powerfully supported by the public? What a strange caprice of fate it was that had given her as the man she must fight, defeat, or be defeated by, her former idol, her former lover!

Shaken with emotion, her mind shot through with these fragmentary thoughts, she turned into a side street. But she had walked beneath its withered maples no more than a block or two, when her largest immediate problem, her father's trial on the morrow, thrust itself into her consciousness, and the pressing need of further action drove all this spasmodic speculation from her mind. She began to think upon what she should next do. Almost instantly her mind darted to the man whom she had definitely connected with the plot against her father, Arnold Bruce, and she turned back toward the Square, afire with a new idea.

She had made great advance through suddenly, though unintentionally, confronting Blake with knowledge of his guilt. Might she not make some further advance, gain some new clue, by confronting Bruce in similar manner?

Ten minutes after she had left the office of Harrison Blake, Katherine entered the *Express* Building. From the first floor sounded a deep and continuous thunder; that afternoon's issue was coming from the press. She lifted her skirts and gingerly mounted the stairway, over which the *Express's* "devil" was occasionally seen to make incantations with the stub of an undisturbing broom.

At the head of the stairway a door stood open. This she entered, and found herself in the general editorial room, ankle-deep with dirt and paper. The air of the place told that the day's work was done. In one corner a telegraph sounder

was chattering its tardy world-gossip to unheeding ears. In the centre at a long table, typewriters before them, three shirt-sleeved young men sprawled at ease reading the *Express*, which the “devil” had just brought them from the nether regions, moist with the black spittle of the beast that there roared and rumbled.

At sight of her tall, fresh figure, a red spot in her either cheek, defiance in her brown eyes, Billy Harper, quicker than the rest, sprang up and crossed the room.

“Miss West, I believe,” he said. “Can I do anything for you?”

“I wish to speak with Mr. Bruce,” was her cold reply.

“This way,” and Billy led her across the wilderness of proofs, discarded copy and old newspapers, to a door beside the stairway that led down into the press-room. “Just go right in,” he said.

She entered. Bruce, his shirt-sleeves rolled up and his bared fore-arms grimy, sat glancing through the *Express*, his feet crossed on his littered desk, a black pipe hanging from one corner of his mouth. He did not look round but turned another page.

“Well, what’s the matter?” he grunted between his teeth.

“I should like a few words with you,” said Katherine.

“Eh!” His head twisted about. “Miss West!”

His feet suddenly dropped to the floor, and he stood up and laid the pipe upon his desk. For the moment he was uncertain how to receive her, but the bright, hard look in her eyes fixed his attitude.

“Certainly,” he said in a brusque, businesslike tone. He placed the atlas-bottomed chair near his own. “Be seated.”

She sat down, and he took his own chair.

“I am at your service,” he said.

Her cheeks slowly gathered a higher colour, her eyes gleamed with a pre-triumphant fire, and she looked straight into his square, rather massive face. Over Blake she had felt an infinity of regret and pain. For this man she felt only boundless hatred, and she thrilled with a vengeful, exultant joy that she was about to unmask him—that later she might crush him utterly.

“I am at your service,” he repeated.

She slowly wet her lips and gathered herself to strike, alert to watch the effects of her blow.

“I have called, Mr. Bruce,” she said with slow distinctness, “to let you know that I know that a conspiracy is under way to steal the water-works! And to let you know that I know that you are near its centre!”

He started.

“What?” he cried.

Her devouring gaze did not lose a change of feature, not so much as the shifting in the pupil of his eye.

“Oh, I know your plot!” she went on rapidly. “It’s every detail! The first step was to ruin the water-works, so the city would sell and sell cheap. The first step toward ruining the system was to get my father out of the way. And so this charge against my father was trumped up to ruin him. The leader of the whole plot is Mr. Blake; his right hand man yourself. Oh, I know every detail of your infamous scheme!”

He stared at her. His lips had slowly parted.

“What—you say that Mr. Blake——”

“Oh, you are trying to play your part of innocence well, but you cannot deceive me!” she cried with fierce contempt. “Yes, Mr. Blake is the head of it. I just came from his office. There’s not a doubt in the world of his guilt. He has admitted it. Oh——”

“Admitted it?”

“Yes, admitted it! Oh, it was a fine and easy way to make a fortune—to dupe the city into selling at a fraction of its value a business that run privately will pay an immense and ever-growing profit.”

He had stood up and was scratching his bristling hair.

“My God! My God!” he whispered.

She rose.

“And you!” she cried, glaring at him, her voice mounting to a climax of scorn, “You! Don’t walk the room”—he had begun to do so—“but look me in the face. To think how you have attacked my father, maligned him, covered him with dishonour! And for what? To help you carry through a dirty trick to rob the city! Oh, I wish I had the words to tell you——”

But he had begun again to pace the little room, scratching his head, his eyes gleaming behind the heavy glasses.

“Listen to me!” she commanded.

“Oh, give me all the hell you want to!” he cried out. “Only don’t ask me to listen to you!”

He paused abruptly before her, and, eyes half-closed, stared piercingly into her face. As she returned his stare, it began to dawn upon her that he did not seem much taken aback. At least his guilt bore no near likeness to that of Mr. Blake.

Suddenly he made a lunge for the door, jerked it open, and his voice descended the stairway, out-thundering the press.

“Jake! Oh, Jake!”

A lesser roar ascended:

“Yes!”

“Stop the press! Rip open the forms! Get the men at the linotypes! And be alive down there, every damned soul of you! And you, Billy Harper, I’ll want you here in two minutes!”

He slammed the door, and turned on Katherine. She had looked upon excitement before, but never such excitement as was flaming in his face.

“Now give me all the details!” he cried.

She it was that was taken aback.

“I—I don’t understand,” she said.

“No time to explain now. Looks like I’ve been all wrong about your father—perhaps a little wrong about you—and perhaps you’ve been a little wrong about me. Let it go at that. Now for the details. Quick!”

“But—but what are you going to do?”

“Going to get out an extra! It’s the hottest story that ever came down the pike! It’ll make the *Express*, and”—he seized her hand in his grimy ones, his eyes blazed, and an exultant laugh leaped from his deep chest—“and we’ll simply rip this old town wide open!”

Katherine stared at him in bewilderment.

“Oh, won’t this wake the old town up!” he murmured to himself.

He dropped into his chair, jerked some loose copy paper toward him, and seized a pencil.

“Now quick! The details!”

“You mean—you are going to print this?” she stammered.

“Didn’t I say so!” he answered sharply.

“Then you really had nothing to do with Mr. Blake’s——”

“Oh, hell! I beg pardon. But this is no time for explanations. Come, come”—he rapped his desk with his knuckles—“don’t you know what getting out an extra is? Every second is worth half your lifetime. Out with the story!”

Katherine sank rather weakly into her chair, beginning to see new things in this face she had so lately loathed.

“The fact of the matter is,” she confessed, “I guess I stated my information a little more definitely than it really is.”

“You mean you haven’t the facts?”

“I’m afraid not. Not yet.”

“Nothing definite I could hinge a story on?”

She shook her head. “I didn’t come prepared for—for things to take this turn. It would spoil everything to have this made public before I had my case worked up.”

“Then there’s no extra!”

He flung down his pencil and sprang up. “Nothing doing, Billy,” he called to

Harper, who that instant opened the door; “go on back with you.” He began to walk up and down the little office, scowling, hands clenched in his trousers’ pockets. After a moment he stopped short, and looked at Katherine half savagely.

“I suppose you don’t know what it means to a newspaper man to have a big story laid in his hands and then suddenly jerked out?”

“I suppose it is something of a disappointment.”

“Disappointment!” The word came out half groan, half sneer. “Rot! If you were waiting in church and the bridegroom didn’t show up, if you were——oh, I can’t make you understand the feeling!”

He dropped back into his chair and scratched viciously at the copy paper with his heavy black pencil. She watched him in a sort of fascination, till he abruptly looked up. Suspicion glinted behind the heavy glasses.

“Are you sure, Miss West,” he asked slowly “that this whole affair isn’t just a little game?”

“What do you mean?”

“That your whole story is nothing but a hoax? Nothing but a trick to get out of a tight hole by calling another man a thief?”

Her eyes flashed.

“You mean that I am telling a lie?”

“Oh, you lawyers doubtless have a better-tasting word for it. You would call it, say, a ‘professional expedient.’”

She was still not sufficiently recovered from her astonishment to be angry. Besides, she felt herself by an unexpected turn put in the wrong regarding Bruce.

“What I have said to you is the absolute truth,” she declared. “Here is the situation—believe me or not, just as you please. I ask you, for the moment, to accept the proposition that my father is the victim of a plot to steal the water-works, and then see how everything fits in with that theory. And bear in mind, as an item worth considering, my father’s long and honourable career—never a dishonouring word against him till this charge came.” And she went on and outlined, more fully than on yesterday before her father, the reasoning that had led her to her conclusion. “Now, does not that sound possible?” she demanded.

He had watched her with keen, half-closed eyes.

“H’m. You reason well,” he conceded.

“That’s a lawyer’s business,” she retorted. “So much for theory. Now for facts.” And she continued and gave him her experience of half an hour before with Blake, the editor’s boring gaze fixed on her all the while. “Now I ask you this question: Is it likely that even a poor water system could fail so quickly and so completely as ours has done, unless some powerful person was secretly working to make it fail? Do you not see it never could? We all would have seen it, but we’ve all been too busy, too blind, and thought too well of our town, to suspect such a thing.”

His eyes were still boring into her.

“But how about Doctor Sherman?” he asked.

“I believe that Doctor Sherman is an innocent tool of the conspiracy, just as my father is its innocent victim,” she answered promptly.

Bruce sat with the same fixed look, and made no reply.

“I have stated my theory, and I have stated my facts,” said Katherine. “I have no court evidence, but I am going to have it. As I remarked before, you can believe what I have said, or not believe it. It’s all the same to me.” She stood up. “I wish you good afternoon.”

He quickly rose.

“Hold on!” he said.

She paused at the door. He strode to and fro across the little office, scowling with thought. Then he paused at the window and looked out.

“Well?” she demanded.

He wheeled about.

“It sounds plausible.”

“Thank you,” she said crisply. “I could hardly expect a man who has been the champion of error, to admit that he has been wrong and accept the truth. Good afternoon.”



Again she reached for the door-knob.

“Wait!” he cried. There was a ring of resentment in his voice, but his square face that had been grudgingly non-committal was now aglow with excitement. “Of course you’re right!” he exclaimed. “There’s a damned infernal conspiracy! Now what can I do to help?”

“Help?” she asked blankly.

“Help work up the evidence? Help reveal the conspiracy?”

She had not yet quite got her bearings concerning this new Bruce.

“Help? Why should you help? Oh, I see,” she said coldly; “it would make a nice sensational story for your paper.”

He flushed at her cutting words, and his square jaw set.

“I suppose I might follow your example of a minute ago and say that I don’t care what you think. But I don’t mind telling you a few things, and giving you a chance to understand me if you want to. I was on a Chicago paper, and had a big place that was growing bigger. I could have sold the *Express* when my uncle left it to me, and stayed there; but I saw a chance, with a paper of my own, to try out some of my own ideas, so I came to Westville. My idea of a newspaper is that its function is to serve the people—make them think—bring them new ideas—to be ever watching their interests. Of course, I want to make money—I’ve got to, or go to smash; but I’d rather run a candy store than run a sleepy, apologetic, afraid-of-a-mouse, mere money-making sheet like the *Clarion*, that would never breathe a word against the devil’s fair name so long as he carried a half-inch ad. You called me a yellow journalist yesterday. Well, if to tell the truth in the hardest way I know how, to tell it so that it will hit people square between the eyes and make ’em sit up and look around ’em—if that is yellow then I’m certainly a yellow journalist, and I thank God Almighty for inventing the breed!”

As Katherine listened to his snappy, vibrant words, as she looked at his powerful, dominant figure, and into his determined face with its flashing eyes, she felt a reluctant warmth creep through her being.

“Perhaps—I may have been mistaken about you,” she said.

“Perhaps you may!” he returned grimly. “Perhaps as much as I was about your father. And, speaking of your father, I don’t mind adding something more. Ever

since I took charge of the *Express*, I've been advocating municipal ownership of every public utility. The water-works, which were apparently so satisfactory, were a good start; I used them constantly as a text for working up municipal ownership sentiment. The franchises of the Westville Traction Company expire next year, and I had been making a campaign against renewing the franchises and in favour of the city taking over the system and running it. Opinion ran high in favour of the scheme. But Doctor West's seeming dishonesty completely killed the municipal ownership idea. That was my pet, and if I was bitter toward your father—well, I couldn't help it. And now," he added rather brusquely, "I've explained myself to you. To repeat your words, you can believe me or not, just as you like."

There was no resisting the impression of the man's sincerity.

"I suppose," said Katherine, "that I should apologize for—for the things I've called you. My only excuse is that your mistake about my father helped cause my mistake about you."

"And I," returned he, "am not only willing to take back, publicly, in my paper, what I have said against your father, but am willing to print your statement about \_\_\_\_\_"

"You must not print a word till I get my evidence," she put in quickly. "Printing it prematurely might ruin my case."

"Very well. And as for what I have said about you, I take back everything—except——" He paused; she saw disapprobation in his eyes. "Except the plain truth I told you that being a lawyer is no work for a woman."

"You are very dogmatic!" said she hotly.

"I am very right," he returned. "Excuse my saying it, but you appear to have too many good qualities as a woman to spoil it all by going out of your sphere and trying——"

"Why—why——" She stood gasping. "Do you know what your uncle told me about you?"

"Old Hosie?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Hosie's an old fool!"

"He said that the trouble with you was that you had not been thrashed enough as a boy. And he was right, too!"

She turned quickly to the door, but he stepped before her.

“Don’t get mad because of a little truth. Remember, I want to help you.”

“I think,” said she, “that we’re better suited to fight each other than to help each other. I’m not so sure I want your help.”

“I’m not so sure you can avoid taking it,” he retorted. “This isn’t your father’s case alone. It’s the city’s case, too, and I’ve got a right to mix in. Now do you want me?”

She looked at him a moment.

“I’ll think it over. For the present, good afternoon.”

He hesitated, then held out his hand. She hesitated, then took it. After which, he opened the door for her and bowed her out.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE PRICE OF A MAN

When, half an hour before, Katherine walked with bowed head out of Harrison Blake's office, Blake gazed fixedly after her for a moment, and his face, now that he was private, deepened its sickly, ashen hue. Then he strode feverishly up and down the room, lips twitching nervously, hands clinching and unclenching. Then he unlocked a cabinet against the wall, poured out a drink from a squat, black bottle, gulped it down, and returned the bottle, forgetting to close the cabinet. After which he dropped into his chair, gripped his face in his two hands, and sat at his desk breathing deeply, but otherwise without motion.

Presently his door opened.

"Mr. Brown is here to see you," announced a voice.

He slowly raised his head, and stared an instant at his stenographer in dumfounded silence.

"Mr. Brown!" he repeated.

"Yes," said the young woman.

He continued to stare at her in sickly stupefaction.

"Shall I tell him you'll see him later?"

"Show him in," said Blake. "But, no—wait till I ring."

He passed his hand across his moist and pallid face, paced his room again several times, then touched a button and stood stiffly erect beside his desk. The next moment the door closed behind a short, rather chubby man with an egg-shell dome and a circlet of grayish hair. He had eyes that twinkled with good fellowship and a cheery, fatherly manner.

"Well, well, Mr. Blake; mighty glad to see you!" he exclaimed as he crossed the room.

Blake, still pale, but now with tense composure, took the hand of his visitor.

“This is a surprise, Mr. Brown,” said he. “How do you happen to be in Westville?”

Mr. Brown disposed himself comfortably in the chair that Katherine had so lately occupied.

“To-morrow’s the trial of that Doctor West, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I thought I’d better be on the ground to see how it came out.”

Blake did not respond at once; but, lips very tight together, sat gazing at the ruddy face of his visitor.

“Everything’s going all right, isn’t it?” asked Mr. Brown in his cheery voice.

“About the trial, you mean?” Blake asked with an effort.

“Of course. The letter I had from you yesterday assured me conviction was certain. Things still stand the same way, I suppose?”

Blake’s whole body was taut. His dark eyes were fixed upon Mr. Brown.

“They do not,” he said quietly.

“Not stand the same way?” cried Mr. Brown, half rising from his chair. “Why not?”

“I am afraid,” replied Blake with his strained quiet, “that the prosecution will not make out a case.”

“Not make out a case?”

“To-morrow Doctor West is going to be cleared.”

“Cleared? Cleared?” Mr. Brown stared. “Now what the devil—see here, Blake, how’s that going to happen?”

Blake’s tense figure had leaned forward.

“It’s going to happen, Mr. Brown,” he burst out, with a flashing of his dark eyes, “because I’m tired of doing your dirty work, and the dirty work of the National Electric & Water Company!”

“You mean you’re going to see he’s cleared?”

“I mean I’m going to see he’s cleared!”

“What—you?” ejaculated Mr. Brown, still staring. “Why, only in your letter yesterday you were all for the plan! What’s come over you?”

“If you’d gone through what I’ve just gone through——” Blake abruptly checked his passionate reference to his scene with Katherine. “I say enough when I say that I’m going to see that Doctor West is cleared. There you have it.”

No further word was spoken for a moment. The two men, leaning toward each other, gazed straight into one another’s eyes. Blake’s powerful, handsome face was blazing and defiant. The fatherly kindness had disappeared from the other, and it was keen and hard.

“So,” said Mr. Brown, cuttingly, and with an infinity of contempt, “it appears that Mr. Harrison Blake is the owner of a white liver.”

“You know that’s a lie!” Blake fiercely retorted. “You know I’ve got as much courage as you and your infernal company put together!”

“Oh, you have, have you? From the way you’re turning tail——”

“To turn tail upon a dirty job is no cowardice!”

“But there have been plenty of dirty jobs you haven’t run from. You’ve put through many a one in the last two or three years on the quiet.”

“But never one like this.”

“You knew exactly what the job was when you made the bargain with us.”

“Yes. And my stomach rose against it even then.”

“Then why the devil did you tie up with us?”

“Because your big promises dazzled me! Because you took me up on a high mountain and showed me the kingdoms of the earth!”

“Well, you then thought the kingdoms were pretty good looking property.”

“Good enough to make me forget the sort of thing I was doing. Good enough to blind me as to how things might come out. But I see now! And I’m through with

it all!”

The chubby little man’s eyes were on fire. But he was too experienced in his trade to allow much liberty to anger.

“And that’s final—that’s where you stand?” he asked with comparative calm.

“That’s where I stand!” cried Blake. “I may have got started crooked, but I’m through with this kind of business now! I’m going back to clean ways! And you, Mr. Brown, you might as well say good-by!”

But Mr. Brown was an old campaigner. He never abandoned a battle merely because it apparently seemed lost. He now leaned back in his chair, slowly crossed his short legs, and thoughtfully regarded Blake’s excited features. His own countenance had changed its aspect; it had shed its recent hardness, and had not resumed its original cheeriness. It was eminently a reasonable face.

“Come, let’s talk this whole matter over in a calm manner,” he began in a rather soothing tone. “Neither of us wants to be too hasty. There are a few points I’d like to call your attention to, if you’ll let me.”

“Go ahead with your points,” said Blake. “But they won’t change my decision.”

“First, let’s talk about the company,” Mr. Brown went on in his mild, persuasive manner. “Frankly, you’ve put the company in a hole. Believing that you would keep your end of the bargain, the company has invested a lot of money and started a lot of projects. We bought up practically all the stock of the Westville street car lines, when that municipal ownership talk drove the price so low, because we expected to get a new franchise through your smashing this municipal ownership fallacy. We have counted on big things from the water-works when you got hold of it for us. And we have plans on foot in several other cities of the state, and we’ve been counting on the failure of municipal ownership in Westville to have a big influence on those cities and to help us in getting what we want. In one way and another this deal here means an awful lot to the company. Your failing us at the last moment means to the company——”

“I understand all that,” interrupted Blake.

“Here’s a point for you to consider then: Since the company has banked so much upon your promise, since it will lose so heavily if you repudiate your word, are you not bound in honour to stand by your agreement?”

Blake opened his lips, but Mr. Brown raised a hand.

“Don’t answer now. I just leave that for you to think upon. So much for the company. Now for yourself. We promised you if you carried this deal through—and you know how able we are to keep our promise!—we promised you Grayson’s seat in the Senate. And after that, with your ability and our support, who knows where you’d stop?” Mr. Brown’s voice became yet more soft and persuasive. “Isn’t that a lot to throw overboard because of a scruple?”

“I can win all that, or part of it, by being loyal to the people,” Blake replied doggedly, but in a rather unsteady tone.

“Come, come, Mr. Blake,” said Brown reprovingly, “you know you’re not talking sense. You know that the only quick and sure way of getting the big offices is by the help of the corporations. So you realize what you’re losing.”

Blake’s face had become drawn and pale. He closed his eyes, as though to shut out the visions of the kingdoms Mr. Brown had conjured up.

“I’m ready to lose it!” he cried.

“All right, then,” Mr. Brown went mildly on. “So much for what we lose, and what you lose. Now for the next point, the action you intend to take regarding Doctor West. Do you mind telling me just how you propose to undo what you have done so far?”

“I haven’t thought it out yet. But I can do it.”

“Of course,” pursued Mr. Brown blandly, “you propose to do it so that you will appear in no way to be involved?”

Blake was thinking of Katherine’s accusation. “Of course.”

“Just suppose you think about that point for a minute or two.”

There was a brief silence. When Mr. Brown next spoke he spoke very slowly and accompanied each word with a gentle tap of his forefinger on the desk.

“Can you think of a single way to clear Doctor West without incriminating yourself?”

Blake gave a start.

“What’s that?”



“Can you get Doctor West out of his trouble without showing who got him into his trouble? Just think that over.”

During the moment of silence Blake grew yet more pale.

“I’ll kill the case somehow!” he breathed.

“But the case looks very strong against Doctor West. Everybody believes him guilty. Do you think you can suddenly, within twenty-four hours, reverse the whole situation, and not run some risk of having suspicion shift around to you?”

Blake’s eyes fell to his desk, and he sat staring whitely at it.

“And there’s still another matter,” pursued the gentle voice of Mr. Brown, now grown apologetic. “I wouldn’t think of mentioning it, but I want you to have every consideration before you. I believe I never told you that the National Electric & Water Company own the majority stock of the Acme Filter Company.”

“No, I didn’t know that.”

“It was because of that mutual relationship that I was able to help out your little plan by getting Marcy to do what he did. Now if some of our directors should feel sore at the way you’ve thrown us down, they might take it into their minds to make things unpleasant for you.”

“Unpleasant? How?”

Mr. Brown’s fatherly smile had now come back. It was full of concern for Blake.

“Well, I’d hate, for instance, to see them use their pressure to drive Mr. Marcy to make a statement.”

“Mr. Marcy? A statement?”

“Because,” continued Mr. Brown in his tone of fatherly concern, “after Mr. Marcy had stated what he knows about this case, I’m afraid there wouldn’t be much chance for you to win any high places by being loyal to the people.”

For a moment after this velvet threat Blake held upon Mr. Brown an open-lipped, ashen face. Then, without a word, he leaned his elbows upon his desk and buried his face in his hands. For a long space there was silence in the room. Mr. Brown’s eyes, kind no longer, but keenest of the keen, watched the form

before him, timing the right second to strike again.

At length he recrossed his legs.

“Of course it’s up to you to decide, and what you say goes,” he went on in his amiable voice. “But speaking impartially, and as a friend, it strikes me that you’ve gone too far in this matter to draw back. It strikes me that the best and only thing is to go straight ahead.”

Blake’s head remained bowed in his hands, and he did not speak.

“And, of course,” pursued Mr. Brown, “if you should decide in favour of the original agreement, our promise still stands good—Senate and all.”

Mr. Brown said no more, but sat watching his man. Again there was a long silence. Then Blake raised his face—and a changed face it was indeed from that which had fallen into his hands. It bore the marks of a mighty struggle, but it was hard and resolute—the face of a man who has cast all hesitancy behind.

“The agreement still stands,” he said.

“Then you’re ready to go ahead?”

“To the very end,” said Blake.

Mr. Brown nodded. “I was sure you’d decide that way,” said he.

“I want to thank you for what you’ve said to bring me around,” Blake continued in his new incisive tone. “But it is only fair to tell you that this was only a spell—not the first one, in fact—and that I would have come to my senses anyhow.”

“Of course, of course.” It was not the policy of Mr. Brown, once the victory was won, to discuss to whom the victory belonged.

Blake’s eyes were keen and penetrating.

“And you say that the things I said a little while back will not affect your attitude toward me in the future?”

“Those things? Why, they’ve already passed out of my other ear! Oh, it’s no new experience,” he went on with his comforting air of good-fellowship, “for me to run into one of our political friends when he’s sick with a bad case of conscience. They all have it now and then, and they all pull out of it. No, don’t you worry about the future. You’re O. K. with us.”

“Thank you.”

“And now, since everything is so pleasantly cleared up,” continued Mr. Brown, “let’s go back to my first question. I suppose everything looks all right for the trial to-morrow?”

Blake hesitated a moment, then told of Katherine’s discovery. “But it’s no more than a surmise,” he ended.

“Has she guessed any other of the parties implicated?” Mr. Brown asked anxiously.

“I’m certain she has not.”

“Is she likely to raise a row to-morrow?”

“I hardly see how she can.”

“All the same, we’d better do something to quiet her,” returned Mr. Brown meaningly.

Blake flashed a quick look at the other.

“See here—I’ll not have her touched!”

Mr. Brown’s scanty eyebrows lifted.

“Hello! You seem very tender about her!”

Blake looked at him sternly a moment. Then he said stiffly: “I once asked Miss West to marry me.”

“Eh—you don’t say!” exclaimed the other, amazed. “That is certainly a queer situation for you!” He rubbed his naked dome. “And you still feel——”

“What I feel is my own affair!” Blake cut in sharply.

“Of course, of course!” agreed Mr. Brown quickly. “I beg your pardon!”

Blake ignored the apology.

“It might be well for you not to see me openly again like this. With Miss West watching me——”

“She might see us together, and suspect things. I understand. Needn’t worry about that. You may not see me again for a year. I’m here—there—everywhere. But before I go, how do things look for the election?”

“We’ll carry the city easily.”

“Who’ll you put up for mayor?”

“Probably Kennedy, the prosecuting attorney.”

“Is he safe?”

“He’ll do what he’s told.”

“That’s good. Is he strong with the people?”

“Fairly so. But the party will carry him through.”

“H’m.” Mr. Brown was thoughtful for a space. “This is your end of the game, of course, and I make it a point not to interfere with another man’s work. The only time I’ve butted in here was when I helped you about getting Marcy. But still, I hope you don’t mind my making a suggestion.”

“Not at all.”

“We’ve got to have the next mayor and council, you know. Simply got to have them. We don’t want to run any risk, however small. If you think there’s one chance in a thousand of Kennedy losing out, suppose you have yourself nominated.”

“Me?” exclaimed Blake.

“It strikes you as a come-down, of course. But you can do it gracefully—in the interest of the city, and all that, you know. You can turn it into a popular hit. Then you can resign as soon as our business is put through.”

“There may be something in it,” commented Blake.

“It’s only a suggestion. Just think it over, and use your own judgment.” He stood up. “Well, I guess that’s all we need to say to one another. The whole situation here is entirely in your hands. Do as you please, and we ask no questions about how you do it. We’re not interested in methods, only in results.”

He clapped Blake heartily upon the shoulder. “And it looks as though we all

were going to get results! Especially you! Why, you, with this trial successfully over—with the election won—with the goods delivered——”

He suddenly broke off, for the tail of his eye had sighted Blake’s open cabinet.

“Will you allow me a liberty?”

“Certainly,” replied Blake, in the dark as to his visitor’s purpose.

Mr. Brown crossed to the cabinet, and returned with the squat, black bottle and two small glasses. He tilted an inch into each tumbler, gave one to Blake, and raised the other on high. His face was illumined with his fatherly smile.

“To our new Senator!” he said.



## CHAPTER X

### SUNSET AT THE SYCAMORES

When the door had closed behind the pleasant figure of Mr. Brown, Blake pressed the button upon his desk. His stenographer appeared.

“I have some important matters to consider,” he said. “Do not allow me to be disturbed until Doctor and Mrs. Sherman come with the car.”

His privacy thus secured, Blake sat at his desk, staring fixedly before him. His brow was compressed into wrinkles, his dark face, still showing a yellowish pallor, was hard and set. He reviewed the entire situation, and as his consuming ambition contemplated the glories of success, and the success after that, and the succession of successes that led up and ever up, his every nerve was afire with an excruciating, impatient pleasure.

For a space while Katherine had confronted him, and for a space after she had gone, he had shrunk from this business he was carrying through. But he had spoken truthfully to Mr. Brown when he had said that his revulsion was but a temporary feeling, and that of his own accord he would have come back to his original decision. He had had such revulsions before, and each time he had swung as surely back to his purpose as does the disturbed needle to the magnetic pole.

Westville considered Harrison Blake a happy blend of the best of his father and mother; whereas, in point of fact, his father and his mother lived in him with their personalities almost intact. There was his mother, with her idealism and her high sense of honour; and his father, with his boundless ambition and his lack of principles. In the earlier years of Blake's manhood his mother's qualities had dominated. He had sincerely tried to do great work for Westville, and had done it; and the reputation he had then made, and the gratitude he had then won, were the seed from which had grown the great esteem with which Westville now regarded him.

But a few years back he had found that rise, through virtue, was slow and beset with barriers. His ambition had become impatient. Now that he was a figure of local power and importance, temptation began to assail him with offers of rapid

elevation if only he would be complaisant. In this situation, the father in him rose into the ascendancy; he had compromised and yielded, though always managing to keep his dubious transactions secret. And now at length ambition ruled him—though as yet not undisturbed, for conscience sometimes rose in unexpected revolt and gave him many a bitter battle.

When his stenographer told Blake that Doctor and Mrs. Sherman were waiting at the curb, he descended with something more like his usual cast of countenance. Elsie and her husband were in the tonneau, and as Blake crossed the sidewalk to the car she stretched out a nervous hand and gave him a worn, excited smile.

“It is so good of you to take us out to The Sycamores for over night!” she exclaimed. “It’s such a pleasure—and such a relief!”

She did not need to explain that it was a relief because the motion, the company, the change of scene, would help crowd from her mind the dread of to-morrow when her husband would have to take the stand against Doctor West; she did not need to explain this, because Blake’s eyes read it all in her pale, feverish face.

Blake shook hands with Doctor Sherman, dismissed his chauffeur, and took the wheel. They spun out of the city and down into the River Road—the favourite drive with Westville folk—which followed the stream in broad sweeping curves and ran through arcades of thick-bodied, bowing willows and sycamores lofty and severe, their foliage now a drought-crisped brown. After half an hour the car turned through a stone gateway into a grove of beech and elm and sycamore. At a comfortable distance apart were perhaps a dozen houses whose outer walls were slabs of trees with the bark still on. This was The Sycamores, a little summer resort established by a small group of the select families of Westville.

Blake stopped the car before one of these houses—“cabins” their owners called them, though their primitiveness was all in that outer shell of bark. A rather tall, straight, white-haired old lady, with a sweet nobility and strength of face, was on the little porch to greet them. She welcomed Elsie and her husband warmly and graciously. Then with no relaxation of her natural dignity into emotional effusion, she embraced her son and kissed him—for to her, as to Westville, he was the same man as five years before, and to him she had given not only the love a mother gives her only son, but the love she had formerly borne her husband who, during his last years, had been to her a bitter grief. Blake returned the kiss with no less feeling. His love of his mother was the talk of Westville; it was the one noble sentiment which he still allowed to sway him with all its



original sincerity and might.

They had tea out upon the porch, with its view of the river twinkling down the easy hill between the trees. Mrs. Blake, seeing how agitated Elsie was, and under what a strain was Doctor Sherman, and guessing the cause, deftly guided the conversation away from to-morrow's trial. She led the talk around to the lecture room which was being added to Doctor Sherman's church—a topic of high interest to them all, for she was a member of the church, Blake was chairman of the building committee, and Doctor Sherman was treasurer of the committee and active director of the work. This manœuvre had but moderate success. Blake carried his part of the conversation well enough, and Elsie talked with a feverish interest which was too great a drain upon her meagre strength. But the stress of Doctor Sherman, which he strove to conceal, seemed to grow greater rather than decrease.

Presently Blake excused himself and Doctor Sherman, and the two men strolled down a winding, root-obstructed path toward the river. As they left the cabin behind them, Blake's manner became cold and hard, as in his office, and Doctor Sherman's agitation, which he had with such an effort kept in hand, began to escape his control. Once he stumbled over the twisted root which a beech thrust across their path and would have fallen had not Blake put out a swift hand and caught him. Yet at this neither uttered a word, and in silence they continued walking on till they reached a retired spot upon the river's bank.

Here Doctor Sherman sank to a seat upon a mossy, rotting log. Blake, erect, but leaning lightly against the scaling, mottled body of a giant sycamore, at first gave no heed to his companion. He gazed straight ahead down the river, emaciated by the drought till the bowlders of its bottom protruded through the surface like so many bones—with the ranks of austere sycamores keeping their stately watch on either bank—with the sun, blood red in the September haze, suspended above the river's west-most reach.

Thus the pair remained for several moments. Then Blake looked slowly about at the minister.

"I brought you down here because there is something I want to tell you," he said calmly.

"I supposed so; go ahead," responded Doctor Sherman in a choked voice, his eyes upon the ground.

“You seem somewhat disturbed,” remarked Blake in the same cold, even tone.

“Disturbed!” cried Doctor Sherman. “Disturbed!”

His voice told how preposterously inadequate was the word. He did not lift his eyes, but sat silent a moment, his white hands crushing one another, his face bent upon the rotted wood beneath his feet.

“It’s that business to-morrow!” he groaned; and at that he suddenly sprang up and confronted Blake. His fine face was wildly haggard and was working in convulsive agony. “My God,” he burst out, “when I look back at myself as I was four years ago, and then look at myself as I am to-day—oh, I’m sick, sick!” A hand gripped the cloth over his breast. “Why, when I came to Westville I was on fire to serve God with all my heart and never a compromise! On fire to preach the new gospel that the way to make people better is to make this an easier world for people to be better in!”

That passion-shaken figure was not a pleasant thing to look upon. Blake turned his eyes back to the glistening river and the sun, and steeled himself.

“Yes, I remember you preached some great sermons in those days,” he commented in his cold voice. “And what happened to you?”

“You know what happened to me!” cried the young minister with his wild passion. “You know well enough, even if you were not in that group of prominent members who gave me to understand that I’d either have to change my sermons or they’d have to change their minister!”

“At least they gave you a choice,” returned Blake.

“And I made the wrong choice! I was at the beginning of my career—the church here seemed a great chance for so young a man—and I did not want to fail at the very beginning. And so—and so—I compromised!”

“Do you suppose you are the first man that has ever made a compromise?”

“That compromise was the direct cause of to-morrow!” the young clergyman went on in his passionate remorse. “That compromise was the beginning of my fall. After the prominent members took me up, favoured me, it became easy to blink my eyes at their business methods. And then it became easy for me to convince myself that it would be all right for me to gamble in stocks.”

“That was your great mistake,” said the dry voice of the motionless figure against the tree. “A minister has no business to fool with the stock market.”

“But what was I to do?” Doctor Sherman cried desperately. “No money behind me—the salary of a dry goods clerk—my wife up there, whom I love better than my own life, needing delicacies, attention, a long stay in Colorado—what other chance, I ask you, did I have of getting the money?”

“Well, at any rate, you should have kept your fingers off that church building fund.”

“God, don’t I realize that! But with the market falling, and all the little I had about to be swept away, what else was a half frantic man to do but to try to save himself with any money he could put his hands upon?”

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, if luck was against you when that church money was also swept away, luck was certainly with you when it happened that I was the one to discover what you had done.”

“So I thought, when you offered to replace the money and cover the whole thing up. But, God, I never dreamed you’d exact such a price in return!”

He gripped Blake’s arm and shook it. His voice was a half-muffled shriek.

“If you wanted the water-works, if you wanted to do this to Doctor West, why did you pick on me to bring the accusation? There are men who would never have minded it—men without conscience and without character!”

Blake steadfastly kept his steely gaze upon the river.

“I believe I have answered that a number of times,” he replied in his hard, even tone. “I picked you because I needed a man of character to give the charges weight. A minister, the president of our reform body—no one else would serve so well. And I picked you because—pardon me, if in my directness I seem brutal—I picked you because you were all ready to my hand; you were in a situation where you dared not refuse me. Also I picked you, instead of a man with no character to lose, because I knew that you, having a character to lose and not wanting to lose it, would be less likely than any one else ever to break down and confess. I hope my answer is sufficiently explicit.”

Doctor Sherman stared at the erect, immobile figure.

“And you still intend,” he asked in a dry, husky voice, “you still intend to force me to go upon the stand to-morrow and commit——”

“I would not use so unpleasant a word if I were you.”

“But you are going to force me to do it?”

“I am not going to force you. You referred a few minutes ago to the time when you had a choice. Well, here is another time when you have a choice.”

“Choice?” cried Doctor Sherman eagerly.

“Yes. You can testify, or not testify, as you please. Only in reaching your decision,” added the dry, emotionless voice, “I suggest that you do not forget that I have in my possession your signed confession of that embezzlement.”

“And you call that a choice?” cried Doctor Sherman. “When, if I refuse, you’ll expose me, ruin me forever, kill Elsie’s love for me! Do you call that a choice?”

“A choice, certainly. Perhaps you are inclined not to testify. If so, very well. But before you make your decision I desire to inform you of one fact. You will remember that I said in the beginning that I brought you down here to tell you something.”

“Yes. What is it?”

“Merely this. That Miss West has discovered that I am behind this affair.”

“What!” Doctor Sherman fell back a step, and his face filled with sudden terror. “Then—she knows everything?”

“She knows little, but she suspects much. For instance, since she knows that this is a plot, she is likely to suspect that every person in any way connected with the affair is guilty of conspiracy.”

“Even—even me?”

“Even you.”

“Then—you think?”

Blake turned his face sharply about upon Doctor Sherman—the first time since

the beginning of their colloquy. It was his father's face—his father in one of his most relentless, overriding moods—the face of a man whom nothing can stop.

“I think,” said he slowly, driving each word home, “that the only chance for people who want to come out of this affair with a clean name is to stick the thing right through as we planned.”

Doctor Sherman did not speak.

“I tell you about Miss West for two reasons. First, in order to let you know the danger you're in. Second, in order, in case you decided to testify, that you may be forewarned and be prepared to outface her. I believe you understand everything now?”

“Yes,” was the almost breathless response.

“Then may I be allowed to ask what you are going to do—testify, or not testify?”

The minister's hands opened and closed. He swallowed with difficulty.

“Testify, or not testify?” Blake insisted.

“Testify,” whispered Doctor Sherman.

“Just as you choose,” said Blake coldly.

The minister sank back to his seat upon the mossy log, and bowed his head into his hands. “Oh, my God!” he breathed.

There followed a silence, during which Blake gazed upon the huddled figure. Then he turned his set face down the glittering, dwindled stream, and, one shoulder lightly against the sycamore, he watched the sun there at the river's end sink softly down into its golden slumber.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE TRIAL

Katherine's first thought, on leaving Bruce's office, was to lay her discovery before Doctor Sherman. She was certain that with her new-found knowledge, and with her entirely new point of view, they could quickly discover wherein he had been duped—for she still held him to be an unwitting tool—and thus quickly clear up the whole case. But for reasons already known she failed to find him; and learning that he had gone away with Blake, she well knew Blake would keep him out of her reach until the trial was over.

In sharpest disappointment, Katherine went home. With the trial so few hours away, with all her new discoveries buzzing chaotically in her head, she felt the need of advising with some one about the situation. Bruce's offer of assistance recurred to her, and she found herself analyzing the editor again, just as she had done when she had walked away from his office. She rebelled against him in her every fibre, yet at the same time she felt a reluctant liking for him. He was a man with big dreams, a rough-and-ready idealist, an idealist with sharply marked limitations, some areas of his mind very broad, some dogmatically narrow. Opinionated, obstinate, impulsive, of not very sound judgment, yet dictatorial because supremely certain of his rightness—courageous, unselfish, sincere—that was the way she now saw the editor of the *Express*.

But he had sneered at her, sharply criticized her, and she hotly spurned the thought of asking his aid. Instead of him, she that evening summoned Old Hosie Hollingsworth to her house, and to the old lawyer she told everything. Old Hosie was convinced that she was right, and was astounded.

“And to think that the good folks of this town used to denounce me as a worshipper of strange gods!” he ejaculated. “Gee, what'll they say when they learn that the idol they've been wearing out their knee-caps on has got clay feet that run clear up to his Adam's-apple!”

They decided that it would be a mistake for Katherine to try to use her new theories and discoveries openly in defence of her father. She had too little evidence, and any unsupported charges hurled against Blake would leave that

gentleman unharmed and would come whirling back upon Katherine as a boomerang of popular indignation. She dared not breathe a word against the city's favourite until she had incontrovertible proof. Under the circumstances, the best course seemed for her to ask for a postponement on the morrow to enable her to work up further evidence.

"Only," warned Hosie, "you must remember that the chances are that Blake has already slipped the proper word to Judge Kellog, and there'll be no postponement."

"Then I'll have to depend upon tangling up that Mr. Marcy on the stand."

"And Doctor Sherman?"

"There'll be no chance of entangling him. He'll tell a straightforward story. How could he tell any other? Don't you see how he's been used?—been made spectator to a skilfully laid scheme which he honestly believes to be a genuine case of bribery?"

At parting Old Hosie held her hand a moment.

"D'you remember the prophecy I made the day you took your office—that you would raise the dickens in this old town?"

"Yes," said Katherine.

"Well, that's coming true—as sure as plug hats don't grow on fig trees! Only not in the way I meant then. Not as a freak. But as a lawyer."

"Thank you." She smiled and slowly shook her head. "But I'm afraid it won't come true to-morrow."

"Of course a prophecy is no good, unless you do your best."

"Oh, I'm going to do my best," she assured him.

The next morning, on the long awaited day, Katherine set out for the Court House, throbbing alternately with hope and fear of the outcome. Mixed with these was a perturbation of a very different sort—an ever-growing stage-fright. For this last there was good reason. Trials were a form of recreation as popular in Calloway County as gladiatorial contests in ancient Rome, and this trial—in the lack of a sensational murder in the county during the year—was the greatest of the twelvemonth. Moreover, it was given added interest by the fact that, for the

first time in recorded history, Calloway County was going to see in action that weirdest product of whirling change, a woman lawyer.

Hub to hub about the hitch-racks of the Square were jammed buggies, surries, spring wagons and other country equipages. The court-room was packed an hour before the trial, and in the corridor were craning, straining, elbowing folk who had come too late. In the open windows—the court-room was on the ground floor—were the busts of eager citizens whose feet were pedestaled on boxes, the sale of which had been a harvest of small coin to neighbouring grocers; and in the trees without youths of simian habit clung to advantageous limbs and strained to get a view of the proceedings. Old Judge Kellog who usually dozed on his twenty-first vertebra through testimony and argument—once a young fledgling of a lawyer, sailing aloft in the empyrean of his eloquence, had been brought tumbling confusedly to earth by the snoring of the bench—attested to the unusualness of the occasion by being upright and awake. And Bud White, the clerk, called the court to order, not with his usual masterpiece of mumbled unintelligibility, brought to perfection by long years of practice, but with real words that could have been understood had only the audience been listening.

But their attention was all fixed upon the counsel for the defence. Katherine, in a plain white shirt waist and a black sailor, sat at a table alone with her father. Doctor West was painfully nervous; his long fingers were constantly twisting among themselves. Katherine was under an even greater strain. She realized with an intenser keenness now that the moment for action was at hand, that this was her first case, that her father's reputation, his happiness, perhaps even his life, were at stake; and she was well aware that all this theatre of people, whose eyes she felt burning into her back, regarded her as the final curiosity of nature. Behind her, with young Harper at his side, she had caught a glimpse of Arnold Bruce, eying her critically and sceptically she thought; and in the audience she had glimpsed the fixed, inscrutable face of Harrison Blake.

But she clung blindly to her determination, and as Bud White sat down, she forced herself to rise. A deep hush spread through the court-room. She stood trembling, swallowing, voiceless, a statue of stage-fright, wildly hating herself for her impotence. For a dizzy, agonizing moment she saw herself a miserable failure—saw the crowd laughing at her as they filed out.

A youthful voice, from a balcony seat in an elm tree, floated in through the open window:



“Speak your piece, little girl, or set down.”

There was a titter. She stiffened.

“Your—your Honour,” she stammered, “I move a postponement in order to allow the defence more time to prepare its case.”

Judge Kellog fingered his patriarchal beard. Katherine stood hardly breathing while she waited his momentous words. But his answer was as Old Hosie had predicted.

“In view of the fact that the defence has already had four months in which to prepare its case,” said he, “I shall have to deny the motion and order the trial to proceed.”

Katherine sat down. The hope of deferment was gone. There remained only to fight.

A jury was quickly chosen; Katherine felt that her case would stand as good a chance with any one selection of twelve men as with any other. Kennedy then stepped forward. With an air that was a blend of his pretentious—if rather raw-boned—dignity as a coming statesman, of extreme deference toward Katherine’s sex, and of the sense of his personal belittlement in being pitted against such a legal weakling, he outlined to the jury what he expected to prove. After which, he called Mr. Marcy to the stand.

The agent of the filter company gave his evidence with that degree of shame-facedness proper to the man, turned state’s witness, who has been an accomplice in the dishonourable proceedings he is relating. It all sounded and looked so true—so very, very true!

When Katherine came to cross-examine him, she gazed at him steadily a moment. She knew that he was lying, and she knew that he knew that she knew he was lying. But he met her gaze with precisely the abashed, guilty air appropriate to his rôle.

What she considered her greatest chance was now before her. Calling up all her wits, she put to Mr. Marcy questions that held distant, hidden traps. But when she led him along the devious, unsuspecting path that conducted to the trap and then suddenly shot at him the question that should have plunged him into it, he very quietly and nimbly walked around the pitfall. Again and again she tried to involve him, but ever with the same result. He was abashed, ready to answer—

and always elusive. At the end she had gained nothing from him, and for a minute stood looking silently at him in baffled exasperation.

“Have you any further questions to ask the witness?” old Judge Kellog prompted her, with a gentle impatience.

For a moment, stung by this witness’s defeat of her, she had an impulse to turn about, point her finger at Blake in the audience, and cry out the truth to the court-room and announce what was her real line of defence. But she realized the uproar that would follow if she dared attack Blake without evidence, and she controlled herself.

“That is all, Your Honour,” she said.

Mr. Marcy was dismissed. The lean, frock-coated figure of Mr. Kennedy arose.

“Doctor Sherman,” he called.

Doctor Sherman seemed to experience some difficulty in making his way up to the witness stand. When he faced about and sat down the difficulty was explained to the crowd. He was plainly a sick man. Whispers of sympathy ran about the court-room. Every one knew how he had sacrificed a friend to his sense of civic duty, and everyone knew what pain that act must have caused a man with such a high-strung conscience.

With his hands tightly gripping the arms of his chair, his bright and hollow eyes fastened upon the prosecutor, Doctor Sherman began in a low voice to deliver his direct testimony. Katherine listened to him rather mechanically at first, even with a twinge of sympathy for his obvious distress.

But though her attention was centred here in the court-room, her brain was subconsciously ranging swiftly over all the details of the case. Far down in the depths of her mind the question was faintly suggesting itself, if one witness is a guilty participant in the plot, then why not possibly the other?—when she saw Doctor Sherman give a quick glance in the direction where she knew sat Harrison Blake. That glance brought the question surging up to the surface of her conscious mind, and she sat bewildered, mentally gasping. She did not see how it could be, she could not understand his motive—but in the sickly face of Doctor Sherman, in his strained manner, she now read guilt.

Thrilling with an unexpected hope, Katherine rose and tried to keep herself before the eyes of Doctor Sherman like an accusing conscience. But he avoided

her gaze, and told his story in every detail just as when Doctor West had been first accused. When Kennedy turned him over for cross-examination, Katherine walked up before him and looked him straight in the eyes a full moment without speaking. He could no longer avoid her gaze. In his eyes she read something that seemed to her like mortal terror.

“Doctor Sherman,” she said slowly, clearly, “is there nothing you would like to add to your testimony?”

His words were a long time coming. Katherine’s life hung suspended while she waited his answer.

“Nothing,” he said.

“There is no fact, no detail, that you may have omitted in your direct testimony, that you now desire to supply?”

“Nothing.”

She took a step nearer, bent on him a yet more searching gaze, and put into her voice its all of conscience-stirring power.

“You wish to go on record then, before this court, before this audience, before the God whom you have appealed to in your oath, as having told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?”

He averted his eyes and was silent a moment. For that moment Blake, back in the audience, did not breathe. To the crowd it seemed that Doctor Sherman was searching his mind for some possible trivial omission. To Katherine it seemed that he was in the throes of a final struggle.

“You wish thus to go on record?” she solemnly insisted.

He looked back at her.

“I do,” he breathed.

She realized now how desperate was this man’s determination, how tightly his lips were locked. But she had picked up another thread of this tangled skein, and that made her exult with a new hope. She went spiritedly at the cross-examination of Doctor Sherman, striving to break him down. So sharp, so rigid, so searching were her questions, that there were murmurs in the audience against such treatment of a sincere, high-minded man of God. But the swiftness and

cleverness of her attack availed her nothing. Doctor Sherman, nerved by last evening's talk beside the river, made never a slip.

From the moment she reluctantly discharged him she felt that her chance—her chance for that day, at least—was gone. But she was there to fight to the end, and she put her only witness, her father, upon the stand. His defence, that he was the victim of a misunderstanding, was smiled at by the court-room—and smiled at with apparently good reason, since Kennedy, in anticipation of the line of defense, had introduced the check from the Acme Filter Company which Dr. West had turned over to the hospital board, to prove that the donation from the filter company had been in Dr. West's hands at the time he had received the bribe from Mr. Marcy. Dr. West testified that the letter containing this check had not been opened until many days after his arrest, and Katharine took the stand and swore that it was she herself who had opened the envelope. But even while she testified she saw that she was not believed; and she had to admit within herself that her father's story appeared absurdly implausible, compared to the truth-visaged falsehoods of the prosecution.

But when the evidence was all in and the time for argument was come, Katherine called up her every resource, she remembered that truth was on her side, and she presented the case clearly and logically, and ended with a strong and eloquent plea for her father. As she sat down, there was a profound hush in the court-room.

Her father squeezed her hand. Tears stood in his eyes.

“Whatever happens,” he whispered, “I'm proud of my daughter.”

Kennedy's address was brief and perfunctory, for the case seemed too easy to warrant his exertion. Still stimulated by the emotion aroused by her own speech and the sense of the righteousness of her cause, Katherine watched the jury go out with a fluttering hope. She still clung to hope when, after a short absence, the jury filed back in. She rose and held her breath while they took their seats.

“You have reached a verdict, gentlemen?” asked Judge Kellog.

“We have,” answered the foreman.

“What is it?”

“We find the defendant guilty.”

Doctor West let out a little moan, and his head fell forward into his arms. Katherine bent over him and whispered a word of comfort into his ear; then rose and made a motion for a new trial. Judge Kellog denied the motion, and haltingly asked Doctor West to step forward to the bar. Doctor West did so, and the two old men, who had been friends since childhood, looked at each other for a space. Then in a husky voice Judge Kellog pronounced sentence: One thousand dollars fine and six months in the county jail.

It was a light sentence—but enough to blacken an honest name for life, enough to break a sensitive heart like Doctor West’s.

A little later Katherine, holding an arm of her father tightly within her own, walked with him and fat, good-natured Sheriff Nichols over to the old brick county jail. And yet a little later, erect, eyes straight before her, she came down the jail steps and started homeward.

As she was passing along the Square, immediately before her Harrison Blake came out of his stairway and started across the sidewalk to his waiting car. Discretion urged her to silence; but passion was the stronger. She stepped squarely up before him and flashed him a blazing look.

“Well—and so you think you’ve won!” she cried in a low voice.

His colour changed, but instantly he was master of himself.

“What, Katherine, you still persist in that absurd idea of yesterday.”

“Oh, drop that pretence! We know each other too well for that!” She moved nearer and, trembling from head to foot, her passionate defiance burst all bounds. “You think you have won, don’t you!” she hotly cried. “Well, let me tell you that this affair is not merely a battle that was to-day won and ended! It’s a war—and I have just begun to fight!”

And sweeping quickly past him, she walked on into Main Street and down it through the staring crowds—very erect, a red spot in either cheek, her eyes defiantly meeting every eye.



## CHAPTER XII

### OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS AT BRUCE'S DOOR

On the following morning Bruce had just finished an editorial on Doctor West's trial, and was busily thumping out an editorial on the local political situation—the Republican and Democratic conventions were both but a few days off—when, lifting his scowling gaze to his window while searching for the particular word he needed, he saw Katherine passing along the sidewalk across the street. Her face was fresh, her step springy; hers was any but a downcast figure. Forgetting his editorial, he watched her turn the corner of the Square and go up the broad, worn steps of the dingy old county jail.

“Well, what do we think of her?” queried a voice at his elbow.

Bruce turned abruptly.

“Oh, it's you, Billy. D'you see Blake?”

“Yes.” The young fellow sank loungingly into the atlas-seated chair. “He wouldn't say anything definite. Said it was up to the convention to pick the candidates. But it's plain Kennedy's his choice for mayor, and we'll be playing perfectly safe in predicting Kennedy's nomination.”

“And Peck?”

“Blind Charlie said it was too early to make any forecasts. In doubt as to whom they'd put forward for mayor.”

“Would Blake say anything about Doctor West's conviction?”

“Sorry for Doctor West's sake—but the case was clear—trial fair—a wholesome example to the city—and some more of that line of talk.”

Bruce grunted.

The reporter leisurely lit a cigarette.

“But how about the lady lawyer, eh?” He playfully prodded his superior's calf with his pointed shoe. “I suppose you'll fire me off your rotten old sheet for

saying it, but I still think she made a damned good showing considering that she had no case—and considering also that she was a woman.” Again he thrust his toe into his chief. “Considering she was a woman—eh, Arn?”

“Shut up, Billy, or I *will* fire you,” growled Bruce.

“Oh, all right,” answered the other cheerfully. “After half a year of the nerve-racking social whirl of this metropolis, I think it would be sort of restful to be back in dear, little, quiet Chicago. But seriously now, Arn, you’ve got to admit she’s good-looking?”

“Good looks don’t make a lawyer!” retorted Bruce.

“But she’s clever—got ideas—opinions of her own, and strong ones too.”

“Perhaps.”

The reporter blew out a cloud of smoke.

“Arn, I’ve been thinking about a very interesting possibility.”

“Well, make it short, and get in there and write your story!”

“I’ve been thinking,” continued Billy meditatively, “over what an interesting situation it would make if the super-masculine editor of the *Express* should fall in love with the lady law——”

Bruce sprang up.

“Confound you, Billy! If I don’t crack that empty little——”

But Billy, tilted back in his chair, held out his cigarette case imperturbably.

“Take one, Arn. You’ll find them very soothing for the nerves.”

“You impertinent little pup, you!” He grabbed Billy by his long hair, held him a moment—then grinned affectionately and took a cigarette. “You’re the worst ever!” He dropped back into his chair. “Now shut up!”

“All right. But speaking impersonally, and with the unemotional aloofness of a critic, you’ll have to admit that it would make a good dramatic situation.”

“Blast you!” cried the editor. “Shall I fire you, or chuck you through the window?”

“Inasmuch as our foremost scientists are uniformly agreed that certain unpleasant results may eventuate when the force of gravitation brings a human organism into sudden and severe juxtaposition with a cement sidewalk, I humbly suggest that you fire me. Besides, that act will automatically avenge me, for then your yellow old newspaper will go plum to blazes!”

“For God’s sake, Billy, get out of here and let me work!”

“But, seriously, Arn—I really am serious now”—and all the mischief had gone out of the reporter’s eyes—“that Miss West would have put up a stunning fight if she had had any sort of a case. But she had nothing to fight with. They certainly had the goods on her old man!”

Bruce turned from his machine and regarded the reporter thoughtfully. Then he crossed and closed the door which was slightly ajar, and again fixed his eyes searchingly on young Harper.

“Billy,” he said in a low, impressive voice, “can you keep a big secret?”

At Bruce’s searching, thoughtful gaze a look of humility crept into Billy’s face.

“Oh, I know you’ve got every right to doubt me,” he acknowledged. “I certainly did leak a lot at the mouth in Chicago when I was boozing so much. But you know since you pulled me out of that wild bunch I was drinking my way to hell with and brought me down here, I’ve been screwed tight as a board to the water-wagon!”

“I know it, Billy. I shouldn’t for an instant——”

“And, Arn,” interrupted Billy, putting his arm contritely across the other’s shoulder, “even though I do joke at you a little—simply can’t help it—you know how eternally grateful I am to you! You’re giving me the chance of my life to make a man of myself. People in this town don’t half appreciate you; they don’t know you for what I know you—the best fellow that ever happened!”

“There, there! Cut it out, cut it out!” said Bruce gruffly, gripping the other’s hand.

“That’s always the way,” said Billy, resentfully. “Your only fault is that you are so infernally bull-headed that a fellow can’t even thank you.”

“You’re thanking me the right way when you keep yourself bolted fast to the



water-cart. What I started out to tell you, what I want you to keep secret, is this: They put the wrong man in jail yesterday.”

“What!” ejaculated Billy, springing up.

“I tell you this much because I want you to keep your eye on the story. Hell’s likely to break loose there any time, and I want you to be ready to handle it in case I should have to be off the job.”

“Good God, old man!” Billy stared at him. “What’s behind all this? If Doctor West’s the wrong man, then who’s the right one?”

“I can’t tell you any more now.”

“But how did you find this out?”

“I said I couldn’t tell you any more.”

A knowing look came slowly into Billy’s face.

“H’m. So that was what Miss West called here about day before yesterday.”

“Get in there and write your story,” said Bruce shortly, and again sat down before his typewriter.

Billy stood rubbing his head dazedly for a long space, then he slowly moved to the door. He opened it and paused.

“Oh, I say, Arn,” he remarked in an innocent tone.

“Yes?”

“After all,” he drawled, “it would make an interesting dramatic situation, wouldn’t it?”

Bruce whirled about and threw a statesman’s year book, but young Harper was already on the safe side of the door; and the incorrigible Billy was saved from any further acts of reprisal being attempted upon his person by the ringing of Bruce’s telephone.

Bruce picked up the instrument.

“Hello. Who’s this?” he demanded.

“Mr. Peck,” was the answer.

“What! You don’t mean ‘Blind Charlie’?”

“Yes. I called up to see if you could come over to the hotel for a little talk about politics.”

“If you want to talk to me you know where to find me! Good-by!”

“Wait! Wait! What time will you be in?”

“The paper goes to press at two-thirty. Any time after then.”

“I’ll drop around before three.”

Four hours later Bruce was glancing through that afternoon’s paper, damp from the press, when there entered his office a stout, half-bald man of sixty-five, with loose, wrinkled, pouchy skin, drooping nose, and a mouth—stained faintly brown at its corners—whose cunning was not entirely masked by a good-natured smile. One eye had a shrewd and beady brightness; the gray film over the other announced it without sight. This was “Blind Charlie” Peck, the king of Calloway County politics until Blake had hurled him from his throne.

Bruce greeted the fallen monarch curtly and asked him to sit down. Bruce did not resume his seat, but half leaned against his desk and eyed Blind Charlie with open disfavour.

The old man settled himself and smiled his good-natured smile at the editor.

“Well, Mr. Bruce, this is mighty dry weather we’re having.”

“Yes. What do you want?”

“Well—well—” said the old man, a little taken aback, “you certainly do jump into the middle of things.”

“I’ve found that the quickest way to get there,” retorted Bruce. “You know there’s no use in you and me wasting any words. You know well enough what I think of you.”

“I ought to,” returned Blind Charlie, dryly, but with good humour. “You’ve said it often enough.”

“Well, that there may be no mistake about it, I’ll say it once more. You’re a good-natured, good-hearted, cunning, unprincipled, hardened old rascal of a politician. Now if you don’t want to say what you came here to say, the same

route that brings you in here takes you out.”

“Come, come,” said the old man, soothingly. “I think you have said a lot of harder things than were strictly necessary—especially since we both belong to the same party.”

“That’s one reason I’ve said them. You’ve been running the party most of your life—you’re still running it—and see what you’ve made of it. Every decent member is ashamed of it! It stinks all through the state!”

Blind Charlie’s face did not lose its smile of imperturbable good nature. It was a tradition of Calloway County that he had never lost his temper.

“You’re a very young man, Mr. Bruce,” said the old politician, “and young blood loves strong language. But suppose we get away from personalities, and get away from the party’s past and talk about its present and its future.”

“I don’t see that it has any present or future to talk about, with you at the helm.”

“Oh, come now! Granted that my ways haven’t been the best for the party. Granted that you don’t like me. Is that any reason we shouldn’t at least talk things over? Now, I admit we don’t stand the shadow of a ghost’s show this election unless we make some changes. You represent the element in the party that has talked most for changes, and I have come to get your views.”

Bruce studied the loose-skinned, flabby face, wondering what was going on behind that old mask.

“What are your own views?” he demanded shortly.

Blind Charlie had taken out a plug of tobacco and with a jack-knife had cut off a thin slice. This, held between thumb and knife-blade, he now slowly transferred to his mouth.

“Perhaps they’re nearer your own than you think. I see, too, that the old ways won’t serve us now. Blake will put up a good ticket. I hear Kennedy is to be his mayor. The whole ticket will be men who’ll be respectable, but they’ll see that Blake gets what he wants. Isn’t that so?”

Bruce thought suddenly of Blake’s scheme to capture the water-works.

“Very likely,” he admitted.

“Now between ourselves,” the old man went on confidently, “we know that Blake has been getting what he wants for years—of course in a quiet, moderate way. Did you ever think of this, how the people here call me a ‘boss’ but never think of Blake as one? Blake’s an ‘eminent citizen.’ When the fact is, he’s a stronger, cleverer boss than I ever was. My way is the old way; it’s mostly out of date. Blake’s way is the new way. He’s found out that the best method to get the people is to be clean, or to seem clean. If I wanted a thing I used to go out and grab it. If Blake wants a thing he makes it appear that he’s willing to go to considerable personal trouble to take it in order to do a favour to the city, and the people fall all over themselves to give it to him. He’s got the churches lined up as solid behind him as I used to have the saloons. Now I know we can’t beat Blake with the kind of a ticket our party has been putting up. And I know we can’t beat Blake with a respectable ticket, for between our respectables——”

“Charlie Peck’s respectables!” Bruce interrupted ironically.

“And Blake’s respectables,” the old man continued imperturbably, “the people will choose Blake’s. Are my conclusions right so far?”

“Couldn’t be more right. What next?”

“As I figure it out, our only chance, and that a bare fighting chance, is to put up men who are not only irreproachable, but who are radicals and fighters. We’ve got to do something new, big, sensational, or we’re lost.”

“Well?” said Bruce.

“I was thinking,” said Blind Charlie, “that our best move would be to run you for mayor.”

“Me?” cried Bruce, starting forward.

“Yes. You’ve got ideas. And you’re a fighter.”

Bruce scrutinized the old face, all suspicion.

“See here, Charlie,” he said abruptly, “what the hell’s your game?”

“My game?”

“Oh, come! Don’t expect me to believe in you when you pose as a reformer!”

“See here, Bruce,” said the other a little sharply, “you’ve called me about every

dirty word lying around handy in the Middle West. But you never called me a hypocrite.”

“No.”

“Well, I’m not coming to you now pretending that I’ve been holding a little private revival, and that I’ve been washed in the blood of the Lamb.”

“Then what’s behind this? What’s in it for you?”

“I’ll tell you—though of course I can’t make you believe me if you don’t want to. I’m getting pretty old—I’m sixty-seven. I may not live till another campaign. I’d like to see the party win once more before I go. That’s one thing. Another is, I’ve got it in for Blake, and want to see him licked. I can’t do either in my way. I can possibly do both in your way. Mere personal satisfaction like this would have been mighty little for me to have got out of an election in the old days. But it’s better than nothing at all”—smiling good-naturedly—“even to a cunning, unprincipled, hardened old rascal of a politician.”

“But what’s the string tied to this offer?”

“None. You can name the ticket, write the platform——”

“It would be a radical one!” warned Bruce.

“It would have to be radical. Our only chance is in creating a sensation.”

“And if elected?”

“You shall make every appointment without let or hindrance. I know I’d be a fool to try to bind you in any way.”

Bruce was silent a long time, studying the wrinkled old face.

“Well, what do you say?” queried Blind Charlie.

“Frankly, I don’t like being mixed up with you.”

“But you believe in using existing party machinery, don’t you? You’ve said so in the *Express*.”

“Yes. But I also have said that I don’t believe in using it the way you have.”

“Well, here’s your chance to take it and use it your own way.”

“But what show would I stand? Feeling in town is running strong against radical ideas.”

“I know, I know. But you are a fighter, and with your energy you might turn the current. Besides, something big may happen before election.”

That same thought had been pulsing excitedly in Bruce’s brain these last few minutes. If Katherine could only get her evidence!

Bruce moved to the window and looked out so that that keen one eye of Blind Charlie might not perceive the exultation he could no longer keep out of his face. Bruce did not see the tarnished dome of the Court House—nor the grove of broad elms, shrivelled and dusty—nor the enclosing quadrangle of somnolent, drooping farm horses. He was seeing this town shaken as by an explosion. He was seeing cataclysmic battle, with Blind Charlie become a nonentity, Blake completely annihilated, and himself victorious at the front. And, dream of his dreams! he was seeing himself free to reshape Westville upon his own ideals.

“Well, what do you say?” asked Blind Charlie.

Controlling himself, Bruce turned about.

“I accept, upon the conditions you have named. But at the first sign of an attempt to limit those conditions, I throw the whole business overboard.”

“There will be no such attempt, so we can consider the matter settled.” Blind Charlie held out his hand, which Bruce, with some hesitation, accepted. “I congratulate you, I congratulate myself, I congratulate the party. With you as leader, I think we’ve all got a fighting chance to win.”

They discussed details of Bruce’s candidacy, they discussed the convention; and a little later Blind Charlie departed. Bruce, fists deep in trousers pockets, paced up and down his little office, or sat far down in his chair gazing at nothing, in excited, searching thought. Billy Harper and other members of the staff, who came in to him with questions, were answered absently with monosyllables. At length, when the Court House clock droned the hour of five through the hot, burnt-out air, Bruce washed his hands and brawny fore-arms at the old iron sink in the rear of the reporter’s room, put on his coat, and strode up Main Street. But instead of following his habit and turning off into Station Avenue, where was situated the house in which he and Old Hosie ate and slept and had their quarrels, he continued his way and turned into an avenue beyond—on his face

the flush of defiant firmness of the bold man who finds himself doing the exact thing he had sworn that he would never do.

He swung open the gate of the West yard, and with firm step went up to the house and rang the bell. When the screen swung open Katherine herself was in the doorway—looking rather excited, trimly dressed, on her head a little hat wound with a veil.

“May I come in?” he asked shortly.

“Why, certainly,” and she stepped aside.

“I didn’t know.”

He bowed and entered the parlour and stood rather stiffly in the centre of the room.

“My reason for daring to violate your prohibition of three days ago, and enter this house, is that I have something to tell you that may prove to have some bearing upon your father’s case.”

“Please sit down. When I apologized to you I considered the apology as equivalent to removing all signs against trespassing.”

They sat down, and for a moment they gazed at each other, still feeling themselves antagonists, though allies—she smilingly at her ease, he grimly serious.

“Now, please, what is it?” she asked.

Bruce, speaking reservedly at first, told her of Blind Charlie’s offer. As he spoke he warmed up and was quite excited when he ended. “And now,” he cried, “don’t you see how this works in with the fight to clear your father? It’s a great opportunity—haven’t thought out yet just how we can use it—that will depend upon developments, perhaps—but it’s a great opportunity! We’ll sweep Blake completely and utterly from power, reinstate your father in position and honour, and make Westville the finest city of the Middle West!”

But she did not seem to be fired by the torch of his enthusiasm. In fact, there was a thoughtful, questioning look upon her face.

“Well, what do you think of it?” he demanded.

“I have been given to understand,” she said pleasantly, “that it is unwomanly to have opinions upon politics.”

He winced.

“This is hardly the time for sarcasm. What do you think?”

“If you want my frank opinion, I am rather inclined to beware of Greeks bearing gifts,” she replied.

“What do you mean?”

“When a political boss, and a boss notoriously corrupt, offers an office to a good man, I think the good man should be very, very suspicious.”

“You think Peck has some secret corrupt purpose? I’ve been scrutinizing the offer for two hours. I know the ins and outs of the local political situation from A to Z. I know all Peck’s tricks. But I have not found the least trace of a hidden motive.”

“Perhaps you haven’t found it because it’s hidden so shrewdly, so deeply, that it can’t be seen.”

“I haven’t found it because it’s not there to find!” retorted Bruce. “Peck’s motive is just what he told me; I’m convinced he was telling the truth. It’s a plain case, and not an uncommon case, of a politician preferring the chance of victory with a good ticket, to certain defeat with a ticket more to his liking.”

“I judge, then, that you are inclined to accept.”

“I have accepted,” said Bruce.

“I hope it will turn out better than worst suspicion might make us fear.”

“Oh, it will!” he declared. “And mark me, it’s going to turn out a far bigger thing for your father than you seem to realize.”

“I hope that more fervently than do you!”

“I suppose you are going to keep up your fight for your father?”

“I expect to do what I can,” she answered calmly.

“What are you going to do?”



She smiled sweetly, apologetically.

“You forget only one day has passed since the trial. You can hardly expect a woman’s mind to lay new plans as quickly as a man’s.”

Bruce looked at her sharply, as though there might be irony in this; but her face was without guile. She glanced at her watch.

“Pardon me,” he said, noticing this action and standing up. “You have your hat on; you were going out?”

“Yes. And I’m afraid I must ask you to excuse me.” She gave him her hand. “I hope you don’t mind my saying it, but if I were you I’d keep all the eyes I’ve got on Mr. Peck.”

“Oh, I’ll not let him fool me!” he answered confidently.

As he walked out of the yard he was somewhat surprised to see the ancient equipage of Mr. Huggins waiting beside the curb. And he was rather more surprised when a few minutes later, as he neared his home, Mr. Huggins drove past him toward the station, with Katherine in the seat behind him. In response to her possessed little nod he amazedly lifted his hat. “Now what the devil is she up to?” he ejaculated, and stared after her till the old carriage turned in beside the station platform. As he reached his gate the eastbound Limited came roaring into the station. The truth dawned upon him. “By God,” he cried, “if she isn’t going back to New York!”



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DESERTER

Bruce was incensed at the cool manner in which Katherine had taken leave of him without so much as hinting at her purpose. In offering her aid and telling her his plans he had made certain advances. She had responded to these overtures by telling nothing. He felt he had been snubbed, and he resented such treatment all the more from a woman toward whom he had somewhat relaxed his dignity and his principles.

As he sat alone on his porch that night he breathed out along with his smoke an accompanying fire of profanity; but for all his wrath, he could not keep the questions from arising. Why had she gone? What was she going to do? Was she coming back? Had she given up her father's case, and had she been silent to him that afternoon about her going for the simple reason that she had been ashamed to acknowledge her retreat?

He waited impatiently for the return of his uncle, who had been absent that evening from supper. He thought that Hosie might answer these questions since he knew the old man to be on friendly terms with Katherine. But when Old Hosie did shuffle up the gravel walk, he was almost as much at a loss as his nephew. True, a note from Katherine had been thrust under his door telling him she wished to talk with him that afternoon; but he had spent the day looking at farms and had not found the note till his return from the country half an hour before.

Bruce flung away his cigar in exasperation, and the dry night air was vibrant with half-whispered but perfervid curses. She was irritating, erratic, irrational, irresponsible—preposterous, simply preposterous—damn that kind of women anyhow! They pretended to be a lot, but there wasn't a damned thing to them!

But he could not subdue his curiosity, though he fervently informed himself of the thousand and one kinds of an unblest fool he was for bothering his head about her. Nor could he banish her image. Her figure kept rising before him out of the hot, dusty blackness: as she had appeared before the jury yesterday, slender, spirited, clever—yes, she had spoken cleverly, he would admit that; as

she had appeared in her parlour that afternoon, a graceful, courteous, self-possessed home person; as he had seen her in Mr. Huggins's old surrey, with her exasperating, non-committal, cool little nod. But why, oh, why, in the name of the flaming rendezvous of lost and sizzling souls couldn't a woman with her qualities also have just one grain—only one single little grain!—of the commonest common-sense?

The next morning Bruce sent young Harper to inquire from Doctor West in the jail, and after that from Katherine's aunt, why Katherine had gone to New York, whether she had abandoned the case, and whether she had gone for good. But if these old people knew anything, they did not tell it to Billy Harper.

Westville buzzed over Katherine's disappearance. The piazzas, the soda-water fountains, the dry goods counters, the Ladies' Aid, were at no loss for an explanation of her departure. She had lost her case—she had discovered that she was a failure as a lawyer—she had learned what Westville thought of her—so what other course was open to her but to slip out of town as quietly as she could and return to the place from which she had come?

The Women's Club in particular rejoiced at her withdrawal. Thank God, a pernicious example to the rising young womanhood of the town was at last removed! Perhaps woman's righteous disapproval of Katherine had a deeper reason than was expressed—for what most self-searching person truly knows the exact motives that prompt his actions? Perhaps, far down within these righteously indignant bosoms, was unconsciously but potently this question: if that type of woman succeeds and wins man's approval, then what is going to become of us who have been built upon man's former taste? At any rate, feminine Westville declared it a blessing that "that terrible thing" was gone.

Westville continued to buzz, but it soon had matters more worth its buzzing. Pressing the heels of one another there came two amazing surprises. The city had taken for granted the nomination of Kennedy for mayor, but the convention's second ballot declared Blake the nominee. Blake had given heed to Mr. Brown's advice and had decided to take no slightest risk; but to the people he let it be known that he had accepted the nomination to help the city out of its water-works predicament, and Westville, recognizing his personal sacrifice, rang with applause of his public spirit. The respectable element looked forward with self-congratulation to him as the next chief of the city—for he would have an easy victory over any low politician who would consent to be Blind Charlie's candidate.

Then, without warning, came Bruce's nomination, with a splendid list of lesser candidates, and upon a most progressive platform. Westville gasped again. Then recovering from its amazement, it was inclined to take this nomination as a joke. But Bruce soon checked their jocularly. That he was fighting for an apparently defunct cause seemed to make no difference to him. Perhaps Old Hosie had spoken more wisely than he had intended when he had once sarcastically remarked that Bruce was "a cross between a bulldog and Don Quixote." Certainly the qualities of both strains were now in evidence. He sprang instantly into the campaign, and by the power and energy of his speeches and of his editorials in the *Express*, he fairly raised his issue from the dead. Bruce did not have a show, declared the people—not the ghost of a show—but if he maintained the ferocious earnestness with which he was starting out, this certainly was going to be the hottest campaign which Westville had seen since Blake had overthrown Blind Charlie Peck.

People recalled Katherine now and then to wonder what she was doing and how mortified she must feel over her fiasco, and to laugh good-naturedly or sarcastically at the pricked soap-bubble of her pretensions. But the newer and present excitement of the campaign was forcing her into the comparative insignificance of all receding phenomena—when, one late September Sunday morning, Westville, or that select portion of Westville which attended the Wabash Avenue Church, was astonished by the sight of Katherine West walking very composedly up the church's left aisle, looking in exceedingly good health and particularly stunning in a tailor-made gown of rich brown corduroy.

She quietly entered a vacant pew and slipped to a position which allowed her an unobstructed view of Doctor Sherman, and which allowed Doctor Sherman an equally unobstructed view of her. Worshippers who stared her way noticed that she seemed never to take her gaze from the figure in the pulpit; and it was remarked, after the service was over, that though Doctor Sherman's discourses had been falling off of late—poor man, his health was failing so!—to-day's was quite the poorest sermon he had ever preached.

The service ended, Katherine went quietly out of the church, smiling and bowing to such as met her eyes, and leaving an active tongue in every mouth behind her. So she had come back! Well, of all the nerve! Did you ever! Was she going to stay? What did she think she was going to do? And so on all the way home, to where awaited the heavy Sunday dinner on which Westville gorged itself python-like—if it be not sacrilege to compare communicants with such heathen beasts—till they could scarcely move; till, toward three o'clock, the church

paper sank down upon the distended stomachs of middle age, and there arose from all the easy chairs of Westville an unrehearsed and somewhat inarticulate, but very hearty, hymnal in praise of the bounty of the Creator.

At about the time Westville was starting up this chorus, Old Hosie Hollingsworth, in Katherine's parlour, deposited his rusty silk hat upon the square mahogany piano that had been Doctor West's wedding gift to his wife. The old lawyer lowered himself into a rocker, crossed his attenuated legs, and shook his head.

"Land sakes—I certainly was surprised to get your note!" he repeated. "When did you get back?"

"Late last night."

He stared admiringly at her fresh young figure.

"I must say, you don't look much like a lawyer who has lost her first case and has sneaked out of town to hide her mortification!"

"Is that what people have been saying?" she smiled. "Well, I don't feel like one!"

"Then you haven't given up?"

"Given up?" She lifted her eyebrows. "I've just begun. It's still a hard case, perhaps a long case; but at last I have a start. And I have some great plans. It was to ask your advice about these plans that I sent for you."

"My advice! Huh! I ain't ever been married—not even so much as once," he commented dryly, "but I've been told by unfortunates that have that it's the female way to do a thing and then ask whether she should do it or not."

"Now, don't be cynical!" laughed Katherine. "You know I tried to consult you before I went away. But it still is not too late for your advice. I'll put my plans before you, and if your masculine wisdom, whose superiority you have proved by keeping yourself unmarried, can show me wherein I'm wrong, I'll change them or drop them altogether."

"Fire away," he said, half grumbling. "What are your plans?"

"They're on a rather big scale. First, I shall put a detective on the case."

"That's all right, but don't you underestimate Harrison Blake," warned Old

Hosie. "Since you've come back Blake will be sure you're after him. He will be on his guard against you; he will expect you to use a detective; he will watch out for him, perhaps try to have his every move shadowed. I suppose you never thought of that?" he demanded triumphantly.

"Oh, yes I did," Katherine returned. "That's why I'm going to hire two detectives."

The old man raised his eyebrows.

"Two detectives?"

"Yes. One for Mr. Blake to watch. One to do the real work."

"Oh!" It was an ejaculation of dawning comprehension.

"The first detective will be a mere blind; a decoy to engage Mr. Blake's attention. He must be a little obvious, rather blundering—so that Mr. Blake can't miss him. He will know nothing about my real scheme at all. While Mr. Blake's attention and suspicion are fixed on the first man, the second man, who is to be a real detective with real brains in his head, will get in the real work."

"Splendid! Splendid!" cried Old Hosie, looking at her enthusiastically. "And yet that pup of a nephew of mine sniffs out, 'Her a lawyer? Nothing! She's only a woman!'"

Katherine flushed. "That's what I want Mr. Blake to think."

"To underestimate you—yes, I see. Have you got your first man?"

"No. I thought you might help me find him, for a local man, or a state man, will be best; it will be easiest for him to be found out to be a detective."

"I've got just the article for you," cried Old Hosie. "You know Elijah Stone?"

"No. But, of course, I've seen him."

"He's Westville's best and only. He thinks he's something terrible as a detective—what you might call a hyper-super-ultra detective. Detective sticks out big all over him—like a sort of universal mumps. He never looks except when he looks cautiously out of the corner of his eye; he walks on his tiptoes; he talks in whispers; he simply oozes mystery. Fat head?—why, Lige Stone wears his hat on a can of lard!"

“Come, I’m not engaging a low comedian for a comic opera.”

“Oh, he’s not so bad as I said. He’s really got a reputation. He’s just the kind of a detective that an inexperienced girl might pick up. Blake will soon find out you’ve hired him, he’ll believe it a bona fide arrangement on your part, and will have a lot of quiet laughs at your simplicity. God made Lige especially for you.”

“All right. I’ll see him to-morrow.”

“Have you thought about the other detective?”

“Yes. One reason I went to New York was to try to get a particular person—Mr. Manning, with whom I’ve worked on some cases for the Municipal League. He has six children, and is very much in love with his wife. The last thing he looks like is a detective. He might pass for a superintendent of a store, or a broker. But he’s very, very competent and clever, and is always master of himself.”

“And you got him?”

“Yes. But he can’t come for a couple of weeks. He is finishing up a case for the Municipal League.”

“How are you going to use him?”

“I don’t just know yet. Perhaps I can fit him into a second scheme of mine. You’ve heard of Mr. Seymour, of Seymour & Burnett?”

“The big bankers and brokers?”

“Yes. I knew Elinor Seymour at Vassar, and I visited her several times; and as Mr. Seymour is president of the Municipal League, altogether I saw him quite a great deal. I don’t mean to be conceited, but I really believe Mr. Seymour has a lot of confidence in me.”

“That’s a fine compliment to his sense,” Old Hosie put in.

“He’s about the most decent of the big capitalists,” she went on. “He was my second reason for going to New York. When I got there he had just left to spend a week-end in Paris, or something of the sort. I had to wait till he came back; that’s why I was gone so long. I went to him with a plain business proposition. I gave him a hint of the situation out here, told him there was a chance the water-works might be sold, and asked authority to buy the system in for him.”

“And how did he take it?” Old Hosie asked eagerly.

“You behold in me an accredited agent of Seymour & Burnett. I don’t know yet how I shall use that authority, but if I can’t do anything better, and if the worst comes to the very worst, I’ll buy in the plant, defeat Mr. Blake, and see that the city gets something like a fair price for its property.”

Old Hosie stared at her in open admiration. “Well, if you don’t beat the band!” he exclaimed.

“In the meantime, I shall busy myself with trying to get my father’s case appealed. But that is really only a blind; behind that I shall every minute be watching Mr. Blake. Now, what do you think of my plans? You know I called you in for your advice.”

“Advice! You need advice about as much as an angel needs a hat pin!”

“But I’m willing to change my plans if you have any suggestions.”

“I was a conceited old idiot when I was a little sore awhile ago because you had called me in for my opinion after you had settled everything. Go right ahead. It’s fine. Fine, I tell you!” He chuckled. “And to think that Harrison Blake thinks he’s bucking up against only a woman. Just a simple, inexperienced, dear, bustling, blundering woman! What a jar he’s got coming to him!”

“We mustn’t be too hopeful,” warned Katherine. “There’s a long, hard fight ahead. Perhaps my plan may not work out. And remember that, after all, I am only a woman.”

“But if you do win!” His old eyes glowed excitedly. “Your father cleared, the idol of the town upset, the water-works saved—think what a noise all that will make!”

A new thought slowly dawned into his face. “H’m—this old town hasn’t been, well, exactly hospitable to you; has laughed at you—sneered at you—given you the cold shoulder.”

“Has it? What do I care!”

“It would be sort of nice, now wouldn’t it,” he continued slowly, keenly, with his subdued excitement, “sort of heaping coals of fire on Westville’s roofs, if the town, after having cut you dead, should find that it had been saved by you. I



suppose you've never thought of that aspect of the case—eh? I suppose it has never occurred to you that in saving your father you'll also save the town?"

She flushed—and smiled a little.

"Oh, so we've already thought of that, have we. I see I can't suggest anything new to you. Let the old town jeer all it wants to now, we'll show 'em in the end! —is that it?"

She smiled again, but did not answer him.

"Now you'll excuse me, won't you, for I promised to call on father this afternoon?"

"Certainly." He rose. "How is your father—or haven't you seen him yet?"

"I called at the jail first thing this morning. He's very cheerful."

"That's good. Well, good-by."

Old Hosie was reaching for his hat, but just then a firm step sounded on the porch and there was a ring of the bell. Katherine crossed the parlour and swung open the screen. Standing without the door was Bruce, a challenging, defiant look upon his face.

"Why, Mr. Bruce," she exclaimed, smiling pleasantly. "Won't you please come in?"

"Thank you," he said shortly.

He bowed and entered, but stopped short at sight of his uncle.

"Hello! You here?"

"Just to give an off-hand opinion, I should say I am." Old Hosie smiled sweetly, put his hat back upon the piano and sank into his chair. "I just dropped in to tell Miss Katherine some of those very clever and cutting things you've said to me about the idea of a woman being a lawyer. I've been expostulating with her—trying to show her the error of her ways—trying to prove to her that she wasn't really clever and didn't have the first qualification for law."

"You please let me speak for myself!" retorted Bruce. "How long are you going to stay here?"

Old Hosie recrossed his long legs and settled back with the air of the rock of ages.

“Why, I was expecting Miss Katherine was going to invite me to stay to supper.”

“Well, I guess you won’t. You please remember this is your month to look after Jim. Now you trot along home and see that he don’t fry the steak to a shingle the way you let him do it last night.”

“Last night I was reading your editorial on the prospects of the corn crop and I got so worked up as to how it was coming out that I forgot all about that wooden-headed nigger. I tell you, Arn, that editorial was one of the most exciting, stirring, nerve-racking, hair-breadth——”

“Come, get along with you!” Bruce interrupted impatiently. “I want to talk some business with Miss West!”

Old Hosie rose.

“You see how he treats me,” he said plaintively to Katherine. “I haven’t had one kind word from that young pup since, when he was in high-school, he got so stuck on himself because he imagined every girl in town was in love with him.”

Bruce took Old Hosie’s silk hat from the piano and held it out to him.

“You certainly won’t get a kind word from me to-night if that steak is burnt!”

Katherine followed Hosie out upon the porch.

“He’s a great boy,” whispered the old man proudly—“if only I can lick his infernal conceit out of him!” He gripped her hand. “Good-by, and luck with you!”

She watched the bent, spare figure down the walk, then went in to Bruce. The editor was standing stiffly in the middle of the parlour.

“I trust that my call is not inopportune?”

“I’m glad to see you, but it does so happen that I promised father to call at five o’clock. And it’s now twenty minutes to.”

“Perhaps you will allow me to walk there with you?”

“But wouldn’t that be, ah—a little dangerous?”

“Dangerous?”

“Yes. Perhaps you forget that Westville disapproves of me. It might not be a very politic thing for a candidate for mayor to be seen upon the street with so unpopular a person. It might cost votes, you know.”

He flushed.

“If the people in this town don’t like what I do, they can vote for Harrison Blake!” He swung open the door. “If you want to get there on time, we must start at once.”

Two minutes later they were out in the street together. People whom they passed paused and stared back at them; groups of young men and women, courting collectively on front lawns, ceased their flirtatious chaffing and their bombardments with handfuls of loose grass, and nudged one another and sat with eyes fixed on the passing pair; and many a solid burgher, out on his piazza, waking from his devotional and digestive nap, blinked his eyes unbelievably at the sight of a candidate for mayor walking along the street with that discredited lady lawyer who had fled the town in chagrin after losing her first case.

At the start Katherine kept the conversation upon Bruce’s candidacy. He told her that matters were going even better than he had hoped; and informed her, with an air of triumph he did not try to conceal, that Blind Charlie Peck had been giving him an absolutely free rein, and that he was more than ever convinced that he had correctly judged that politician’s motives. Katherine meekly accepted this implicit rebuke of her presumption, and congratulated him upon the vindication of his judgment.

“But I came to you to talk about your affairs, not mine,” he said as they turned into Main Street. “I half thought, when you left, that you had gone for good. But your coming back proves you haven’t given up. May I ask what your plans are, and how they are developing?”

Her eyes dropped to the sidewalk, and she seemed to be embarrassed for words. It was not wholly his fault that he interpreted her as crest-fallen, for Katherine was not lacking in the wiles of Eve.

“Your plans have not been prospering very well, then?” he asked, after a pause.

“Oh, don’t think that; I still have hopes,” she answered hurriedly. “I am going to keep right on at the case—keep at it hard.”

“Were you successful in what you went to New York for?”

“I can’t tell yet. It’s too early. But I hope something will come of it.”

He tried to get a glimpse of her face, but she kept it fixed upon the ground—to hide her discomfiture, he thought.

“Now listen to me,” he said kindly, with the kindness of the superior mind. “Here’s what I came to tell you, and I hope you won’t take it amiss. I admire you for the way you took your father’s case when no other lawyer would touch it. You have done your best. But now, I judge, you are at a standstill. At this particular moment it is highly imperative that the case go forward with highest speed. You understand me?”

“I think I do,” she said meekly. “You mean that a man could do much better with the case than a woman?”

“Frankly, yes—still meaning no offense to you. You see how much hangs upon your father’s case besides his own honour. There is the election, the whole future of the city. You see we are really facing a crisis. We have got to have quick action. In this crisis, being in the dark as to what you were doing, and feeling a personal responsibility in the matter, I have presumed to hint at the outlines of the case to a lawyer friend of mine in Indianapolis; and I have engaged him, subject to your approval, to take charge of the matter.”

“Of course,” said Katherine, her eyes still upon the sidewalk, “this man lawyer would expect to be the chief counsel?”

“Being older, and more experienced——”

“And being a man,” Katherine softly supplied.

“He of course would expect to have full charge—naturally,” Bruce concluded.

“Naturally,” echoed Katherine.

“Of course you would agree to that?”

“I was just trying to think what a man would do,” she said meditatively, in the same soft tone. “But I suppose a man, after he had taken a case when no one else would take it, when it was hopeless—after he had spent months upon it, made himself unpopular by representing an unpopular cause, and finally worked out a line of defense that, when the evidence is gained, will not only clear his client

but astound the city—after he had triumph and reputation almost within his grasp, I suppose a man would be quite willing to step down and out and hand over the glory to a newcomer.”

He looked at her sharply. But her face, or what he saw of it, showed no dissembling.

“But you are not stating the matter fairly,” he said. “You should consider the fact that you are at the end of your rope!”

“Yes, I suppose I should consider that,” she said slowly.

They were passing the Court House now. He tried to study her face, but it continued bent upon the sidewalk, as if in thought. They reached the jail, and she mounted the first step.

“Well, what do you say?” he asked.

She slowly raised her eyes and looked down on him guilelessly.

“You’ve been most thoughtful and kind—but if it’s just the same to you, I’d like to keep on with the case a little longer alone.”

“What!” he ejaculated. He stared at her. “I don’t know what to make of you!” he cried in exasperation.

“Oh, yes you do,” she assured him sweetly, “for you’ve been trying to make very little of me.”

“Eh! See here, I half believe you don’t want my aid!” he blurted out.

Standing there above him, smiling down upon him, she could hardly resist telling him the truth—that sooner would she allow her right hand to be burnt off than to accept aid from a man who had flaunted and jeered at her lawyership—that it was her changeless determination not to tell him one single word about her plans—that it was her purpose to go silently ahead and let her success, should she succeed, be her reply to his unbelief. But she checked the impulse to fling the truth in his face—and instead continued to smile inscrutably down upon him.

“I hope that you will do all for my father, for the city, for your own election, that you can,” she said. “All I ask is that for the present I be allowed to handle the case by myself.”

The Court House tower tolled five. She held out to him a gloved hand.

“Good-by. I’m sorry I can’t invite you in,” she said lightly, and turned away.

He watched the slender figure go up the steps and into the jail, then turned and walked down the street—exasperated, puzzled, in profound thought.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE NIGHT WATCH

The next morning Elijah Stone appeared in Katherine's office as per request. He was a thickly, if not solidly, built gentleman, in imminent danger of a double chin, and with that submerged blackness of the complexion which is the result of a fresh-shaven heavy beard. He kept his jaw clinched to give an appearance of power, and his black eyebrows lowered to diffuse a sense of deeply pondered mystery. His wife considered him a rarely handsome specimen of his sex, and he permitted art to supplement the acknowledged gifts of nature so far as to perfume his glossy black hair, to wear a couple of large diamond rings, and to carry upon the watch chain that clanked heavily across the broad and arching acreage of his waistcoat a begemmed lodge emblem in size a trifle smaller than a paper weight.

He was an affable, if somewhat superior, being, and he listened to Katherine with a still further lowering of his impressive brows. She informed him, in a perplexed, helpless, womanly way, that she was inclined to believe that her father was "the victim of foul play"—the black brows sank yet another degree—and that she wished him privately to investigate the matter. He of course would know far, far better what to do than she, but she would suggest that he keep an eye upon Blake. At first Mr. Stone appeared somewhat sceptical and hesitant, but after peering darkly out for a long and ruminative period at the dusty foliage of the Court House elms, and after hearing the comfortable fee Katherine was willing to pay, he consented to accept the case. As he left he kindly assured her, with manly pity for her woman's helplessness, that if there was anything in her suspicion she "needn't waste no sleep now about gettin' the goods."

In the days that followed, Katherine saw her Monsieur Lecoque shadowing the movements of Blake with the lightness and general unobtrusiveness of a mahogany bedstead ambling about upon its castors. She soon guessed that Blake perceived that he was being watched, and she imagined how he must be smiling up his sleeve at her simplicity. Had the matters at stake not been so grave, had she been more certain of the issue, she might have put her own sleeve to a similar purpose.

In the meantime, as far as she could do so without exciting suspicion, she kept close watch upon Blake. It had occurred to her that there was a chance that he had an unknown accomplice whose discovery would make the gaining of the rest of the evidence a simple matter. There was a chance that he might let slip some revealing action. At any rate, till Mr. Manning came, her rôle was to watch with unsleeping eye for developments. Her office window commanded the entrance to Blake's suite of rooms, and no one went up by day whom she did not see. Her bedroom commanded Blake's house and grounds, and every night she sat at her darkened window till the small hours and watched for possible suspicious visitors, or possible suspicious movements on the part of Blake.

Also she did not forget Doctor Sherman. On the day of her departure for New York, she had called upon Doctor Sherman, and in the privacy of his study had charged him with playing a guilty part in Blake's conspiracy. She had been urged to this course by the slender chance that, when directly accused as she had dared not accuse him in the court-room, he might break down and confess. But Doctor Sherman had denied her charge and had clung to the story he had told upon the witness stand. Since Katherine had counted but little on this chance, she had gone away but little disappointed.

But she did not now let up upon the young minister. Regular attendance at church had of late years not been one of Katherine's virtues, but after her return it was remarked that she did not miss a single service at which Doctor Sherman spoke. She always tried to sit in the very centre of his vision, seeking to keep ever before his mind, while he preached God's word, the sin he had committed against God's law and man's. He visibly grew more pale, more thin, more distraught. The changes inspired his congregation with concern; they began to talk of overwork, of the danger of a breakdown; and seeing the dire possibility of losing so popular and pew-filling a pastor, they began to urge upon him the need of a long vacation.

Katherine could not but also give attention to the campaign, since it was daily growing more sensational, and was completely engrossing the town. Blake, in his speeches, stood for a continuance of the rule that had made Westville so prosperous, and dwelt especially upon an improvement in the service of the water-works, though as to the nature of the improvements he confined himself to language that was somewhat vague. Katherine heard him often. He was always eloquent, clever, forceful, with a manly grace of presence upon the platform—just what she, and just what the town, expected him to be.



But the surprise of the campaign, to Katherine and to Westville, was Arnold Bruce. Katherine had known Bruce to be a man of energy; now, in her mind, a forceful if not altogether elegant phrase of Carlyle attached itself to him—"A steam-engine in pants." He was never clever, never polished, he never charmed with the physical grace of his opponent, but he spoke with a power, an earnestness, and an energy that were tremendous. By the main strength of his ideas and his personality he seemed to bear down the prejudice against the principle for which he stood. He seemed to stand out in the mid-current of hostile opinion and by main strength hurl it back into its former course. The man's efforts were nothing less than herculean. He was a bigger man, a more powerful man, than Westville had ever dreamed; and his spirited battle against such apparently hopeless odds had a compelling fascination. Despite her defiantly critical attitude, Katherine was profoundly impressed; and she heard it whispered about that, notwithstanding Blake's great popularity, his party's certainty of success was becoming very much disturbed.

Both Katherine and Bruce were fond of horseback riding—Doctor West's single luxury, his saddle horse, was ever at Katherine's disposal—and at the end of one afternoon they met by chance out along the winding River Road, with its border of bowing willows and mottled sycamores, between whose browned foliage could be glimpsed long reaches of the broad and polished river, steel-gray in the shadows, a flaming copper where the low sun poured over it its parting fire. Little by little Bruce began to talk of his ideals. Presently he was speaking with a simplicity and openness that he had not yet used with Katherine. She perceived, more clearly than before, that whereas he was dogmatic in his ideas and brutally direct in their expression, he was a hot-souled idealist, overflowing with a passionate, even desperate, love of democracy, which he feared was in danger of dying out in the land—quietly and painlessly suffocated by a narrowing oligarchy which sought to blind the people to its rule by allowing them the exercise of democracy's dead forms.

His square, rude face, which she watched with a rising fascination, was no longer repellent. It had that compelling beauty, superior to mere tint and moulding of the flesh, which is born of great and glowing ideas. She saw that there was sweetness in his nature, that beneath his rough exterior was a violent, all-inclusive tenderness.

Now and then she put in a word of discriminating approval, now and then a word of well-reasoned dissent.

“I believe you are even more radical than I am!” he exclaimed, looking at her keenly.

“A woman, if she is really radical, has got to be more radical than a man. She sees all the evils and dangers that he sees, and in addition she suffers from injustices and restrictions from which man is wholly free.”

He was too absorbed in the afterglow of what he had been saying to take in all the meanings implicated in her last phrase.

“Do you know,” he said, as they neared the town, “you are the first woman I have met in Westville to whom one could talk about real things and who could talk back with real sense.”

A very sly and pat remark upon his inconsistency was at her tongue’s tip. But she realized that he had spoken impulsively, unguardedly, and she felt that it would be little short of sacrilege to be even gently sarcastic after the exalted revelation he had made of himself.

“Thank you,” she said quietly, and turned her face and smiled at the now steel-blue reaches of the river.

He dropped in several evenings to see her. When he was in an idealistic mood she was warmly responsive. When he was arbitrary and opinionated, she met him with chaffing and raillery, and at such times she was as elusive, as baffling, as exasperating as a sprite. On occasions when he rather insistently asked her plans and her progress in her father’s case, she evaded him and held him at bay. She felt that he admired her, but with a grudging, unwilling admiration that left his fundamental disapproval of her quite unshaken.

The more she saw of this dogmatic dreamer, this erratic man of action, the more she liked him, the more she found really admirable in him. But mixed with her admiration was an alert and pugnacious fear, so big was he, so powerful, so violently hostile to all the principles involved in her belief that the whole wide world of action should in justice lie as much open to woman to choose from as to man.

Without cessation Katherine kept eyes and mind on Blake. She searched out and pondered over the thousand possible details and ramifications his conspiracy might have. No human plan was a perfect plan. By patiently watching and studying every point there was a chance that she might discover one detail, one

slip, one oversight, that would give her the key to the case.

One of the thousand possibilities was that he had an active partner in his scheme. Since no such partner was visible in the open, it was likely that his associate was a man with whom Blake wished to have seemingly no relations. Were this conjecture true, then naturally he would meet this confederate in secret. She began to think upon all possible means and places of holding secret conferences. Such a meeting might be held there in Westville in the dead of night. It might be held in any large city in which individuals might lose themselves—Indianapolis, Louisville, Cincinnati, Chicago. It might be held at any appointed spot within the radius of an automobile journey.

Katherine analyzed every possible place of this last possibility. She began to watch, as she watched other possibilities, the comings and goings of the Blake automobile. It occurred to her that, if anything were in this conjecture, the meeting would be held at night; and then, a little later, it occurred to her to make a certain regular observation. The Blake garage and the West stable stood side by side and opened into the same alley. Every evening while Blake's car was being cleaned—if it had been in use during the day—Katherine went out to say good night to her saddle horse, and as she was on friendly terms with Blake's man she contrived, while exchanging a word with him, to read the mileage record of the speedometer. This observation she carried on with no higher hope of anything resulting from it than from any of a score of other measures. It was merely one detail of her all-embracing vigilance.

Every night she sat on watch—the evening's earlier half usually in the rustic summer-house in the backyard, the latter part at her bedroom window. One night after most of Westville was in bed, her long, patient vigil was rewarded by seeing the Blake automobile slip out with a single vague figure at the wheel and turn into the back streets of the town.

Hours passed, and still she sat wide-eyed at her window. It was not till raucous old muzzains of roosters raised from the watch-towers of their various coops their concatenated prophecy of the dawn, that she saw the machine return with its single passenger. The next morning, as soon as she saw Blake's man stirring about his work, she slipped out to her stable. Watching her chance, she got a glimpse of Blake's speedometer. Then she quickly slipped back to her room and sat there in excited thought.

The evening before the mileage had read 1437; this morning the reading was

1459. Blake, in his furtive midnight journey, had travelled twenty-two miles. If he had slipped forth to meet a secret ally, then evidently their place of meeting was half of twenty-two miles distant. Where was this rendezvous?

Almost instantly she thought of The Sycamores. That fitted the requirements exactly. It was eleven miles distant—Blake had a cabin there—the place was deserted at this season of the year. Nothing could be safer than for two men, coming in different vehicles, from different points perhaps, to meet at that retired spot at such an eyeless hour.

Perhaps there was no confederate. Perhaps Blake's night trip was not to a secret conference. Perhaps The Sycamores was not the rendezvous. But there was a chance that all three of these conjectures were correct. And if so, there was a chance,—aye, more, a probability—that there would be further midnight trysts.

Bruce had fallen into the habit of dropping in occasionally for a few minutes at the end of an evening's speaking to tell Katherine how matters seemed to be progressing. When he called that night toward ten he was surprised to be directed around to the summer-house. His surprise was all the more because the three months' drought had that afternoon been broken, and the rain was now driving down in gusts and there was a far rumbling of thunder that threatened a nearer and a fiercer cannonading.

Crouching beneath his umbrella, he made his way through the blackness to the summer-house, in which he saw sitting a dim, solitary figure.

"In mercy's name, what are you doing out here?" he demanded as he entered.

"Watching the rain. I love to be out in a storm." Every clap of thunder sent a shiver through her.

"You must go right into the house!" he commanded. "You'll get wet. I'll bet you're soaked already!"

"Oh, no. I have a raincoat on," she answered calmly. "I'm going to stay and watch the storm a little longer."

He expostulated, spoke movingly of colds and pneumonia. But she kept her seat and sweetly suggested that he avoid his vividly pictured dangers of a premature death by following his own advice. He jerked a rustic chair up beside her, growled a bit in faint imitation of the thunder, then ran off into the wonted subject of the campaign.

As the situation now stood he had a chance of winning, so successful had been his fight to turn back public opinion; and if only he had and could use the evidence Katherine was seeking, an overwhelming victory would be his beyond a doubt. He plainly was chafing at her delays, and as plainly made it evident that he was sceptical of her gaining proof. But she did not let herself be ruffled. She evaded all his questions, and when she spoke she spoke calmly and with good-nature.

Presently, sounding dimly through a lull in the rising tumult of the night, they heard the Court House clock strike eleven. Soon after, Katherine's ear, alert for a certain sound, caught a muffled throbbing that was not distinguishable to Bruce from the other noises of the storm.

She sprang up.

"You must go now—good night!" she said breathlessly, and darted out of the summer-house.

"Wait! Where are you going?" he cried, and tried to seize her, but she was gone.

He stumbled amazedly after her vague figure, which was running through the grape-arbour swiftly toward the stable. The blackness, his unfamiliarity with the way, made him half a minute behind Katherine in entering the barn.

"Miss West!" he called. "Miss West!"

There was no answer and no sound within the stable. Just then a flash of lightning showed him that the rear door was open. As he felt his way through this he heard Katherine say, "Whoa, Nelly! Whoa, Nelly!" and saw her swing into the saddle.

He sprang forward and caught the bridle rein.

"What are you going to do?" he cried.

"Going out for a little gallop," she answered with an excited laugh.

"What?" A light broke in upon him. "You've been sitting there all evening in your riding habit! Your horse has been standing saddled and bridled in the stall! Tell me—where are you going?"

"For a little ride, I said. Now let loose my rein."

“Why—why—” he gasped in amazement. Then he cried out fiercely: “You shall not go! It’s madness to go out in a storm like this!”

“Mr. Bruce, let go that rein this instant!” she said peremptorily.

“I shall do nothing of the sort! I shall not let you make an insane fool of yourself!”

She bent downward. Though in the darkness he could not see her face, the tensivity of her tone told him her eyes were flashing.

“Mr. Bruce,” she said with slow emphasis, “if you do not loosen that rein, this second, I give you my word I shall never see you, never speak to you again.”

“All right, but I shall not let you make a fool of yourself,” he cried with fierce dominance. “You’ve got to yield to sense, even though I use force on you.”

She did not answer. Swiftly she reversed her riding crop and with all her strength brought its heavy end down upon his wrist.

“Nelly!” she ordered sharply, and in the same instant struck the horse. The animal lunged free from Bruce’s benumbed grasp, and sprang forward into a gallop.

“Good night!” she called back to him.

He shouted a reply; his voice came to her faintly, wrathful and defiant, but his words were whirled away upon the storm.



## CHAPTER XV

### POLITICS MAKE STRANGE BED-FELLOWS

She quieted Nelly into a canter, made her way through the soundly sleeping back streets, and at length emerged from the city and descended into the River Road, which was slightly shorter than Grayson's Pike which led over the high back country to The Sycamores. She knew what Nelly could do, and she settled the mare down into the fastest pace she could hold for the eleven miles before her.

Katherine was aquiver with suspense, one moment with hopeful expectation, the next with fear that her deductions were all awry. Perhaps Blake had not gone out to meet a confederate. And if he had, perhaps The Sycamores was not the rendezvous. But if her deductions were correct, who was this secret ally? Would she be able to approach them near enough to discover his identity? And would she be able to learn the exact outlines of the plot that was afoot? If so, what would it all prove to be?

Such questions and doubts galloped madly through her mind. The storm grew momentarily in fierceness. The water and fury of three months of withheld storms were spending themselves upon the earth in one violent outburst. The wind cracked her skirt like a whip-lash, and whined and snarled and roared among the trees. The rain drove at her in maddened sheets, found every opening in her raincoat, and soon she was as wet as though dropped in the river yonder. The night was as black as the interior of a camera, save when—as by the opening of a snapshot shutter—an instantaneous view of the valley was fixed on Katherine's startled brain by the lightning ripping in fiery fissures down the sky. Then she saw the willows bending and whipping in the wind, saw the gnarled old sycamores wrestling with knotted muscles, saw the broad river writhing and tossing its swollen and yellow waters. Then, blackness again—and, like the closing click of this world-wide camera, there followed a world-shaking crash of thunder.

Katherine would have been terrified but for the stimulant within. She crouched low upon her horse, held a close rein, petted Nelly, talked to her and kept her going at her best—onward—onward—onward—through the covered wooden bridge that spanned Buck Creek—through the little old village of Sleepy Eye—

up Red Man's Ridge—and at last, battered, buffeted, half-drowned, she and Nelly drew up at the familiar stone gateway of The Sycamores.

She dismounted, led Nelly in and tied her among the beeches away from the drive. Then cautiously, palpitably, she groped her way in the direction of the Blake cabin, avoiding the open lest the lightning should betray her presence. At length she came to the edge of a cleared space in which she knew the cabin stood. But she could see nothing. The cabin was just a cube of blackness imbedded in this great blackness which was the night. She peered intently for a lighted window; she listened for the lesser thunder of a waiting automobile. But she could see nothing but the dark, hear nothing but the dash of the rain, the rumble of the thunder, the lashing and shrieking of the wind.

Her heart sank. No one was here. Her guesses all were wrong.

But she crept toward the house, following the drive. Suddenly, she almost collided with a big, low object. She reached forth a hand. It fell upon the tire of an automobile. She peered forward and seemed to see another low shape. She went toward it and felt. It was a second car.

She dashed back among the trees, and thus sheltered from the revealing glare of the lightning, almost choking with excitement, she began to circle the house for signs which would locate in what room were the men within. She paused before each side and peered closely at it, but each side in turn presented only blackness, till she came to the lee of the house.

This, too, was dark for the first moment. Then in a lower window, which she knew to be the window of Blake's den, two dull red points of light appeared—glowed—subsided—glowed again—then vanished. A minute later one reappeared, then the other; and after the slow rise and fall and rise of the glow, once more went out. She stood rigid, wondering at the phenomenon. Then suddenly she realized that within were two lighted cigars.

Bending low, she scurried across the open space and crouched beside the window. Luckily it had been opened to let some fresh air into the long-closed room. And luckily this was the lee of the house and the beat of the storm sounded less loudly here, so that their voices floated dimly out to her. This lee was also a minor blessing, for Katherine's poor, wet, shivering body now had its first protection from the storm.

Tense, hardly breathing, with all five senses converged into hearing, she stood



flattened against the wall and strained to catch their every word. One voice was plainly Blake's. The other had a faintly familiar quality, though she could not place it. This second man had evidently come late, for their conversation was of a preliminary, beating-around-the-bush character—about the fierceness of the storm, and the additional security it lent their meeting.

Katherine searched her memory for the owner of this second voice. She had thought at first of Doctor Sherman, but this voice had not a tone in common with the young clergyman's clear, well-modulated baritone. This was a peculiar, bland, good-natured drawl. She had not heard it often, but she had unmistakably heard it. As she ransacked her memory it grew increasingly familiar, yet still eluded her. Then, all of a sudden, she knew it, and she stood amazed.

The second voice was the voice of Blind Charlie Peck.

Katherine was well acquainted with the secret bi-partisan arrangement common in so many American cities, by which the righteous voter is deluded into believing that there are two parties contending for the privilege of giving him their best service, whereas in reality the two are one, secretly allied because as a political trust they can most economically and profitably despoil the people. Her first thought was that these ancient enemies, who for ten years had belaboured one another with such a realistic show of bitterness upon the political stage of Westville, had all along been friends and partners behind the scenes. But of this idea she was presently disillusioned.

“Well, Mr. Blake, let's get down to business,” Blind Charlie's voice floated out to her. “You've had a day to think over my proposition. Now what have you got to say to it?”

There was a brief silence. When Blake did speak, Katherine could discern in his repressed tone a keen aversion for his companion.

“My position is the same as last night. What you say is all guesswork. There is nothing in it.”

Blind Charlie's voice was soft—purringly soft.

“Then why didn't you ask me to go to hell, and stay at home instead of coming out here?”

There was again a short silence.

“Come now,” the soft voice persuaded, “let’s don’t go over what we did last night. I know I’m right.”

“I tell you you’re only guessing,” Blake doggedly returned. “You haven’t a scrap of proof.”

“I don’t need proof, when I’m certain about a thing,” gently returned the voice of Blind Charlie. “I’ve been in politics for forty-eight years—ever since I was nineteen, when I cast my first vote. I’ve got sharpened up considerable in that time, and while I haven’t been in on much in the last ten years, I can still smell a fat deal clean across the state. For the last three months I’ve been smelling, and smelling it keener every day, that you’ve got a rich game going.”

“And so”—rather sarcastically—“you set Bruce on, to try to run the game down!”

“Well, I would use a little different figure of speech,” returned Blind Charlie smoothly. “When I’ve got a coon up a hollow tree I build a fire in the hollow to bring him down. Bruce is my fire.”

“And you think your coon is coming down?”

“I rather think he is. Don’t you?”

“Well, I tell you he’s not! For there’s no coon up the tree!”

“I see I’ve got to state the thing to you again,” said Blind Charlie patiently, and so softly that Katherine had to strain her utmost to get his words. “When I grew sure you had a big deal on about the water-works, I saw that the only way to force you to let me in was to put you in a fix where you would either have to split up or be in danger of losing the whole thing. So I nominated Bruce. He’s one of the easiest I ever took in; but, I tell you, he is certainly one hell of a fighter! That’s what I nominated him for. You know as well as I do the way he’s swinging the voters round. It beats anything I’ve ever seen. If he keeps this up till election, and if I pull off a couple of good tricks I’ve got all ready, he’ll be a winner, sure! And now”—Blind Charlie’s purring voice thrust out its claws—“either I put Bruce in and smash your deal till it’s not worth a damn, or else you come across!”

“There’s nothing in it, I tell you!” declared Blake.

“There’s no use keeping up that pretence,” continued Blind Charlie. “You’ve had

a day to think over my proposition. You know perfectly well what your choice is between: a sure thing if you divide with me, the risk of nothing if you refuse. So let's waste no more time. Come, which is it?"

There was a long silence.

"I understand," commented Blind Charlie, with a soft sympathy that Katherine knew was meant to bite like acid. "It's hard for a respectable man like you to mix up with Charlie Peck. But political business makes strange bed-fellows, and unless you're willing to sleep with almost anybody you'd better keep out of this kind of business altogether. But after all," he added, "I guess it's better to share a good bed than to have no bed at all."

"What do you want?" Blake asked huskily.

"Only my share of the bed," blandly returned Blind Charlie.

"What's that, in plain words?"

"Not much. Only half of what you're going to make."

Blake exploded.

"Damn you, Peck, you're nothing but a damned blackmailer!"

"All right, I agree to that," said Blind Charlie. Then he added in his soft voice: "But if I'm a blackmailer in this affair, then please, Mr. Blake, what do you call yourself?"

"You—you——" To the crouching figure outside the window Blake seemed to be half-choking. But suddenly he exploded again. "I'll not do it, Peck! I'll not do it—never while God's earth stands!"

"I guess you will, Blake!" Blind Charlie's voice was no longer soft; it had a slow, grating, crunching sound. "Damn your soul, you've been acting toward me with your holier-than-thou reformer's attitude for ten years. D'you think I'm a man to swallow that quietly? D'you think I haven't had it in for you all those ten years? Why, there hasn't been a minute that I haven't been looking for my chance. And at last I've got it! I've not only got a line on this water-works business, but I've found out all about your pretty little deal with Adamson during the last months you were Lieutenant-Governor!"

"Adamson!" ejaculated Blake.

“Yes, Adamson!” went on the harsh voice of Blind Charlie. “That hits you where you live, eh! You didn’t know I had it, did you? Well, I didn’t till to-day—but I’ve got it now all right! There, my cards are all on the table. Look ’em over. I don’t want Bruce elected any more than you do; but either you do what I say, or by God I turn over to Bruce all I know about the Adamson affair and all I know about this water-works deal! Now I give you just one minute to decide!”

Katherine breathlessly awaited the answer. A space passed. She heard Blind Charlie stand up.

“Time’s up! Good night—and to hell with you!”

“Wait! Wait!” Blake cried.

“Then you accept?”

Blake’s voice shook. “Before I answer, what do you want?”

“I’ve already told you. Half of what you get.”

“But I’m to get very little.”

“Very little!” Blind Charlie’s voice was ironical; it had dropped its tone of crushing menace. “Very little! Now I figure that you’ll get the water-works for a third, or less, of their value. That’ll give you something like half a million at the start-off, not to speak of the regular profits later on. Now as for me,” he concluded drily, “I wouldn’t call that such a very little sum that I’d kick it out of my way if I saw it lying in the road.”

“But no such sum is lying there.”

“No? Then what do you get?”

Blake did not answer.

“Come, speak out!”

Blake’s voice came with an effort.

“I’m not doing this for myself.”

“Then who for?”

Blake hesitated, then again spoke with an effort.

“The National Electric & Water Company.”

Blind Charlie swore in his surprise.

“But I reckon you’re not doing it for them for charity?”

“No.”

“Well, what for?”

Blake again remained silent.

“Come, what for?” impatiently demanded Charlie.

“For a seat in the Senate.”

“That’s no good to me. What else?”

“Fifty thousand dollars.”

“The devil! Is that all?” ejaculated Blind Charlie.

“Everything.”

Blind Charlie swore to himself for a moment. Then he fell into a deep silence.

“Well, what’s the matter?” Blake presently inquired.

“I was just wondering,” replied Blind Charlie, slowly, “if it wouldn’t be better to call this business off between you and me.”

“Call it off?”

“Yes. I never imagined you were playing for such a little pile as fifty thousand. Since there’s only fifty thousand in it”—his voice suddenly rang out with vindictive triumph—“I was wondering if it wouldn’t pay me better to use what I know to help elect Bruce.”

“Elect Bruce?” cried Blake in consternation.

“Exactly. Show you up, and elect Bruce,” said Blind Charlie coolly. “To elect my mayor—there’s more than fifty thousand for me in that.”

There was a dismayed silence on Blake’s part. But after a moment he recovered himself, and this time it was his voice that had the note of ascendancy.

“You are forgetting one point, Mr. Peck,” said he.

“Yes?”

“Bruce’s election will not mean a cent to you. You will get no offices. Moreover, the control of your party machinery will be sure to pass from you to him.”

“You’re right,” said the old man promptly. “See how quick I am to acknowledge the corn. However, after all,” he added philosophically, “what you’re getting is really enough for two. You take the senatorship, and I’ll take the fifty thousand. What do you say to that?”

“What about Bruce—if I accept?”

“Bruce? Bruce is just a fire to smoke the coon out. When the coon comes down, I put out the fire.”

“You mean?”

“I mean that I’ll see that Bruce don’t get elected.”

“You’ll make sure about that?”

“Oh, you just leave Bruce to me!” said Blind Charlie with grim confidence. “And now, do you accept?”

Blake was silent. He still shrank from this undesirable alliance. Outside, Katherine again breathlessly hung upon his answer.

“What do you say?” demanded the old man sharply. “Do you accept? Or do I smash you?”

“I accept—of course.”

“And we’ll see this thing through together?”

“Yes.”

“Then here you are. Let’s shake on it.”

They talked on, dwelling on details of their partnership, Katherine missing never a word.

At length, their agreement completed, they left the room, and Katherine slipped from the window across into the trees and made such haste as she could through

the night and the storm to where she had left her horse. She heard one car go slowly out the entrance of the grove, its lamps dark that its visit might not be betrayed, and she heard it turn cautiously into the back-country road. After a little while she saw a glare shoot out before the car—its lamps had been lighted—and she saw it skim rapidly away. Soon the second car crept out, took the high back-country pike, and repeated the same tactics.

Then Katherine untied Nelly, mounted, and started slowly homeward along the River Road.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THROUGH THE STORM

Bowed low to shield herself against the ever fiercer buffets of the storm, Katherine gave Nelly free rein to pick her own way at her own pace through the blackness. The rain volleyed into her pitilessly, the wind sought furiously to wrest her from the saddle, the lightning cracked open the heavens into ever more fiery chasms, and the thunder rattled and rolled and reverberated as though a thousand battles were waging in the valley. It was as if the earth's dissolution were at hand—as if the long-gathered wrath of the Judgment Day were rending the earth asunder and hurling the fragments afar into the black abyss of eternity.

But Katherine, though gasping and shivering, gave minor heed to this elemental rage. Whatever terror she might have felt another time at such a storm, her brain had now small room for it. She was exultantly filled with the magnitude of her discovery. The water-works deal! The National Electric & Water Company! Bruce not a bona fide candidate at all, but only a pistol at Blake's head to make him stand and deliver! Blake and Blind Charlie—those two whole-hearted haters, who belaboured each other so valiantly before the public—in a secret pact to rob that same dear public!

At the highest moments of her exultation it seemed that victory was already hers; that all that remained was to proclaim to Westville on the morrow what she knew. But beneath all her exultation was a dim realization that the victory itself was yet to be won. What she had gained was only a fuller knowledge of who her enemies were, and what were their purposes.

Her mind raced about her discovery, seeking how to use it as the basis of her own campaign. But the moment of an extensive and astounding discovery is not the moment for the evolving of well-calculated plans; so the energies of her mind were spent on extravagant dreams or the leaping play of her jubilation.

One decision, however, she did reach. That was concerning Bruce. Her first impulse was to go to him and tell him all, in triumphant refutation of his ideas concerning woman in general, and her futility in particular. But as she realized that she was not at the end of her fight, but only at a better-informed beginning,



she saw that the day of her triumph over him, if ever it was to come, had at least not yet arrived. As for admitting him into her full confidence, her woman's pride was still too strong for that. It held her to her determination to tell him nothing. She was going to see this thing through without him.

Moreover, she had another reason for silence. She feared, if she told him all, his impetuous nature might prompt him to make a premature disclosure of the information, and that would be disastrous to her future plans. But since he was vitally concerned in Blake's and Peck's agreement, it was at least his due that he be warned; and so she decided to tell him, without giving her source of information, that Blind Charlie proposed to sell him out.

Nelly's pace had slowed into a walk, and even then the gale at times almost swept the poor horse staggering from the road. The rain drove down in ever denser sheets. The occasional flashes of lightning served only to emphasize the blackness. So dense was it, it seemed a solid. The world could not seem blacker to a toad in the heart of a stone. The instants of crackling fire showed Katherine the river, below her in the valley, leaping, surging, almost out of its banks—the trees, writhing and wrestling, here and there one jaggedly discrowned. And once, as she was crossing a little wooden bridge that spanned a creek, she saw that it was almost afloat—and for an instant of terror she wished she had followed the higher back-country road taken by the two automobiles.

She had reached the foot of Red Man's Ridge, and was winding along the river's verge, when she thought she heard her name sound faintly through the storm. She stopped Nelly and sat in sudden stiffness, straining her ears. Again the voice sounded, this time nearer, and there was no mistaking her name.

“Miss West! Katherine!”

She sat rigid, almost choking. The next minute a shapeless figure almost collided with Nelly. It eagerly caught the bridle-rein and called out huskily:

“Is that you, Miss West?”

She let out a startled cry.

“Who are you? What do you want?”

“It's you! Thank God, I've found you!” cried the voice.

“Arnold Bruce!” she ejaculated.

He loosened the rein and moved to her side and put his hand upon the back of her saddle.

“Thank God I’ve found you!” he repeated, with a strange quaver to his voice.

“Arnold Bruce! What are you doing here?”

“Didn’t you hear me shout after you, when you started, that I was coming, too?”

“I heard your voice, but not what you said.”

“Do you think I would let you go out alone on a night like this?” he demanded in his unstrung tone. “It’s no night for a man to be out, much less a woman!”

“You mean—you followed me?”

“What else did you think I’d do?”

“And on foot?”

“If I had stopped to get a horse I’d have lost your direction. So I ran after you.”

They were moving on now, his hand upon the back of her saddle to link them together in the darkness. He had to lean close to her that their voices might be heard above the storm.

“And you have run after me all this way?”

“Ran and walked. But I couldn’t make much headway in the storm—Calling out to you every few steps. I didn’t know what might have happened to you. All kinds of pictures were in my mind. You might have been thrown and be lying hurt. In the darkness the horse might have wandered off the road and slipped with you into the river. It was—it was——” She felt the strong forearm that lay against her back quiver violently. “Oh, why did you do it!” he burst out.

A strange, warm tingling crept through her.

“I—I——” Something seemed to choke her.

“Oh, why did you do it!” he repeated.

Contrary to her determination of but a little while ago, an impulse surged up in her to tell him all she had just learned, to tell him all her plans. She hung for a moment in indecision. Then her old attitude, her old determination, resumed its

sway.

“I had a suspicion that I might learn something about father’s case,” she said.

“It was foolishness!” he cried in fierce reproof, yet with the same unnerved quaver in his voice. “You should have known you could find nothing on such a night as this!”

She felt half an impulse to retort sharply with the truth. But the thought of his stumbling all that way in the blackness subdued her rising impulse to triumph over him. So she made no reply at all.

“You should never have come! If, when you started, you had stopped long enough for me to speak to you, I could have told you you would not have found out anything. You did not, now did you?”

She still kept silent.

“I knew you did not!” he cried in exasperated triumph. “Admit the truth—you know you did not!”

“I did not learn everything I had hoped.”

“Don’t be afraid to acknowledge the truth!”

“You remember what I said when you were first offered the nomination by Mr. Peck—to beware of him?”

“Yes. You were wrong. But let’s not talk about that now!”

“I am certain now that I was right. I have the best of reasons for believing that Mr. Peck intends to sell you out.”

“What reasons?”

She hesitated a moment.

“I cannot give them to you—now. But I tell you I am certain he is planning treachery.”

“Your talk is wild. As wild as your ride out here to-night.”

“But I tell you——”

“Let’s talk no more about it now,” he interrupted, brushing the matter aside. “It

—it doesn't interest me now.”

There was a blinding glare of lightning, then an awful clap of thunder that rattled in wild echoes down the valley.

“Oh, why did you come?” he cried, pressing closer. “Why did you come? It's enough to kill a woman!”

“Hardly,” said she.

“But you're wet through,” he protested.

“And so are you.”

“Have my coat.” And he started to slip it off.

“No. One more wet garment won't make me any drier.”

“Then put it over your head. To keep off this awful beat of the storm. I'll lead your horse.”

“No, thank you; I'm all right,” she said firmly, putting out a hand and checking his motion to uncoat himself. “You've been walking. I've been riding. You need it more than I do.” And then she added: “Did I hurt you much?”

“Hurt me?”

“When I struck you with my crop.”

“That? I'd forgotten that.”

“I'm very sorry—if I hurt you.”

“It's nothing. I wish you'd take my coat. Bend lower down.” And moving forward, he so placed himself that his broad, strong body was a partial shield to her against the gale.

This new concern for her, the like of which he had never before evinced the faintest symptoms, begot in her a strange, tingling, but blurred emotion. They moved on side by side, now without speech, gasping for the very breath that the gale sought to tear away from their lips. The storm was momentarily gaining power and fury. Afterward the ancient weather-men of Calloway County were to say that in their time they had never seen its like. The lightning split the sky into even more fearsome fiery chasms, and in the moments of wild illumination they

could see the road gullied by scores of impromptu rivulets, could glimpse the broad river billowing and raging, the cattle huddling terrified in the pastures, the woods swaying and writhing in deathlike grapple. The wind hurled by them in a thousand moods and tones, all angry; a fine, high shrieking on its topmost note—a hoarse snarl—a lull, as though the straining monster were pausing to catch its breath—then a roaring, sweeping onrush as if bent on irresistible destruction. And on top of this glare, this rage, was the thousandfold crackle, rattle, rumble of the thunder.

At such a time wild beasts, with hostility born in their blood, draw close together. It was a storm to resolve, as it were, all complex shades of human feeling into their elementary colours—when fear and hate and love stand starkly forth, unqualified, unblended. Without being aware that she was observing, Katherine sensed that Bruce’s agitation was mounting with the storm. And as she felt his quivering presence beside her in the furious darkness, her own emotion surged up with a wild and startling strength.

A tree top snapped off just before them with its toy thunder.

“Will this never stop!” gasped Bruce, huskily. “God, I wish I had you safe home!”

The tremulous tensivity in his voice set her heart to leaping with an unrestraint yet wilder. But she did not answer.

Suddenly Nelly stumbled in a gully and Katherine pitched forward from the saddle. She would have fallen, had not a pair of strong arms closed about her in mid-air.

“Katherine—Katherine!” Bruce cried, distracted. Nelly righted herself and Katherine regained her seat, but Bruce still kept his arm about her. “Tell me—are you hurt?” he demanded.

She felt the arms around her trembling with intensity.

“No,” she said with a strange choking.

“Oh, Katherine—Katherine!” he burst out. “If you only knew how I love you!”

What she felt could not crystallize itself into words.

“Do you love me?” he asked huskily.

Just then there was a flash of lightning. It showed her his upturned face, appealing, tender, passion-wrought. A wild, exultant thrill swept through her. Without thinking, without speaking, her tingling arm reached out, of its own volition as it were, and closed about his neck, and she bent down and kissed him.

“Katherine!” he breathed hoarsely. “Katherine!” And he crushed her convulsively to him.

She lay thrilled in his arms... After a minute they moved on, his arm about her waist, her arm about his neck. Rain, wind, thunder were forgotten. Forgotten were their theories of life. For that hour the man and woman in them were supremely happy.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE CUP OF BLISS

The next morning Katherine lay abed in that delicious lassitude which is the compound of complete exhaustion and of a happiness that tingles through every furthestmost nerve. And as she lay there she thought dazedly of the miracle that had come to pass. She had not even guessed that she was in love with Arnold Bruce. In fact, she had been resisting her growing admiration for him, and the day before she could hardly have told whether her liking was greater than her hostility. Then, suddenly, out there in the storm, all complex counter-feelings had been swept aside, and she had been revealed to herself.

She was tremulously, tumultuously happy. She had had likings for men before, but she had never guessed that love was such a mighty, exultant thing as this. But, as she lay there, the thoughts that had never come to her in the storm out there on the River Road, slipped into her mind. Into her exultant, fearful, dizzy happiness there crept a fear of the future. She clung with all her soul to the ideas of the life she wished to live; she knew that he, in all sincerity, was militantly opposed to those ideas. Difference in religious belief had brought bitterness, tragedy even, into the lives of many a pair of lovers. The difference in their case was no less firmly held to on either side, and she realized that the day must come when their ideas must clash, when they two must fight it out. Quivering with love though she was, she could but look forward to that inevitable day with fear.

But there were too many other new matters tossing in her brain for her to dwell long upon this dread. At times she could but smile whimsically at the perversity of love. The little god was doubtless laughing in impish glee at what he had brought about. She had always thought in a vague way that she would sometime marry, but she had always regarded it as a matter of course that the man she would fall in love with would be one in thorough sympathy with her ideas and who would help her realize her dream. And here she had fallen in love with that dreamed-of man's exact antithesis!

And yet, as she thought of Arnold Bruce, she could not imagine herself loving any other man in all the world.

Love gave her a new cause for jubilation over her last night's discovery. Victory, should she win it, and win it before election, had now an added value—it would help the man she loved. But as she thought over her discovery, she realized that while she might create a scandal with it, it was not sufficient evidence nor the particular evidence that she desired. Blake and Peck would both deny the meeting, and against Blake's denial her word would count for nothing, either in court or before the people of Westville. And she could not be present at another conference with two or three witnesses, for the pair had last night settled all matters and had agreed that it would be unnecessary to meet again. Her discovery, she perceived more clearly than on the night before, was not so much evidence as the basis for a more enlightened and a more hopeful investigation.

Another matter, one that had concerned her little while Bruce had held but a dubious place in her esteem, now flashed into her mind and assumed a large importance. The other party, as she knew, was using Bruce's friendship for her as a campaign argument against him; not on the platform of course—it never gained that dignity—but in the street, and wherever the followers of the hostile camps engaged in political skirmish. Its sharpest use was by good housewives, with whom suffrage could be exercised solely by influencing their husbands' ballots. "What, vote for Mr. Bruce! Don't you know he's a friend of that woman lawyer? A man who can see anything in that Katherine West is no fit man for mayor!"

All this talk, Katherine now realized, was in some degree injuring Bruce's candidacy. With a sudden pain at the heart she now demanded of herself, would it be fair to the man she loved to continue this open intimacy? Should not she, for his best interests, urge him, require him, to see her no more?

She was in the midst of this new problem, when her Aunt Rachel brought her in a telegram. She read it through, and on the instant the problem fled her mind. She lay and thought excitedly—hour after hour—and her old plans altered where they had been fixed, and took on definite form where previously they had been unsettled.

The early afternoon found her in the office of old Hosie Hollingsworth.

"What do you think of that?" she demanded, handing him the telegram.

Old Hosie read it with a puzzled look. Then slowly he repeated it aloud:

"'Bouncing boy arrived Tuesday morning. All doing well. John.'" He raised his



eyes to Katherine. "I'm always glad to see people lend the census a helping hand," he drawled. "But who in Old Harry is John?"

"Mr. Henry Manning. The New York detective I told you about."

"Eh? Then what——"

"It's a cipher telegram," Katherine explained with an excited smile. "It means that he will arrive in Westville this afternoon, and will stay as long as I need him."

"But what should he send that sort of a fool thing for?"

"Didn't I tell you that he and I are to have no apparent relations whatever? An ordinary telegram, coming through that gossiping Mr. Gordon at the telegraph office, would have given us away. Now I've come to you to talk over with you some new plans for Mr. Manning. But first I want to tell you something else."

She briefly outlined what she had learned the night before; and then, without waiting to hear out his ejaculations, rapidly continued: "I told Mr. Manning to come straight to you, on his arrival, to learn how matters stood. All my communications to him, and his to me, are to be through you. Tell him everything, including about last night."

"And what is he to do?"

"I was just coming to that." Her brown eyes were gleaming with excitement. "Here's my plan. It seems to me that if Blind Charlie Peck could force his way into Mr. Blake's scheme and become a partner in it, then Mr. Manning can, too."

Old Hosie blinked.

"Eh? Eh? How?"

"You are to tell Mr. Manning that he is Mr. Hartsell, or whoever he pleases, a real estate dealer from the East, and that his ostensible business in Westville is to invest in farm lands. Buying in run-down or undrained farms at a low price and putting them in good condition, that's a profitable business these days. Besides, since you are an agent for farm lands, that will explain his relations with you. Understand?"

"Yes. What next?"

“Secretly, he is to go around studying the water-works. Only not so secretly that he won’t be noticed.”

“But what’s that for?”

“Buying farm land is only a blind to hide his real business,” she went on rapidly. “His real business here is to look into the condition of the water-works with a view to buying them in. He is a private agent of Seymour & Burnett; you remember I am empowered to buy the system for Mr. Seymour. When Mr. Blake and Mr. Peck discover that a man is secretly examining the water-works—and they’ll discover it all right; when they discover that this man is the agent of Mr. Seymour, with all the Seymour millions behind him—and we’ll see that they discover that, too—don’t you see that when they make these discoveries this may set them to thinking, and something may happen?”

“I don’t just see it yet,” said Old Hosie slowly, “but it sounds like there might be something mighty big there.”

“When Mr. Blake learns there is another secret buyer in the field, a rival buyer ready and able to run the price up to three times what he expects to pay—why, he’ll see danger of his whole plan going to ruin. Won’t his natural impulse be, rather than run such a risk, to try to take the new man in?—just as he took in Blind Charlie Peck?”

“I see! I see!” exclaimed Old Hosie. “By George, it’s mighty clever! Then what next?”

“I can’t see that far. But with Mr. Manning on the inside, our case is won.”

Old Hosie leaned forward.

“It’s great! Great! If you’re not above shaking hands with a mere man——”

“Now don’t make fun of me,” she cried, gripping the bony old palm.

“And while you’re quietly turning this little trick,” he chuckled, “the Honourable Harrison Blake will be carefully watching every move of Elijah Stone, the best hippopotamus in the sleuth business, and be doing right smart of private snickering at the simplicity of womankind.”

She flushed, but added soberly:

“Of course it’s only a plan, and it may not work at all.”

They talked the scheme over in detail. At length, shortly before the hour at which the afternoon express from the East was due to arrive, Katherine retired to her own office. Half an hour later, looking down from her window, she saw the old surrey of Mr. Huggins' draw up beside the curb, in it a quietly dressed, middle-aged passenger who had the appearance of a solid man of affairs. He crossed the sidewalk and a little later Katherine heard him enter Old Hosie's office on the floor below. After a time she saw the stranger go out and drive around the Square to the Tippecanoe House, Peck's hotel, where Katherine had directed that Mr. Manning be sent to facilitate his being detected by the enemy.

Her plan laid, Katherine saw there was little she could do but await developments—and in the meantime to watch Blake, which Mr. Mannings' rôle would not permit his doing, and to watch and study Doctor Sherman. Despite this new plan, and her hopes in it, she realized that it was primarily a plan to defeat Blake's scheme against the city. She still considered Doctor Sherman the pivotal character in her father's case; he was her father's accuser, the man who, she believed more strongly every day, could clear him with a few explanatory words. So she determined to watch him none the less closely because of her new plan—to keep her eyes upon him for signs that might show his relations to Blake's scheme—to watch for signs of the breaking of his nerve, and at the first sign to pounce accusingly upon him.

When she reached home that afternoon she found Bruce awaiting her. Since morning, mixed with her palpitating love and her desire to see him, there had been dread of this meeting. In the back of her mind the question had all day tormented her, should she, for his own interests, send him away? But sharper than this, sharper a hundredfold, was the fear lest the difference between their opinions should come up.

But Bruce showed no inclination to approach this difference. Love was too new and near a thing for him to wander from the present. For this delay she was fervently grateful, and forgetful of all else she leaned back in a big old walnut chair and abandoned herself completely to her happiness, which might perhaps be all too brief. They talked of a thousand things—talk full of mutual confession: of their former hostility, of what it was that had drawn their love to one another, of last night out in the storm. The spirits of both ran high. Their joy, as first joy should be, was sparkling, effervescent.

After a time she sat in silence for several moments, smiling half-tenderly, half-roguishly, into his rugged, square-hewed face, with its glinting glasses and its

*chevaux de frise* of bristling hair.

“Well,” he demanded, “what are you thinking about?”

“I was thinking what very bad eyes I have.”

“Bad eyes?”

“Yes. For up to yesterday I always considered you——But perhaps you are thin-skinned about some matters?”

“Me thin-skinned? I’ve got the epidermis of a crocodile!”

“Well, then——up to yesterday I always thought you——but you’re sure you won’t mind?”

“I tell you I’m so thick-skinned that it meets in the middle!”

“Well, then, till yesterday I always thought you rather ugly.”

“Glory be! Eureka! Excelsior!”

“Then you don’t mind?”

“Mind?” cried he. “Did you think that I thought I was pretty?”

“I didn’t know,” she replied with her provoking, happy smile, “for men are such conceited creatures.”

“I’m not authorized to speak for the rest, but I’m certainly conceited,” he returned promptly. “For I’ve always believed myself one of the ugliest animals in the whole human menagerie. And at last my merits are recognized.”

“But I said ‘till yesterday’,” she corrected. “Since then, somehow, your face seems to have changed.”

“Changed?”

“Yes. I think you are growing rather good-looking.” Behind her happy raillery was a tone of seriousness.

“Good-looking? Me good-looking? And that’s the way you dash my hopes!”

“Yes, sir. Good-looking.”

“Woman, you don’t know what sorrow is in those words you spoke! Just to think,” he said mournfully, “that all my life I’ve fondled the belief that when I was made God must have dropped the clay while it was still wet.”

“I’m sorry——”

“Don’t try to comfort me. The blow’s too heavy.” He slowly shook his head. “I never loved a dear gazelle——”

“Oh, I don’t mean the usual sort of good-looking,” she consoled him. “But good-looking like an engine, or a crag, or a mountain.”

“Well, at any rate,” he said with solemn resignation, “it’s something to know the particular type of beauty that I am.”

Suddenly they both burst into merry laughter.

“But I’m really in earnest,” she protested. “For you really are good-looking!”

He leaned forward, caught her two hands in his powerful grasp and almost crushed his lips against them.

“Perhaps it’s just as well you don’t mind my face, dear,” he half-whispered, “for, you know, you’re going to see a lot of it.”

She flushed, and her whole being seemed to swim in happiness. They did not speak for a time; and she sat gazing with warm, luminous eyes into his rugged, determined face, now so soft, so tender.

But suddenly her look became very grave, for the question of the morning had recurred to her. Should she not give him up?

“May I speak about something serious?” she asked with an effort. “Something very serious?”

“About anything in the world!” said he.

“It’s something I was thinking about this morning, and all day,” she said. “I’m afraid I haven’t been very thoughtful of you. And I’m afraid you haven’t been very thoughtful of yourself.”

“How?”

“We’ve been together quite often of late.”

“Not often enough!”

“But often enough to set people talking.”

“Let ’em talk!”

“But you must remember——”

“Let’s stop their tongues,” he interrupted.

“How?”

“By announcing our engagement.” He gripped her hands. “For we are engaged, aren’t we?”

“I—I don’t know,” she breathed.

“Don’t know?” He stared at her. “Why, you’re white as a sheet! You’re not in earnest?”

“Yes.”

“What does this mean?”

“I—I had started to tell you. You must remember that I am an unpopular person, and that in my father I am representing an unpopular man. And you must remember that you are candidate for mayor.”

He had begun to get her drift.

“Well?”

“Well, I am afraid our being together will lessen your chances. And I don’t want to do anything in the world that will injure you.”

“Then you think——”

“I think—I think”—she spoke with difficulty—“we should stop seeing each other.”

“For my sake?”

“Yes.”

He bent nearer and looked her piercingly in the eyes.

“But for your own sake?” he demanded.

She did not speak.

“But for your own sake?” he persisted.

“For my sake—for my sake——” Half-choked, she broke off.

“Honest now? Honest?”

She did not realize till that moment all it would mean to her to see him no more.

“For my own sake——” Suddenly her hands tightened about his and she pressed them to her face. “For my sake—never! never!”

“And do you think that I——” He gathered her into his strong arms. “Let them talk!” he breathed passionately against her cheek. “We’ll win the town in spite of it!”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE CANDIDATE AND THE TIGER

The town's talk continued, as Katherine knew it would. But though she resented it in Bruce's behalf, it was of small importance in her relationship with him compared with the difference in their opinions. She was in constant fear, every time he called, lest that difference should come up. But it did not on the next day, nor on the next. He was too full of love on the one hand, too full of his political fight on the other. The more she saw of him the more she loved him, so thoroughly fine, so deeply tender, was he—and the more did she dread that avoidless day when their ideas must come into collision, so masterful was he, so certain that he was right.

On the fourth evening after their stormy ride she thought the collision was at hand.

“There is something serious I want to speak to you about,” he began, as they sat in the old-fashioned parlour. “You know what the storm has done to the city water. It has washed all the summer's accumulation of filth down into the streams that feed the reservoir, and since the filtering plant is out of commission the water has been simply abominable. The people are complaining louder than ever. Blake and the rest of his crew are telling the public that this water is a sample of what everything will be like if I'm elected. It's hurting me, and hurting me a lot. I don't blame the people so much for being influenced by what Blake says, for, of course, they don't know what's going on beneath the surface. But I've got to make some kind of a reply, and a mighty strong one, too. Now here's where I want you to help me.”

“What can I do?” she asked.

“If I could only tell the truth—what a regular knock-out of a reply that would be!” he exclaimed. “Some time ago you told me to wait—you expected to have the proof a little later. Do you have any idea how soon you will have your evidence?”

Again she felt the impulse to tell him all she knew and all her plans. But a medley of motives worked together to restrain her. There was the momentum of



her old decision to keep silent. There was the knowledge that, though he loved her as a woman, he still held her in low esteem as a lawyer. There was the instinct that what she knew, if saved, might in some way serve her when they two fought their battle. And there was the thrilling dream of waiting till she had all her evidence gathered and then bringing it triumphantly to him—and thus enable him through her to conquer.

“I’m afraid I can’t give you the proof for a while yet,” she replied.

She saw that he was impatient at the delay, that he believed she would discover nothing. She expected the outbreak that very instant. She expected him to demand that she turn the case over to the Indianapolis lawyer he had spoken to her about, who *would* be able to make some progress; to demand that she give up law altogether, and demand that as his intended wife she give up all thought of an independent professional career. She nerved herself for the shock of battle.

But it did not come.

“All right,” he said. “I suppose I’ll have to wait a little longer, then.”

He got up and paced the floor.

“But I can’t let Blake and his bunch go on saying those things without any kind of an answer from me. I’ve got to talk back, or get out of the fight!”

He continued pacing to and fro, irked by his predicament, frowning with thought. Presently he paused before her.

“Here is what I’m going to say,” he announced decisively. “Since I cannot tell the whole truth, I’m going to tell a small part of the truth. I’m going to say that the condition of the water is due to intentional mismanagement on the part of the present administration—which everybody knows is dominated by Blake. Blake’s party, in order to prevent my election on a municipal ownership platform, in order to make sure of remaining in power, is purposely trying to make municipal ownership fail. And I’m going to say this as often, and as hard, as I can!”

In the days that followed he certainly did say it hard, both in the *Express* and in his speeches. The charge had not been made publicly before, and, stated with Bruce’s tremendous emphasis, it now created a sensation. Everybody talked about it; it gave a yet further excitement to a most exciting campaign. There was vigorous denial from Blake, his fellow candidates, and from the *Clarion*, which was supporting the Blake ticket. Again and again the *Clarion* denounced Bruce’s

charge as merely the words of a demagogue, a yellow journalist—merely the irresponsible and baseless calumny so common in campaigns. Nevertheless, it had the effect that Bruce intended. His stock took a new jump, and sentiment in his favour continued to grow at a rate that made him exult and that filled the enemy with concern.

This inquietude penetrated the side office of the Tippecanoe House and sorely troubled the heart of Blind Charlie Peck. So, early one afternoon, he appeared in the office of the editor of the *Express*. His reception was rather more pleasant than on the occasion of his first visit, now over a month before; for, although Katherine had repeated her warning, Bruce had given it little credit. He did not have much confidence in her woman's judgment. Besides, he was reassured by the fact that Blind Charlie had, in every apparent particular, adhered to his bargain to keep hands off.

"Just wait a second," Bruce said to his caller; and turning back to his desk he hastily scribbled a headline over an item about a case of fever down in River Court. This he sent down to the composing-room, and swung around to the old politician. "Well, now, what's up?"

"I just dropped around," said Blind Charlie, with his good-natured smile, "to congratulate you on the campaign you're making. You're certainly putting up a fine article of fight!"

"It does look as if we had a pretty fair chance of winning," returned Bruce, confidently.

"Great! Great!" said Blind Charlie heartily. "I certainly made no mistake when I picked you out as the one man that could win for us."

"Thanks. I've done my best. And I'm going to keep it up."

"That's right. I told you I looked on it as my last campaign. I'm pretty old, and my heart's not worth a darn. When I go, whether it's up or down, I'll travel a lot easier for having first soaked Blake good and proper."

Bruce did not answer. He expected Blind Charlie to leave; in fact, he wanted him to go, for it lacked but a quarter of an hour of press time. But instead of departing, Blind Charlie settled back in his chair, crossed his legs and leisurely began to cut off a comfortable mouthful from his plug of tobacco.

"Yes, sir, it's a great fight," he continued. "It doesn't seem that it could be

improved on. But a little idea has come to me that may possibly help. It may not be any good at all, but I thought it wouldn't do any harm to drop in and suggest it to you."

"I'll be glad to hear it," returned Bruce. "But couldn't we talk it over, say in half an hour? It's close to press time, and I've got some proofs to look through—in fact the proof of an article on that water-works charge of mine."

"Oh, I'll only take a minute or two," said Blind Charlie. "And you may want to make use of my idea in this afternoon's paper."

"Well, go ahead. Only remember that at this hour the press is my boss."

"Of course, of course," said Blind Charlie amiably. "Well, here's to business: Now I guess I've been through about as many elections as you are years old. It isn't what the people think in the middle of the campaign that wins. It's what they think on election day. I've seen many a horse that looked like he had the race on ice at the three quarters licked to a frazzle in the home stretch. Same with candidates. Just now you look like a winner. What we want is to make sure that you'll still be out in front when you go under the wire."

"Yes, yes," said Bruce impatiently. "What's your plan?"

"You've got the people with you now," the old man continued, "and we want to make sure you don't lose 'em. This water-works charge of yours has been a mighty good move. But I've had my ear to the ground. I've had it to the ground for nigh on fifty years, and if there's any kind of a political noise, you can bet I hear it. Now I've detected some sounds which tell me that your water-works talk is beginning to react against you."

"You don't say! I haven't noticed it."

"Of course not; if you had, there'd be no use for me to come here and tell you," returned Blind Charlie blandly. "That's where the value of my political ear comes in. Now in my time I've seen many a sensation react and swamp the man that started it. That's what we've got to look out for and guard against."

"U'm! And what do you think we ought to do?"

Bruce was being taken in a little easier than Blind Charlie had anticipated.

"If I were you," the old man continued persuasively, "I'd pitch the tune of the

whole business in a little lower key. Let up on the big noise you're making—cut out some of the violent statements. I think you understand. Take my word for it, quieter tactics will be a lot more effective at this stage of the game. You've got the people—you don't want to scare them away."

Bruce stared thoughtfully, and without suspicion, at the loose-skinned, smiling, old face.

"U'm!" he said. "U'm!"

Blind Charlie waited patiently for two or three minutes.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked.

"You may be right," Bruce slowly admitted.

"There's no doubt of it," the old politician pleasantly assured him.

"And of course I'm much obliged. But I'm afraid I disagree with you."

"Eh?" said Blind Charlie, with the least trace of alarm.

Bruce's face tightened, and the flat of his hand came down upon his desk.

"When you start a fight, the way to win is to keep on fighting. And that's what I'm going to do."

Blind Charlie started forward in his chair.

"See here," he began, authoritatively. But in an instant his voice softened. "You'll be making a big mistake if you do that. Better trust to my older head in this. I want to win as much as you do, you know."

"I admit you may be right," said Bruce doggedly. "But I'm going to fight right straight ahead."

"Come, now, listen to reason."

"I've heard your reasons. And I'm going right on with the fight."

Blind Charlie's face grew grim, but his voice was still gentle and insinuating.

"Oh, you are, are you? And give no attention to my advice?"

"I'm sorry, but that's the way I see it."

“I’m sorry, but that’s the way I don’t see it.”

“I know; but I guess I’m running this campaign,” retorted Bruce a little hotly.

“And I guess the party chairman has some say-so, too.”

“I told you, when I accepted, that I would take the nomination without strings, or I wouldn’t take it at all. And you agreed.”

“I didn’t agree to let you ruin the party.”

Bruce looked at him keenly, for the first time suspicious. Katherine’s warning echoed vaguely in his head.

“See here, Charlie Peck, what the devil are you up to?”

“Better do as I say,” advised Peck.

“I won’t!”

“You won’t, eh?” Blind Charlie’s face had grown hard and dark with threats. “If you don’t,” he said, “I’m afraid the boys won’t see your name on the ticket on election day.”

Bruce sprang up.

“Damn you! What do you mean by that?”

“I reckon you’re not such an infant that you need that explained.”

“You’re right; I’m not!” cried Bruce. “And so you threaten to send word around to the boys to knife me on election day?”

“As I said, I guess I don’t need to explain.”

“No, you don’t, for I now see why you came here,” cried Bruce, his wrath rising as he realized that he had been hoodwinked by Blind Charlie from the very first. “So there’s a frame-up between you and Blake, and you’re trying to sell me out and sell out the party! You first tried to wheedle me into laying down—and when I wouldn’t be fooled, you turned to threats!”

“The question isn’t what I came for,” snapped Blind Charlie. “The question is, what are you going to do? Either you do as I say, or not one of the boys will vote for you. Now I want your answer.”

“You want my answer, do you? Why—why——” Bruce glared down at the old man in a fury. “Well, by God, you’ll get my answer, and quick!”

He dropped down before his typewriter, ran in a sheet of paper, and for a minute the keys clicked like mad. Then he jerked out the sheet of paper, scribbled a cabalistic instruction across its top, sprang to his office door and let out a great roar of “Copy!”

He quickly faced about upon Blind Charlie.

“Here’s my answer. Listen:

“This afternoon Charlie Peck called at the office of the *Express* and ordered its editor, who is candidate for mayor, to cease from his present aggressive campaign tactics. He threatened, in case the candidate refused, to order the “boys” to knife him at the polls.

“The candidate refused.

“Voters of Westville, do your votes belong to you, or do they belong to Charlie Peck?”

“That’s my answer, Peck. It all goes in big, black type in a box in the centre of the first page of this afternoon’s paper. We’ll see whether the party will stand for your methods.” At this instant the grimy young servitor of the press appeared. “Here, boy. Rush that right down.”

“Hold on!” cried Peck in consternation. “You’re not going to print that thing?”

“Unless the end of the world happens along just about now, that’ll be on the street in half an hour.” Bruce stepped to the door and opened it wide. “And, now, clear out! You and your votes can go plum to hell!”

“Damn you! But that piece will do you no good. I’ll deny it!”

“Deny it—for God’s sake do! Then everybody will know I’m telling the truth. And let me warn you, Charlie Peck—I’m going to find out what your game is! I’m going to show you up! I’m going to wipe you clear off the political map!”

Blind Charlie swore at him again as he passed out of the door.

“We’re not through with each other yet—remember that!”

“You bet we’re not!” Bruce shouted after him. “And when we are, there’ll not be enough of you left to know what’s happened!”

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## CHAPTER XIX

### WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

Two hours later Bruce was striding angrily up and down the West parlour, telling Katherine all about it.

She refrained from saying, "I told you so," by either word or look. She was too wise for such a petty triumph. Besides, there was something in that afternoon's *Express*, which Bruce had handed her that interested her far more than his wrathful recital of Blind Charlie's treachery; and although she was apparently giving Bruce her entire attention, and was in fact mechanically taking in his words, her mind was excitedly playing around this second piece of news.

For Doctor Sherman, so said the *Express*, had that day suddenly left Westville. He had been failing in health for many weeks and was on the verge of a complete breakdown, the *Express* sympathetically explained, and at last had yielded to the importunities of his worried congregation that he take a long vacation. He had gone to the pine woods of the North, and to insure the unbroken rest he so imperatively required, to prevent the possibility of appealing letters of inconsiderate parishioners or other cares from following him into his isolation, he had, at his doctor's command, left no address behind.

Katherine instantly knew that this vacation was a flight. The situation in Westville had grown daily more intense, and Doctor Sherman had seemed to her to be under an ever-increasing strain. Blake, she was certain, had ordered the young clergyman to leave, fearing, if he remained, that his nerve might break and he might confess his true relation to her father's case. She realized that now, when Doctor Sherman was apparently weakening, was the psychological time to besiege him with accusation and appeal; and while Bruce was rehearsing his scene with Blind Charlie she was rapidly considering means for seeking out Doctor Sherman and coming face to face with him.

Her mind was brought back from its swift search by Bruce swinging a chair up before her and sitting down.

"But, Katherine—I'll show Peck!" he cried, fiercely, exultantly. "He doesn't know what a fight he's got ahead of him. This frees me entirely from him and his



machine, and I'm going to beat him so bad that I'll drive him clear out of politics."

She nodded. That was exactly what she was secretly striving to help him do.

He became more composed, and for a hesitant, silent moment he peered thoughtfully into her eyes.

"But, Katherine—this affair with Peck this afternoon shows me I am up against a mighty stiff proposition," he said, speaking with the slowness of one who is shaping his statements with extreme care. "I have got to fight a lot harder than I thought I would have to three hours ago, when I thought I had Peck with me. To beat him, and beat Blake, I have got to have every possible weapon. Consequently, circumstances force me to speak of a matter that I wish I did not have to talk about." He reached forward and took her hand. "But, remember, dear," he besought her tenderly, "that I don't want to hurt you. Remember that."

She felt a sudden tightening about the heart.

"Yes—what is it?" she asked quietly.

"Remember, dear, that I don't want to hurt you," he repeated. "It's about your father's case. You see how certain victory would be if we only had the evidence to prove what we know?"

"I see."

"I don't mean to say one single unkind word about your not having made—having made—more encouraging progress." He pressed her hand; his tone was gentle and persuasive. "I'll confess I have secretly felt some impatience, but I have not pressed the matter because—well, you see that in this critical situation, with election so near, I'm forced to speak about it now."

"What would you like?" she said with an effort.

"You see we cannot afford any more delays, any more risks. We have got to have the quickest possible action. We have got to use every measure that may get results. Now, dear, you would not object, would you, if at this critical juncture, when every hour is so valuable, we were to put the whole matter in the hands of my Indianapolis lawyer friend I spoke to you about?"

The gaze she held upon his continued steady, but she was pulsing wildly within

and she had to swallow several times before she could speak.

“You—you think he can do better than I can?”

“I do not want to say a single word that will reflect on you, dear. But we must admit the facts. You have had the case for over four months, and we have no real evidence as yet.”

“And you think he can get it?”

“He’s very shrewd, very experienced. He’ll follow up every clue with detectives. If any man can succeed in the short time that remains, he can.”

“Then you—you think I can’t succeed?”

“Come, dear, let’s be reasonable!”

“But I think I can.”

“But, Katherine!” he expostulated.

She felt what was coming.

“I’m sure I can—if you will only trust me a little longer!” she said desperately.

He dropped her hand.

“You mean that, though I ask you to give it up, you want to continue the case?”

She grew dizzy, his figure swam before her.

“I—I think I do.”

“Why—why——” He broke off. “I can’t tell you how surprised I am!” he exclaimed. “I have said nothing of late because I was certain that, if I gave nature a little time in which to work, there would be no need to argue the matter with you. I was certain that, now that love had entered your life, your deeper woman’s instincts would assert themselves and you would naturally desire to withdraw from the case. In fact, I was certain that your wish to practise law, your ambition for a career outside the home, would sink into insignificance—and that you would have no desire other than to become a true woman of the home, where I want my wife to be, where she belongs. Oh, come now, Katherine,” he added with a rush of his dominating confidence, taking her hand again, “you know that’s just what you’re going to do!”

She sat throbbing, choking. She realized that the long-feared battle was now inevitably at hand. For the moment she did not know whether she was going to yield or fight. Her love of him, her desire to please him, her fear of what might be the consequence if she crossed him, all impelled her toward surrender; her deep-seated, long-clung-to principles impelled her to make a stand for the life of her dreams. She was a tumult of counter instincts and emotions. But excited as she was, she found herself looking on at herself in a curious detachment, palpitably wondering which was going to win—the primitive woman in her, the product of thousands of generations of training to fit man’s desire, or this other woman she contained, shaped by but a few brief years, who had come ardently to believe that she had the right to be what she wanted to be, no matter what the man required.

“Oh, come now, dear,” Bruce assured her confidently, yet half chidingly, “you know you are going to give it all up and be just my wife!”

She gazed at his rugged, resolute face, smiling at her now with that peculiar forgiving tenderness that an older person bestows upon a child that is about to yield its childish whim.

“There now, it’s all settled,” he said, smoothing her hand. “And we’ll say no more about it.”

And then words forced their way up out of her turbulent indecision.

“I’m afraid it isn’t settled.”

His eyebrows rose in surprise.

“No?”

“No. I want to be your wife, Arnold. But—but I can’t give up the other.”

“What! You’re in earnest?” he cried.

“I am—with all my heart!”

He sank back and stared at her. If further answer were needed, her pale, set face gave it to him. His quick anger began to rise, but he forced it down.

“That puts an entirely new face on the matter,” he said, trying to speak calmly. “The question, instead of merely concerning the next few weeks, concerns our whole lives.”

She tried to summon all her strength, all her faculties, for the shock of battle.

“Just so,” she answered

“Then we must go over the matter very fully,” he said. His command over himself grew more easy. He believed that what he had to do was to be patient, and talk her out of her absurdity. “You must understand, of course,” he went on, smiling at her tenderly, “that I want to support my wife, and that I am able to support my wife. I want to protect her—shield her—have her lean upon me. I want her to be the goddess of my home. The goddess of my home, Katherine! That’s what I want. You understand, dear, don’t you?”

She saw that he confidently expected her to yield to his ideal and accept it, and she now knew that she could never yield. She paused a space before she spoke, in a sort of terror of what might be the consequence of the next few moments.

“I understand you,” she said, duplicating his tone of reason. “But what shall I do in the home? I dislike housework.”

“There’s no need of your doing it,” he promptly returned. “I can afford servants.”

“Then what shall I do in the home?” she repeated.

“Take things easy. Enjoy yourself.”

“But I don’t want to enjoy myself. I want to do things. I want to work.”

“Come, come, be reasonable,” he said, with his tolerant smile. “You know that’s quite out of the question.”

“Since you are going to pay servants,” she persisted, “why should I idle about the house? Why should not I, an able-bodied person, be out helping in the world’s work somehow—and also helping you to earn a living?”

“Help me earn a living!” He flushed, but his resentment subsided. “When I asked you to marry me I implied in that question that I was able and willing to support you. Really, Katherine, it’s quite absurd for you to talk about it. There is no financial necessity whatever for you to work.”

“You mean, then, that I should not work because, in you, I have enough to live upon?”

“Of course!”

“Do you know any man, any real man I mean,” she returned quickly, “who stops work in the vigour of his prime merely because he has enough money to live upon? Would you give up your work to-morrow if some one were willing to support you?”

“Now, don’t be ridiculous, Katherine! That’s quite a different question. I’m a man, you know.”

“And work is a necessity for you?”

“Why, of course.”

“And you would not be happy without it?” she eagerly pursued.

“Certainly not.”

“And you are right there! But what you don’t seem to understand is, that I have the same need, the same love, for work that you have. If you could only recognize, Arnold, that I have the same feelings in this matter that you have, then you would understand me. I demand for myself the right that all men possess as a matter of course—the right to work!”

“If you must work,” he cried, a little exasperated, “why, of course, you can help in the housework.”

“But I also demand the right to choose my work. Why should I do work which I do not like, for which I have no aptitude, and which I should do poorly, and give up work which interests me, for which I have been trained, and for which I believe I have an aptitude?”

“But don’t you realize, in doing it, if you are successful, you are taking the bread out of a man’s mouth?” he retorted.

“Then every man who has a living income, and yet works, is also taking the bread out of a man’s mouth. But does a real man stop work because of that? Besides, if you use that argument, then in doing my own housework I’d be taking the bread out of a woman’s mouth.”

“Why—why——” he stammered. His face began to redden. “We shouldn’t belittle our love with this kind of talk. It’s all so material, so sordid.”

“It’s not sordid to me!” she cried, stretching out a hand to him. “Don’t be angry, Arnold. Try to understand me—please do, please do. Work is a necessity of life to you. It is also a necessity of life to me. I’m fighting with you for the right to work. I’m fighting with you for my life!”

“Then you place work, your career, above our happiness together?” he demanded angrily.

“Not at all,” she went on rapidly, pleadingly. “But I see no reason why there should not be both. Our happiness should be all the greater because of my work. I’ve studied myself, Arnold, and I know what I need. To be thoroughly happy, I need work; useful work, work that interests me. I tell you we’ll be happier, and our happiness will last longer, if only you let me work. I know! I know!”

“Dream stuff! You’re following a mere will-o’-the-wisp!”

“That’s what women have been following in the past,” she returned breathlessly. “Look among your married friends. How many ideally happy couples can you count? Very, very few. And why are there so few? One reason is, because the man finds, after the novelty is worn off, that his wife is uninteresting, has nothing to talk about; and so his love cools to a good-natured, passive tolerance of her. Most married men, when alone with their wives, sit in stupid silence. But see how the husband livens up if a man joins them! This man has been out in the interesting world. The wife has been cooped up at home. The man has something to talk about. The wife has not. Well, I am going to be out in the interesting world, doing something. I am going to have something to talk to my husband about. I am going to be interesting to him, as interesting to him as any man. And I am going to try to hold his love, Arnold, the love of his heart, the love of his head, to the very end!”

He was exasperated by her persistence, but he still held himself in check.

“That sounds very plausible to you. But there is one thing in your argument you forget.”

“And that?”

“We are grown-up people, you and I. I guess we can talk straight out.”

“Yes. Go on!”

He gazed at her very steadily for a moment.

“There are such things as children, you know.”

She returned his steady look.

“Of course,” she said quickly. “Every normal woman wants children. And I should want them too.”

“There—that settles it,” he said with triumph. “You can’t combine children and a profession.”

“But I can!” she cried. “And I should give the children the very best possible care, too! Of course there are successive periods in which the mother would have to give her whole attention to the children. But if she lives till she is sixty-five the sum total of her forty or forty-five married years that she has to give up wholly to her children amounts to but a few years. There remains all the balance of her life that she could give to other work. Do you realize how tremendously the world is changing, and how women’s work is changing with it?”

“Oh, let’s don’t mix in statistics, and history, and economics with our love!”

“But we’ve got to if our love is to last!” she cried. “We’re living in a time when things are changing. We’ve got to consider the changes. And the greatest changes are, and are going to be, in woman’s work. Up in our attic are my great-grandmother’s wool carders, her spinning wheel, her loom, all sorts of things; she spun, wove, made all the clothing, did everything. These things are now done by professional experts; that sort of work has been taken away from woman. Now all that’s left for the woman to do in the home is to cook, clean, and care for children. Life is still changing. We are still developing. Some time these things too will be done, and better done, by professional experts—though just how, or just when, I can’t even guess. Once there was a strong sentiment against the child being taken from the mother and being sent to school. Now most intelligent parents are glad to put their children in charge of trained kindergartners at four or five. And in the future some new institution, some new variety of trained specialist, may develop that will take charge of the child for a part of the day at an even earlier age. That’s the way the world is moving!”

“Thanks for your lecture on the Rise, Progress and Future of Civilization,” he said ironically, trying to suppress himself. “But interesting as it was, it has nothing whatever to do with the case. We’re not talking about civilization, and the universe, and evolution, and the fourth dimension, and who’s got the button. We’re talking about you and me. About you and me, and our love.”

“Yes, Arnold, about you and me and our love,” she cried eagerly. “I spoke of these things only because they concern you and me and our love so very, very much.”

“Of all things for two lovers to talk about!” he exclaimed with mounting exasperation.

“They are the things of all things! For our love, our life, hangs upon them!”

“Well, anyhow, you haven’t got these new institutions, these new experts,” he retorted, brushing the whole matter aside. “You’re living to-day, not in the millennium!”

“I know, I know. In the meantime, life for us women is in a stage of transition. Until these better forms develop we are going to have a hard time. It will be difficult for me to manage, I know. But I’m certain I can manage it.”

He stood up. His face was very red, and he swallowed once or twice before the words seemed able to come out.

“I’m surprised, Katherine—surprised!—that you should be so persistent in this nonsense. What you say is all against nature. It won’t work.”

“Perhaps not. But at least you’ll let me try! That’s all I ask of you—that you let me try!”

“It would be weak in me, wrong in me, to yield.”

“Then you’re not willing to give me a chance?”

He shook his head.

She rose and moved before him.

“But, Arnold, do you realize what you are doing?” she cried with desperate passion. “Do you realize what it is I’m asking you for? Work, interesting work—that’s what I need to make me happy, to make you happy! Without it, I shall be miserable, and you will be miserable in having a miserable wife about you—and all our years together will be years of misery. So you see what a lot I’m fighting for: work, development, happiness!—the happiness of all our married years!”

“That’s only a delusion. For your sake, and my sake, I’ve got to stand firm.”

“Then you will not let me?”



“I will not.”

She stared palely at his square, adamant face.

“Arnold!” she breathed. “Arnold!—do you know what you’re trying to do?”

“I am trying to save you from yourself!”

“You’re trying to break my will across yours,” she cried a little wildly. “You’re trying to crush me into the iron mould of your idea of a woman. You’re trying to kill me—yes, to kill me.”

“I am trying to save you!” he repeated, his temper breaking its frail leash. “Your ideas are all wrong—absurd—insane!”

“Please don’t be angry, Arnold!” she pleaded.

“How can I help it, when you won’t listen to reason! When you are so perversely obstinate!”

“I’m not obstinate,” she cried breathlessly, holding one of his hands tightly in both her own. “I’m just trying to cling as hard as I can to life—to our happiness. Please give me a chance, Arnold! Please, please!”

“Confound such obstinate wrong-headedness!” he exploded. “No, I tell you! No! And that settles it!”

She shrank back.

“Oh!” she cried. Her breast began to rise and fall tumultuously, and her cheeks slowly to redden. “Oh!” she cried again. Then her words leaped hotly out: “Oh, you bigot!”

“If to stand by what I know is right, and to save you from making a fool of yourself, is to be a bigot—then I’m a bigot all right, and I thank the God that made me one!”

“And you think you are going to save me from myself?” she demanded.

He stepped nearer, and towering over her, he took hold of her shoulders in a powerful grasp and looked down upon her dominantly.

“I know I am! I am going to make you exactly what I want you to be!”

Her eyes flamed back up into his.

“Because you are the stronger?”

“Because I am the stronger—and because I am right,” he returned grimly.

“I admit that you are the superior brute,” she said with fierce passion. “But you will never break me to your wishes!”

“And I tell you I will!”

“And I tell you you will not!”

There was a strange and new fire in her eyes.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean this,” she returned, and the hands that gripped her shoulders felt her tremble through all her body. “I should not expect you to marry a woman who was so unreasonable as to demand that you, for her sake, should give up your loved career. And, for my part, I shall never marry a man so unreasonable as to make the same demand of me.”

He fell back a pace.

“You mean——”

“Was I not plain enough? I mean that you will never have the chance to crush me into your iron mould, for I will never marry you.”

“What!” And then: “So I’m fired, am I?” he grated out.

“Yes, for you’re as narrow and as conventional as the rest of men,” she rushed on hotly. “You never say a word so long as a woman’s work is unpleasant! It’s all right for her to scrub, and wash dishes, and wear her life away in factories. But as soon as she wants to do any work that is pleasant and interesting and that will gain her recognition, you cry out that she’s unwomanly, unsexed, that she’s flying in the face of God! Oh, you are perfectly willing that woman, on the one hand, should be a drudge, or on the other the pampered pet of your one-woman harem. But I shall be neither, I tell you. Never! Never! Never!”

They stared at one another, trembling with passion.

“And you,” he said with all the fierce irony of his soul, “and you, I suppose, will

now go ahead and clear your father, expose Blake, and perform all those other wonders you've talked so big about!"

"That's just what I am going to do!" she cried defiantly.

"And that's just what you are not!" he blazed back. "I may have admired the woman in you—but, for those things, you have not the smallest atom of ability. Your father's trial, your failure to get evidence—hasn't that shown you? You are going to be a failure—a fizzle—a fiasco! Did you hear that? A pitiable, miserable, humiliated fiasco! And time will prove it!"

"We'll see what time will prove!" And she swept furiously past him out of the room.



## CHAPTER XX

### A SPECTRE COMES TO TOWN

For many an hour Katherine's wrath continued high, and she repeated, with clinched hands, all her invectives against the bigotry of Bruce. He was a bully—a boor—a brute—a tyrant. He considered himself the superman. And in pitiable truth he was only a moral coward—for his real reason in opposing her had been that he was afraid to have Westville say that his wife worked. And he had insulted her, for his parting words to her had been a jeering statement that she had no ability, only a certain charm of sex. How, oh, how, had she ever imagined that they two might possibly share a happy life together?

But after a season her wrath began to subside, and she began to see that after all Bruce was no very different man from the Bruce she had loved the last few weeks. He had been thoroughly consistent with himself. She had known that he was cocksure and domineering. She had foreseen that the chances were at least equal that he would take the position he had. She had foreseen and feared this very issue. His virtues were just as big as on yesterday, when she and he had thought of marriage, and his faults were no greater. And she realized, after the first passion of their battle had spent its force, that she still loved him.

In the long hours of the night a pang of emptiness, of vast, irretrievable loss, possessed her. She and Love had touched each other for a space—then had flung violently apart, and were speeding each in their eternally separate direction. Life for her might be rich and full of honour and achievement, but as she looked forward into the long procession of years, she saw that life was going to have its dreariness, its vacancies, its dull, unending aches. It was going to be such a very, very different business from that life of work and love and home and mutual aid she had daringly dreamed of during the two weeks she and Bruce had been lovers.

But she did not regret her decision. She did not falter. Her resentment of Bruce's attitude stiffened the backbone of her purpose. She was going straight ahead, bear the bitterness, and live the life she had planned as best she could.

But there quickly came other matters to share her mind with a lost love and a

broken dream. First was the uproar created by Bruce's defiant announcement in the *Express* of Blind Charlie's threatened treachery. That sensation reigned for a day or two, then was almost forgotten in a greater. This second sensation made its initial appearance quite unobtrusively; it had a bare dozen lines down in a corner of the same issue of the *Express* that had contained Bruce's defiance and Doctor Sherman's departure. The substance of the item was that two cases of illness had been reported from the negro quarter in River Court, and that the doctors said the symptoms were similar to those of typhoid fever.

Those two cases of fever in that old frame tenement up a narrow, stenchy alley were the quiet opening of a new act in the drama that was played that year in Westville. The next day a dozen cases were reported, and now the doctors unhesitatingly pronounced them typhoid. The number mounted rapidly. Soon there were a hundred. Soon there was an epidemic. And the Spectre showed no deference to rank. It not only stalked into the tenements of River Court and Railroad Alley—and laid its felling finger on starveling children and drink-shattered men—It visited the large and airy homes on Elm and Maple Streets and Wabash Avenue, where those of wealth and place were congregated.

In Westville was the Reign of Terror. Haggard doctors were ever on the go, snatching a bite or a moment's sleep when chance allowed. Till then, modern history had been reckoned in Westville from the town's invasion by factories, or from that more distant time when lightning had struck the Court House. But those milestones of time are to-day forgotten. Local history is now dated, and will be for many a decade, from the "Days of Fever" and the related events which marked that epoch.

In the early days of the epidemic Katherine heard one morning that Elsie Sherman had just been stricken. She had seen little of Elsie during the last few weeks; the strain of their relation was too great to permit the old pleasure in one another's company; but at this news she hastened to Elsie's bedside. Her arrival was a God-send to the worn and hurried Doctor Woods, who had just been called in. She telegraphed to Indianapolis for a nurse; she telegraphed to a sister of Doctor Sherman to come; and she herself undertook the care of Elsie until the nurse should arrive.

"What do you think of her case, Doctor?" she asked anxiously when Doctor Woods dropped in again later in the day.

He shook his head.

“Mrs. Sherman is very frail.”

“Then you think——”

“I’m afraid it will be a hard fight. I think we’d better send for her husband.”

Despite her sympathy for Elsie, Katherine thrilled with the possibility suggested by the doctor’s words. Here was a situation that should bring Doctor Sherman out of his hiding, if anything could bring him. Once home, and unnerved by the sight of his wife precariously balanced between life and death, she was certain that he would break down and confess whatever he might know.

She asked Elsie for her husband’s whereabouts, but Elsie answered that she had had letters but that he had never given an address. Katherine at once determined to see Blake, and demand to know where Doctor Sherman was; and after the nurse arrived on an afternoon train, she set out for Blake’s office.

But Blake was out, and his return was not expected for an hour. To fill in the time, Katherine paid a visit to her father in the jail. She told him of Elsie’s illness, and told at greater length than she had yet had chance to do about the epidemic. In his turn he talked to her about the fever’s causes; and when she left the jail and returned to Blake’s office an idea far greater than merely asking Doctor Sherman’s whereabouts was in her mind.

This time she was told that Blake was in, but could see no one. Undeterred by this statement, Katherine walked quickly past the stenographer and straight for his private door, which she quickly and quietly opened and closed.

Blake was sitting at his desk, his head bowed forward in one hand. He was so deep in thought, and she had entered so quietly, that he had not heard her. She crossed to his desk, stood opposite him, and for a moment gazed down upon his head.

“Mr. Blake,” she remarked at length.

He started up.

“You here!” he ejaculated.

“Yes. I came to talk to you.”

He did not speak at once, but stood staring a little wildly at her. She had not spoken to him since the day of her father’s trial, nor seen him save at a distance.

She was now startled at the change this closer view revealed to her. His eyes were sunken and ringed with purple, his face seemed worn and thin, and had taken on a tinge of yellowish-green.

“I left orders that I could see no one,” he said, trying to speak sharply.

“I know,” she answered quietly. “But you’ll see me.”

For an instant he hesitated.

“Very well—sit down,” he said, resuming his chair. “Now what is it you wish?”

She seated herself and leaned across the desk toward him.

“I wish to talk to you about the fever,” she said with her former composure, and looking him very steadily in the eyes. “I suppose you know what caused it?”

“I am no doctor. I do not.”

“Then let me tell you. My father has just told me that there must have been a case of typhoid during the summer somewhere back in the drainage area of the water-system. That recent big storm carried the summer’s accumulation of germ-laden filth down into the streams. And since the city was unguarded by a filter, those germs were swept into the water-mains, we drank them, and the epidemic \_\_\_\_\_”

“That filter was useless—a complete failure!” Blake broke in rather huskily.

“You know, Mr. Blake, and I know,” she returned, “that that filter has been, and still is, in excellent condition. And you know, and I know, that if it had been in operation, purifying the water, there might possibly have been a few cases of typhoid, but there would never have been this epidemic. That’s the God’s truth, and you know it!”

He swallowed, but did not answer her.

“I suppose,” she pursued in her steady tone, “you realize who is responsible for all these scores of sick?”

“If what you say is true, then your father is guilty, for building such a filter.”

“You know better. You know that the guilty man is yourself.”

His face grew more yellowish-green.

“It’s not so! No one is more appalled by this disaster than I am!”

“I know you are appalled by the outcome. You did not plan to murder citizens. You only planned to defraud the city. But this epidemic is the direct consequence of your scheme. Every person who is now in a sick bed, you put that person there. Every person who may later go to his grave, you will have sent that person there.”

Her steady voice grew more accusing. “What does your conscience say to you? And what do you think the people will say to you, to the great public-spirited Mr. Blake, when they learn that you, prompted by the desire for money and power, have tried to rob the city and have stricken hundreds with sickness?”

His yellowish face contorted most horribly, but he did not answer.

“I see that your conscience has been asking you those same questions,” Katherine pursued. “It is something, at least, that your conscience is not dead. Those are not pleasant questions to have asked one, are they?”

Again his face twisted, but he seemed to gather hold of himself.

“You are as crazy as ever—that’s all rot!” he said huskily, with a denying sweep of a clinched hand. “But what do you want?”

“Three things. First, that you have the filter put back in commission. Let’s at least do what we can to prevent any more danger from that source.”

“The filter is useless. Besides, I am no official, and have nothing to do with it.”

“It is in perfect condition, and you have everything to do with it,” she returned steadily.

He swallowed. “I’ll suggest it to the mayor.”

“Very well; that is settled. To the next point. Have you heard that Mrs. Sherman is sick?”

“Yes.”

“She wants her husband.”

“Well?”

“My second demand is to know where you have hidden Doctor Sherman.”



“Doctor Sherman? I have nothing to do with Doctor Sherman!”

“You also have everything to do with Doctor Sherman,” she returned steadily. “He is one of the instruments of your plot. You feared that he would break down and confess, and so you sent him out of the way. Where is he?”

Again his face worked spasmodically. “I tell you once more I have nothing whatever to do with Doctor Sherman! Now I hope that’s all. I am tired of this. I have other matters to consider. Good day.”

“No, it is not all. For there is my third demand. And that is the most important of the three. But perhaps I should not say demand. What I make you is an offer.”

“An offer?” he exclaimed.

She did not reply to him directly. She leaned a little farther across his desk and looked at him with an even greater intentness.

“I do not need to ask you to pause and think upon all the evil you have done the town,” she said slowly. “For you have thought. You were thinking at the moment I came in. I can see that you are shaken with horror at the unforeseen results of your scheme. I have come to you to take sides with your conscience; to join it in asking you, urging you, to draw back and set things as nearly right as you can. That is my demand, my offer, my plea—call it what you will.”

He had been gazing at her with wide fixed eyes. When he spoke, his voice was dry, mechanical.

“Set things right? How?”

“Come forward, confess, and straighten out the situation of your own accord. Westville is in a terrible condition. If you act at once, you can at least do something to relieve it.”

“By setting things right, as you call it, you of course include the clearing of your father?”

“The clearing of my father, of course. And let me say to you, Mr. Blake—and for this moment I am speaking as your friend—that it will be better for you to clear this whole matter up voluntarily, at once, than to be exposed later, as you certainly will be. To clear this matter at once may have the result of simplifying the fight against the epidemic—it may save many lives. That is what I am

thinking of first of all just now.”

“You mean to say, then, that it is either confess or be exposed?”

“There is no use in my beating about the bush with you,” she replied in her same steady tone. “For I know that you know that I am after you.”

He did not speak at once. He sat gazing fixedly at her, with twitching face. She met his gaze without blinking, breathlessly awaiting his reply.

Suddenly a tremor ran through him and his face set with desperate decision.

“Yes, I know you are after me! I know you are having me followed—spied upon!” There was a biting, contemptuous edge to his tone. “Even if I were guilty, do you think I would be afraid of exposure from you? Oh, I know the man you have sleuthing about on my trail. Elijah Stone! And I once thought you were a clever girl!”

“You refuse, then?” she said slowly.

“I do! And I defy you! If your accusations against me are true, go out and proclaim them to the city. I’m willing to stand for whatever happens!”

She regarded his flushed, defiant face. She perceived clearly that she had failed, that it was useless to try further.

“Very well,” she said slowly. “But I want you to remember in the future that I have given you this chance; that I have given you your choice, and you have chosen.”

“And I tell you again that I defy you!”

“You are a more hardened man, or a more desperate man, than I thought,” said she.

He did not reply upon the instant, but sat gazing into her searching eyes. Before he could speak, the telephone at his elbow began to ring. He picked it up.

“Hello! Yes, this is Mr. Blake.... Her temperature is the same, you say?... No, I have not had an answer yet. I expect a telegram any minute. I’ll let you know as soon as it comes. Good-by.”

“Is some one sick?” Katherine asked, as he hung up the receiver.

“My mother,” he returned briefly, his recent defiance all gone.

Katherine, too, for the moment, forgot their conflict.

“I did not know it. There are so many cases, you know. Who is attending her?”

“Doctor Hunt, temporarily,” he answered. “But these Westville doctors are all amateurs in serious cases. I’ve telegraphed for a specialist—the best man I could hear of—Doctor Brenholtz of Chicago.”

His defiance suddenly returned.

“If I have seemed to you worn, unnerved, now you know the real cause!” he said.

“So,” she remarked slowly, “the disaster you have brought on Westville has struck your own home!”

His face twitched convulsively.

“I believe we have finished our conversation. Good afternoon.”

Katherine rose.

“And if she dies, you know who will have killed her.”

He sprang up.

“Go! Go!” he cried.

But she remained in her tracks, looking him steadily in the eyes. While they stood so, the stenographer entered and handed him a telegram. He tore it open, glanced it through, and stood staring at it in a kind of stupor.

“My God!” he breathed.

He tore the yellow sheet across, dropped the pieces in the waste-basket and began to pace his room, on his face a wild, dazed look. He seemed to have forgotten Katherine’s presence. But a turn brought her into his vision. He stopped short.

“You still here?”

“I was waiting to hear if Doctor Brenholtz was coming,” she said.

He stared at her a moment. Then he crossed to his desk, took the two fragments of the telegram from his waste-basket and held them out to her.

“There is what he says.”

She took the telegram and read:

“No use my coming. Best man on typhoid in West lives in your own town. See Dr. David West.”

Katherine laid down the yellow pieces and raised her eyes to Blake’s white, strained face. The two gazed at each other for a long moment.

“Well?” he said huskily.

“Well?” she quietly returned.

“Do you think I can get him?”

“How can you get a man who is serving a sentence in jail?”

“If I—if I——” He could not get the words out.

“Yes. If you confess—clear him—get him out of jail—of course he will treat the case.”

“I didn’t mean that! God!” he cried, “is confession of a thing I never did the fee you exact for saving a life?”

“What, you still hold out?”

“I’m not guilty! I tell you, I’m not guilty!”

“Then you’ll not confess?”

“Never! Never!”

“Not even to save your mother?”

“She’s sick—very sick. But she’s not going to die—I’ll not let her die! Your father does not have to be cleared to get out of jail. In this emergency I can arrange to get him out for a time on parole. What do you say?”

She gazed at the desperate, wildly expectant figure. A little shiver ran through her.

“What do you say?” he repeated.

“There can be but one answer,” she replied. “My father is too big a man to demand any price for his medical skill—even the restoration of his honest name by the man who stole it. Parole him, and he will go instantly to Mrs. Blake.”

He dropped into his chair and seized his telephone.

“Central, give me six-o-four—quick!” There was a moment of waiting. “This you, Judge Kellog?... This is Harrison Blake. I want you to arrange the proper papers for the immediate parole of Doctor West. I’ll be responsible for everything. Am coming right over and will explain.”

He fairly threw the receiver back upon its hook. “Your father will be free in an hour,” he cried. And without waiting for a reply, he seized his hat and hurried out.



## CHAPTER XXI

### BRUCE TO THE FRONT

Katherine came down from Blake's office with many thoughts surging through her brain: Of her father's release—of Blake's obduracy—of his mother's illness; but at the forefront of them all, because demanding immediate action, was the need of finding Doctor Sherman.

As she stepped forth from the stairway, she saw Arnold Bruce striding along the Square in her direction. There was a sudden leaping of her heart, a choking at her throat. But they passed each other with the short cold nod which had been their manner of greeting during the last few days when they had chanced to meet.

The next instant a sudden impulse seized her, and she turned about.

"Mr. Bruce," she called after him.

He came back to her. His face was rather pale, but was doggedly resolute. Her look was not very different from his.

"Yes, Miss West?" said he.

For a moment it was hard for her to speak. No word, only that frigid nod, had passed between them since their quarrel.

"I want to ask you something—and tell you something," she said coldly.

"I am at your service," said he.

"We cannot talk here. Suppose we cross into the Court House yard?"

In silence he fell into step beside her. They did not speak until they were in the yard where passers-by could not overhear them.

"You know of Mrs. Sherman's illness?" she began in a distant, formal tone.

"Yes."

“It promises to be serious. We must get her husband home if possible. But no one has his address. An idea for reaching him has been vaguely in my head. It may not be good, but it now seems the only way.”

“Do you mind telling me what it is?”

“Doctor Sherman is somewhere in the pine woods of the North. What I thought about doing was to order some Chicago advertising agency to insert notices in scores of small dailies and weeklies up North, announcing to Doctor Sherman his wife’s illness and urging him to come home. My hope is that one of the papers may penetrate whatever remote spot he may be in and the notice reach his eyes. What I want to ask you is the name of an agency.”

“Black & Graves are your people,” said he.

“Also I want to know how to go about it to get prompt action on their part.”

“Write out the notice and send it to them with your instructions. And since they won’t know you, better enclose a draft or money order on account. No, don’t bother about the money; you won’t know how much to send. I know Phil Black, and I’ll write him to-day guaranteeing the account.”

“Thank you,” she said.

“You’re perfectly welcome,” said he with his cold politeness. “Is there anything else I can do?”

“That’s all about that. But I have something to tell you—a suggestion to make for your campaign, if you will not consider it impertinent.”

“Quite otherwise. I shall be very glad to get it.”

“You have been saying in your speeches that the bad water has been due to intentional mismanagement of the present administration, which is ruled by Mr. Blake, for the purpose of rendering unpopular the municipal ownership principle.”

“I have, and it’s been very effective.”

“I suggest that you go farther.”

“How?”

“Make the fever an issue of the campaign. The people, in fact all of us, have



been too excited, too frightened, to understand the relation between the bad management of the water-works, the bad water, and the fever. Tell them that relation. Only tell it carefully, by insinuation if necessary, so that you will avoid the libel law—for you have no proof as yet. Make them understand that the fever is due to bad water, which in turn is due to bad management of the water-works, which in turn is due to the influence of Mr. Blake.”

“Great! Great!” exclaimed Bruce.

“Oh, the idea is not really mine,” she said coldly. “It came to me from some things my father told me.”

Her tone recalled to him their chilly relationship.

“It’s a regular knock-out idea,” he said stiffly. “And I’m much obliged to you.”

They had turned back and were nearing the gate of the yard.

“I hope it will really help you—but be careful to avoid giving them an opening to bring a libel charge. Permit me to say that you have been making a splendid campaign.”

“Things do seem to be coming my direction. The way I threw Blind Charlie’s threat back into his teeth, that has made a great hit. I think I have him on the run.”

He hesitated, gave her a sharp look, then added rather defiantly:

“I might as well tell you that in a few days I expect to have Blake also on the run—in fact, in a regular gallop. That Indianapolis lawyer friend of mine, Wilson’s his name, is coming here to help me.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed.

“You’ll remember,” he continued in his defiant tone, “that I once told you that your father’s case was not your case. It’s the city’s. I’m going to put Wilson on it, and I expect him to clear it all up in short order.”

She could not hold back a sudden uprush of resentment.

“So then it’s to be a battle between us, is it?” she demanded, looking him straight in the face.

“A battle? How?”

“To see which one gets the evidence.”

“We’ve got to get it—that’s all,” he answered grimly.

In an instant she had resumed control of herself.

“I hope you succeed,” she said calmly. “Good afternoon.” And with a crisp nod she turned away.

Bruce’s action in calmly taking the case out of her hands, which was in effect an iteration of his statement that he had no confidence in her ability, stung her bitterly and for a space her wrath flamed high. But there were too many things to be done to give much time to mere resentment. She wrote the letter to the Chicago advertising agency, mailed it, then set out to find her father. At the jail she was told that he had been released and had left for Blake’s. There she found him. He came out into the hall, kissed her warmly, then hurried back into the bedroom. Katherine, glancing through the open door, saw him move swiftly about the old gray-haired woman, while Blake stood in strained silence looking on.

When her father had done all for Mrs. Blake he could do at that time, Katherine hurried him away to Elsie Sherman. He replaced the very willing Doctor Woods, who knew little about typhoid, and assumed charge of Elsie with all his unerring mastery of what to do. He gave her his very best skill, and he hovered about her with all the concern that the illness of his own child might have evoked, for she had been a warm favourite with him and the charges of her husband had in no degree lessened his regard. Whatever science and care and love could do for her, it all was certain to be done.

Within two hours after Blake had received Doctor Brenholtz’s telegram its contents had flashed about the town. Doctor West was besieged. The next day found him treating not only as many individual cases as his strength and the hours of the day allowed, but found him in command of the Board of Health’s fight against the plague, with all the rest of the city’s doctors accepting orders from him. All his long life of incessant study and experiment, all those long years when he had been laughed at for a fool and jeered at for a failure—all that time had been but an unconscious preparation for this great fight to save a stricken city. And the town, for all its hatred, for all the stain upon his name, as it watched this slight, white-haired man go so swiftly and gently and efficiently about his work, began to feel for him something akin to awe—began dimly to

feel that this old figure whom it had been their habit to scorn for near a generation was perhaps their greatest man.

While Katherine watched this fight against the fever with her father as its central figure, while she awaited in suspense some results of her advertising campaign, and while she tried to press forward the other details of her search for evidence, she could but keep her eyes upon the mayoralty campaign—for it was mounting to an ever higher climax of excitement. Bruce was fighting like a fury. The sensation created by his announcement of Blind Charlie's threatened treachery was a mere nothing compared to the uproar created when he informed the people, not directly, but by careful insinuation, that Blake was responsible for the epidemic.

Blake denied the charge with desperate energy and with all his power of eloquence; he declared that the epidemic was but another consequence of that supremest folly of mankind, public ownership. He was angrily supported by his party, his friends and his followers—but those followers were not so many as a few short weeks before. Passion was at its highest—so high that trustworthy forecasts of the election were impossible. But ten days before election it was freely talked about the streets, and even privately admitted by some of Blake's best friends, that nothing but a miracle could save him from defeat.

In these days of promise Bruce seemed to pour forth an even greater energy; and in his efforts he was now aided by Mr. Wilson, the Indianapolis lawyer, who was spending his entire time in Westville. Katherine caught in Bruce's face, when they passed upon the street, a gleam of triumph which he could not wholly suppress. She wondered, with a pang of jealousy, if he and Mr. Wilson were succeeding where she had failed—if all her efforts were to come to nothing—if her ambition to demonstrate to Bruce that she could do things was to prove a mere dream?

Toward noon one day, as she was walking along the Square homeward bound from Elsie Sherman's, she passed Bruce and Mr. Wilson headed for the stairway of the *Express Building*. Both bowed to her, then Katherine overheard Bruce say, "I'll be with you in a minute, Wilson," and the next instant he was at her side.

"Excuse me, Miss West," he said. "But we have just unearthed something which I think you should be the first person to learn."

"I shall be glad to hear it," she said in the cold, polite tone they reserved for one another.

“Let’s go over into the Court House yard.”

They silently crossed the street and entered the comparative seclusion of the yard.

“I suppose it is something very significant?” she asked.

“So significant,” he burst out, “that the minute the *Express* appears this afternoon Harrison Blake is a has-been!”

She looked at him quickly. The triumph she had of late seen gleaming in his face was now openly blazing there.

“You mean——”

“I mean that I’ve got the goods on him!”

“You—you have evidence?”

“The best sort of evidence!”

“That will clear my father?”

“Perhaps not directly. Indirectly, yes. But it will smash Blake to smithereens!”

She was happy on Bruce’s account, on her father’s, on the city’s, but for the moment she was sick upon her own.

“Is the nature of the evidence a secret?”

“The whole town will know it this afternoon. I asked you over here to tell you first. I have just secured a full confession from two of Blake’s accomplices.”

“Then you’ve discovered Doctor Sherman?” she exclaimed.

“Doctor Sherman?” He stared at her. “I don’t know what you mean. The two men are the assistant superintendent of the water-works and the engineer at the pumping-plant.”

“How did you get at them?”

“Wilson and I started out to cross-examine everybody who might be in the remotest way connected with the case. My suspicion against the two men was first aroused by their strained behaviour. I went——”

“Then it was you who made this discovery, not that—that other lawyer?”

“Yes, I was the first to tackle the pair, though Wilson has helped me. He’s a great lawyer, Wilson. We’ve gone at them relentlessly—with accusation, cross-examination, appeal; with the result that this morning both of them broke down and confessed that Blake had secretly paid them to do all that lay within their power to make the water-works a failure.”

They followed the path in silence for several moments, Katherine’s eyes upon the ground. At length she looked up. In Bruce’s face she plainly read what she had guessed to be an extra motive with him all along, a glowering determination to crush her, humiliate her, a determination to cut the ground from beneath her ambition by overturning Blake and clearing her father without her aid.

“And so,” she breathed, “you have made good all your predictions. You have succeeded and I have failed.”

For an instant his square face glowed upon her, exultant with triumph. Then he partially subdued the look.

“We won’t discuss that matter,” he said. “It’s enough to repeat what I once said, that Wilson is a crackerjack lawyer.”

“All the same, I congratulate you—and wish you every success,” she said; and as quickly thereafter as she could she made her escape, her heart full of the bitterness of personal defeat.

That afternoon the *Express*, in its largest type, in its editor’s highest-powered English, made its exposure of Harrison Blake. And that afternoon there was pandemonium in Westville. Violence might have been attempted upon Blake, but, fortunately for him, he had gone the night before to Indianapolis—on a matter of state politics, it was said.

Blake, however, was a man to fight to the last ditch. On the morning after the publication of the *Express*’s charges, the *Clarion* printed an indignant denial from him. That same morning Bruce was arrested on a charge of criminal libel, and that same day—the grand jury being in session—he was indicted. Blake’s attorney demanded that, since these charges had a very direct bearing upon the approaching election, the trial should take precedence over other cases and be heard immediately. To this Bruce eagerly agreed, for he desired nothing better than to demolish Blake in court, and the trial was fixed for five days before

election.

Katherine, going about, heard the people jeer at Blake's denial; heard them say that his demand for a trial was mere bravado to save his face for a time—that when the trial came he would never show up. She saw the former favourite of Westville become in an hour an object of universal abomination. And, on the other hand, she saw Bruce leap up to the very apex of popularity.

For Bruce's sake, for every one's sake but her own, she was rejoiced. But as for herself, she walked in the valley of humiliation, she ate of the ashes of bitterness. Swept aside by the onrush of events, feeling herself and her plans suddenly become futile, she decided to cease all efforts and countermand all orders. But she could not veto her plan concerning Doctor Sherman, for her money was spent and her advertisements were broadcast through the North. As for Mr. Manning, he stated that he had become so interested in the situation that he was going to stay on in Westville for a time to see how affairs came out.

On the day of the trial Katherine and the city had one surprise at the very start. Contrary to all predictions, Harrison Blake was in the court-room and at the prosecution's table. Despite all the judge, the clerk, and the sheriff could do to maintain order, there were cries and mutterings against him. Not once did he flinch, but sat looking straight ahead of him, or whispering to his private attorney or to the public prosecutor, Kennedy. He was a brave man. Katherine had known that.

Bruce, all confidence, recited on the witness stand how he had come by his evidence. Then the assistant superintendent told with most convincing detail how he had succumbed to Blake's temptation and done his bidding. Next, the engineer testified to the same effect.

The crowd lowered at Blake. Certainly matters looked blacker than ever for the one-time idol of the city.

But Blake sat unmoved. His calmness begat a sort of uneasiness in Katherine. When the engineer had completed his direct testimony, Kennedy arose, and following whispered suggestions from Blake, cross-questioned the witness searchingly, ever more searchingly, pursued him in and out, in and out, till at length, snap!—Katherine's heart stood still, and the crowd leaned forward breathless—snap, and he had caught the engineer in a contradiction!

Kennedy went after the engineer with rapid-fire questions that involved the

witness in contradiction on contradiction—that got him confused, then hopelessly tangled up—that then broke him down completely and drew from him a shamefaced confession. The fact was, he said, that Mr. Bruce, wanting campaign material, had privately come to him and paid him to make his statements. He had had no dealings with Mr. Blake whatever. He was a poor man—his wife was sick with the fever—he had needed the money—he hoped the court would be lenient with him—etc., etc. The other witness, recalled, confessed to the same story.

Amid a stunned court room, Bruce sprang to his feet.

“Lies! Lies!” he cried in a choking fury. “They’ve been bought off by Blake!”

“Silence!” shouted Judge Kellog, pounding his desk with his gavel.

“I tell you it’s trickery! They’ve been bought off by Blake!”

“Silence!” thundered the judge, and followed with a dire threat of contempt of court.

But already Mr. Wilson and Sheriff Nichols were dragging the struggling Bruce back into his chair. More shouts and hammering of gavels by the judge and clerk had partially restored to order the chaos begotten by this scene, when a bit of paper was slipped from behind into Bruce’s hand. He unfolded it with trembling fingers, and read in a disguised, back-hand scrawl:

“There’s still enough left of me to know what’s happened.”

That was all. But Bruce understood. Here was the handiwork and vengeance of Blind Charlie Peck. He sprang up again and turned his ireful face to where, in the crowd, sat the old politician.

“You—you——” he began.

But before he got further he was again dragged down into his seat. And almost before the crowd had had time fairly to regain its breath, the jury had filed out, had filed back in again, had returned its verdict of guilty, and Judge Kellog had imposed a sentence of five hundred dollars fine and sixty days in the county jail.

In all the crowd that looked bewildered on, Katherine was perhaps the only one who believed in Bruce’s cry of trickery. She saw that Blake, with Blind Charlie’s cunning back of him, had risked his all on one bold move that for a brief period

had made him an object of universal hatred. She saw that Bruce had fallen into a trap cleverly baited for him, saw that he was the victim of an astute scheme to discredit him utterly and remove him from the way.

As Blake left the Court House Katherine heard a great cheer go up for him; and within an hour the evidence of eye and ear proved to her that he was more popular than ever. She saw the town crowd about him to make amends for the injustice it considered it had done him. And as for Bruce, as he was led by Sheriff Nichols from the Court House toward the jail, she heard him pursued by jeers and hisses.

Katherine walked homeward from the trial, completely dazed by this sudden capsizing of all of Bruce's hopes—and of her own hopes as well, for during the last few days she had come to depend on Bruce for the clearing of her father. That evening, and most of the night, she spent in casting up accounts. As matters then stood, they looked desperate indeed. On the one hand, everything pointed to Blake's election and the certain success of his plans. On the other hand, she had gained no clue whatever to the whereabouts of Doctor Sherman; nothing had as yet developed in the scheme she had built about Mr. Manning; as for Mr. Stone, she had expected nothing from him, and all he had turned in to her was that he suspected secret relations between Blake and Peck. Furthermore, the man she loved—for yes, she loved him still—was in jail, his candidacy collapsed, the cause for which he stood a ruin. And last of all, the city, to the music of its own applause, was about to be colossally swindled.

A dark prospect indeed. But as she sat alone in the night, the cheers for Blake floating in to her, she desperately determined to renew her fight. Five days still remained before election, and in five days one might do much; during those five days her ships might still come home from sea. She summoned her courage, and gripped it fiercely. "I'll do my best! I'll do my best!" she kept breathing throughout the night. And her determination grew in its intensity as she realized the sum of all the things for which she fought, and fought alone.

She was fighting to save her father, she was fighting to save the city, she was fighting to save the man she loved.





## CHAPTER XXII

### THE LAST STAND

The next morning Katherine, incited by the desperate need of action, was so bold as to request Mr. Manning to meet her at Old Hosie's. She was fortunate enough to get into the office without being observed. The old lawyer, in preparation for the conference, had drawn his wrinkled, once green shade as far down as he dared without giving cause for suspicion, and before the window had placed a high-backed chair and thrown upon it a greenish, blackish, brownish veteran of a fall overcoat—thus balking any glances that might rove lazily upward to his office.

Old Hosie raised his lean figure from his chair and shook her hand, at first silently. He, too, was dazed by the collapse of Bruce's fortunes.

"Things certainly do look bad," he said slowly. "I never suspected that his case would suddenly stand on its head like that."

"Nor did I—though from the beginning I had an instinctive feeling that it was too good, too easy, to be true."

"And to think that after all we know the boy is right!" groaned the old man.

"That's what makes the whole affair so tantalizing. We know he is right—we know my father is innocent—we know the danger the city is in—we know Mr. Blake's guilt—we know just what his plans are. We know everything! But we have not one jot of evidence that would be believed by the public. The irony of it! To think, for all our knowledge, we can only look helplessly on and watch Mr. Blake succeed in everything."

Old Hosie breathed an imprecation that must have made his ancestors, asleep behind the old Quaker meeting-house down in Buck Creek, gasp in their grassy, cedar-shaded graves.

"All the same," Katherine added desperately, "we've got to half kill ourselves trying between now and election day!"

They subsided into silence. In nervous impatience Katherine awaited the

appearance of the pseudo-investor in run-down farms. He seemed a long time in coming, but the delay was all in her suspense, for as the Court House clock was tolling the appointed hour Mr. Manning, *alias* Mr. Hartsell, walked into the office. He was, as Katherine had once described him to Old Hosie, a quiet, reserved man with that confidence-inspiring amplitude in the equatorial regions commonly observable in bank presidents and trusted officials of corporations.

As he closed the door his subdued but confident dignity dropped from him and he warmly shook hands with Katherine, for this was their first meeting since their conference in New York six weeks before.

“You must know how very, very terrible our situation is,” Katherine rapidly began. “We’ve simply *got* to do something!”

“I certainly haven’t done much so far,” said Manning, with a rueful smile. “I’m sorry—but you don’t know how tedious my rôle’s been to me. To act the part of bait, and just lie around before the noses of the fish you’re after, and not get a bite in two whole weeks—that’s not my idea of exciting fishing.”

“I know. But the plan looked a good one.”

“It looked first-class,” conceded Manning. “And, perhaps——”

“With election only four days off, we’ve simply got to do something!” Katherine repeated. “If nothing else, let’s drop that plan, devise a new one, and stake our hopes on some wild chance.”

“Wait a minute,” said Manning. “I wouldn’t drop that plan just yet. I’ve gone two weeks without a bite, but—I’m not sure—remember I say I’m not sure—but I think that at last I may possibly have a nibble.”

“A nibble you say?” cried Katherine, leaning eagerly forward.

“At least, the cork bobbed under.”

“When?”

“Last night.”

“Last night? Tell me about it!”

“Well, of late I’ve been making my study of the water-works more and more obvious, and I’ve half suspected that I’ve been watched, though I was too

uncertain to risk raising any false hopes by sending you word about it. But yesterday afternoon Blind Charlie Peck—he’s been growing friendly with me lately—yesterday Blind Charlie invited me to have supper with him. The supper was in his private dining-room; just us two. I suspected that the old man was up to some game, and when I saw the cocktails and whiskey and wine come on, I was pretty sure—for you know, Miss West, when a crafty old politician of the Peck variety wants to steal a little information from a man, his regulation scheme is to get his man so drunk he doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

“I know. Go on!”

“I tried to beg off from the drinking. I told Mr. Peck I did not drink. I liked it, I said, but I could not carry it. A glass or two would put me under the table, so the only safe plan for me was to leave it entirely alone. But he pressed me—and I took one. And he pressed me again, and I took another—and another—and another—till I’d had five or——”

“But you should never have done it!” cried Katherine in alarm.

Manning smiled at her reassuringly.

“I’m no drinking man, but I’m so put together that I can swallow a gallon and then sign the pledge with as steady a hand as the president of the W. C. T. U. But after the sixth drink I must have looked just about right to Blind Charlie. He began to put cunning questions at me. Little by little all my secrets leaked out. The farm lands were only a blind. My real business in Westville was the water-works. There was a chance that the city might sell them, and if I could get them I was going to snap them up. In fact, I was going to make an offer to the city in a very few days. I had been examining the system closely; it wasn’t really in bad shape at all; it was worth a lot more than the people said; and I was ready, if I had to, to pay its full value to get it—even more. I had plenty of money behind me, for I was representing Mr. Seymour, the big New York capitalist.”

“Good! Good!” cried Katharine breathlessly. “How did he seem to take it?”

“I could see that he was stirred up, and I guessed that he was thinking big thoughts.”

“But did he say anything?”

“Not a word. Except that it was interesting.”

“Ah!” It was an exclamation of disappointment. Then she instantly added: “But of course he could not say anything until after he had talked it over with Mr. Blake. He’ll do that this morning—if he did not do it last night. You may be approached by them to-day.”

She stood up excitedly, and her brown eyes glowed. “After all, something may come of the plan!”

“It’s at least an opening,” said Manning.

“Yes. And let’s use it for all it’s worth. Don’t you think it would be best for you to go right back to your hotel, and keep yourself in sight, so Mr. Peck won’t have to lose a second in case he wants to talk to you again?”

“That’s what I had in mind.”

“And all day I’ll be either in my office, or at home, or at Mrs. Sherman’s. And the minute anything develops, send word to Mr. Hollingsworth and he’ll send word to me.”

“I’ll not waste a minute,” he assured her.

All day she waited with suppressed excitement for good news from Manning. But the only news was that there was no news. And so on the second day. And so on the third. Her hopes, that had flared so high, sunk by slow degrees to mere embers among the ashes. It appeared that the nibble, which had seemed but the preliminary to swallowing the bait, was after all no more than a nibble; that the fish had merely nosed the worm and swum away. In the meantime, while eaten up by the suspense of this inaction, she was witness to activity of the most strenuous variety. Never had she seen a man spring up into favour as did Harrison Blake. His campaign meetings were resumed the very night of Bruce’s conviction; the city crowded to them; the Blake Marching Club tramped the streets till midnight, with flaming torches, rousing the enthusiasm of the people with their shouts and campaign songs; and wherever Blake appeared upon the platform he was greeted by an uproar, and even when he appeared by daylight, when men’s spirits are more sedate, his progress through the streets was a series of miniature ovations.

As for Bruce, Katherine saw his power and position crumble so swiftly that she could hardly see them disappear. The structure of a tremendous future had stood one moment imposingly before her eyes. Presto, and it was no more! The

sentiment he had roused in favour of public ownership, and against the regime of Blake, was as a thing that had never been. With him in jail, his candidacy was but the ashes that are left by a conflagration—though, to be sure, since the ballots were already printed, it was too late to remove his name. He was a thing to be cursed at, jeered at. He had suddenly become a little lower than nobody, a little less than nothing.

And as for his paper, when Katherine looked at it it made her sick at heart. Within a day it lost a third in size. Advertisers no longer dared, perhaps no longer cared, to give it patronage. Its news and editorial character collapsed. This last she could hardly understand, for Billy Harper was in charge, and Bruce had often praised him to her as a marvel of a newspaper man. But one evening, when she was coming home late from Elsie Sherman's and hurrying through the crowd of Main Street, Billy Harper lurched against her. The next day, with a little adroit inquiry, she learned that Harper, freed from Bruce's restraining influence, and depressed by the general situation, was drinking constantly. It required no prophetic vision for Katherine to see that, if things continued as they now were going, on the day Bruce came out of jail he would find the *Express*, which he had lifted to power and a promise of prosperity, had sunk into a disrepute and a decay from which even so great an energy as his could not restore it.

Since there was so little she could do elsewhere, Katherine was at the Shermans' several times a day, trying in unobtrusive ways to aid the nurse and Doctor Sherman's sister. Miss Sherman was a spare, silent woman of close upon forty, with rather sharp, determined features. Despite her unloveliness, Katherine respected her deeply, for in other days Elsie had told her sister-in-law's story. Miss Sherman and her brother were orphans. To her had been given certain plain virtues, to him all the graces of mind and body. She was a country school-teacher, and it had been her hard work, her determination, her penny-counting economy, that had saved her talented brother from her early hardships and sent him through college. She had made him what he was; and beneath her stern exterior she loved him with that intense devotion a lonely, ingrowing woman feels for the object on which she has spent her life's thought and effort.

Whenever Katherine entered the sick chamber—they had moved Elsie's bed into the sitting-room because of its greater convenience and better air—her heart would stand still as she saw how white and wasted was her friend. At such a time she would recall with a choking keenness all of Elsie's virtues, each virtue increased and purified—her simplicity, her purity, her loyalty.

Several times Elsie came back from the brink of the Great Abyss, over which she so faintly hovered, and smiled at Katherine and spoke a few words—but only a few, for Doctor West allowed no more. Each time she asked, with fluttering trepidation, if any word had come from her husband; and each time at Katherine’s choking negative she would try to smile bravely and hide her disappointment.

On one of the last days of this period—it was the Sunday before election—Doctor West had said that either the end or a turn for the better must be close at hand. Katherine had been sitting long watching Elsie’s pale face and faintly rising bosom, when Elsie slowly opened her eyes. Elsie pressed her friend’s hand with a barely perceptible pressure and smiled with the faintest shadow of a smile.

“You here again, Katherine?” she breathed.

“Yes, dear.”

“Just the same dear Katherine!”

“Don’t speak, Elsie.”

She was silent a space. Then the wistful look Katherine had seen so often came into the patient’s soft gray eyes, and she knew what Elsie’s words were going to be before they passed her lips.

“Have you heard anything—from him?”

Katherine slowly shook her head.

Elsie turned her face away for a moment. A sigh fluttered out. Then she looked back.

“But you are still trying to find him?”

“We have done, and are doing, everything, dear.”

“I’m sure,” sighed Elsie, “that he would come if he only knew.”

“Yes—if he only knew.”

“And you will keep on—trying—to get him word?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Then perhaps—he may come yet.”

“Perhaps,” said Katherine, with hopeful lips. But in her heart there was no hope.

Elsie closed her eyes, and did not speak again. Presently Katherine went out into the level, red-gold sunlight of the waning November afternoon. The church bells, resting between their morning duty and that of the night, all were silent; over the city there lay a hush—it was as if the town were gathering strength for its final spasm of campaign activity on the morrow. There was nothing in that Sabbath calm to disturb the emotion of Elsie’s bedside, and Katherine walked slowly homeward beneath the barren maples, in that fearful, tremulous, yearning mood in which she had left the bedside of her friend.

In this same mood she reached home and entered the empty sitting-room. She was slowly drawing off her gloves when she perceived, upon the centre-table, a special delivery letter addressed to herself. She picked it up in moderate curiosity. The envelope was plain, the address was typewritten, there was nothing to suggest the identity of the sender. In the same moderate curiosity she unfolded the inclosure. Then her curiosity became excitement, for the letter bore the signature of Mr. Seymour.

“I have to-day received a letter from Mr. Harrison Blake of Westville,” Mr. Seymour wrote her, “of which the following is the text: ‘We have just learned that there is in our city a Mr. Hartsell who represents himself to be an agent of yours instructed to purchase the water-works of Westville. Before entering into any negotiations with him the city naturally desires to be assured by you that he is a representative of your firm. As haste is necessary in this matter, we request you to reply at once and by special delivery.’”

“Ah, I understand the delay now!” Katherine exclaimed. “Before making a deal with Mr. Manning, Mr. Blake and Mr. Peck wanted to be sure their man was what he said he was!”

“And now, Miss West,” Mr. Seymour wrote on, “since you have kept me in the dark as to the details of your plan, and as I have never heard of said Hartsell, I have not known just how to reply to your Mr. Blake. So I have had recourse to the vague brevity of a busy man, and have sent the following by the same mail that brings this to you: ‘Replying to your inquiry of the 3rd inst. I beg to inform you that I have a representative in Westville fully authorized to act for me in the matter of the water-works.’ I hope this reply is all right. Also there is a second hope, which is strong even if I try to keep it subdued; and that is that you will

have to buy the water-works in for me.”

From that instant Katherine’s mind was all upon her scheme. She was certain that Mr. Seymour’s reply was already in the hands of Blake and Peck, and that they were even then planning, or perhaps had already planned, what action they should take. At once she called Old Hosie up by telephone.

“I think it looks as though the ‘nibble’ were going to develop into a bite, and quick,” she said rapidly. “Get into communication with Mr. Manning and tell him to make no final arrangement with those parties till he sees me. I want to know what they offer.”

It was an hour later, and the early night had already fallen, when there was a ring at the West door, and Old Hosie entered, alone. Katharine quickly led the old lawyer into the parlour.

“Well?” she whispered.

“Manning has just accepted an invitation for an automobile ride this evening from Charlie Peck.”

Katherine suddenly gripped his hand.

“That may be a bite!”

The old man nodded with suppressed excitement.

“They were to set out at six. It’s five minutes to six now.”

Without a word Katherine crossed swiftly and opened the door an inch, and stood tensely waiting beside it. Presently, through the calm of the Sabbath evening, there started up very near the sudden buzzing of a cranked-up car. Then swiftly the buzzing faded away into the distance.

Katherine turned.

“It’s Mr. Blake’s car. They’ll all be at The Sycamores in half an hour. It’s a bite, certain! Get hold of Mr. Manning as soon as he comes back, and bring him here. The house will be darkened, but the front door will be unlocked. Come right in. Come as late as you please. You’ll find me waiting here in the parlour.”

The hours that followed were trying ones for Katherine. She sat about with her aunt till toward ten o’clock. Then her father returned from his last call, and soon



thereafter they all went to their rooms. Katherine remained upstairs till she thought her father and aunt were settled, then slipped down to the parlour, set the front door ajar, and sat waiting in the darkness. She heard the Court House clock with judicial slowness count off eleven o'clock—then after a long, long space, count off twelve. A few minutes later she heard Blake's car return, and after a time she heard the city clock strike one.

It was close upon two when soft steps sounded upon the porch and the front door opened. She silently shook hands with her two vague visitors.

"We didn't think it safe to come any sooner," explained Old Hosie in a whisper.

"You've been with them out at The Sycamores?" Katherine eagerly inquired of Manning.

"Yes. For a four hours' session."

"Well?"

"Well, so far it looks O. K."

In a low voice he detailed to Katherine how they had at first fenced with one another; how at length he had told them that he had a formal proposal to the city to buy the water-works all drawn up and that on the morrow he was going to present it—and that, furthermore, he would, if necessary, increase the sum he offered in that proposal to the full value of the plant. Blake and Peck, after a slow approach to the subject, in which they admitted that they also planned to buy the system, had suggested that, inasmuch as he was only an agent and there would be no profit in the purchase to him personally, he abandon his purpose. If he would do this they would make it richly worth his while. He had replied that this was such a different plan from that which he had been considering that he must have time to think it over and would give them his answer to-morrow. On which understanding the three had parted.

"I suppose it would hardly be practicable," said Katherine when he had finished, "to have a number of witnesses concealed at your place of meeting and overhear your conversation?"

"No, it would be mighty difficult to pull that off."

"And what's more," she commented, "Mr. Blake would deny whatever they said, and with his present popularity his words would carry more weight than that of

any half dozen witnesses we might get. At the best, our charges would drag on for months, perhaps years, in the courts, with in the end the majority of the people believing in him. With the election so near, we must have instantaneous results. We must use a means of exposing him that will instantly convince all the people.”

“That’s the way I see it,” agreed Manning.

“When did they offer to pay you, in case you agreed to sell out to them?”

“On the day they got control of the water-works. Naturally they didn’t want to pay me before, for fear I might break faith with them and buy in the system for Mr. Seymour.”

“Can’t you make them put their proposition in the form of an agreement, to be signed by all three of you?” asked Katherine.

“But mebbe they won’t consent to that,” put in Old Hosie.

“Mr. Manning will know how to bring them around. He can say, for example, that, unless he has such a written agreement, they will be in a position to drop him when once they’ve got what they want. He can say that unless they consent to sign some such agreement he will go on with his original plan. I think they’ll sign.”

“And if they do?” queried Old Hosie.

“If they do,” said Katherine, “we’ll have documentary evidence to show Westville that those two great political enemies, Mr. Blake and Mr. Peck, are secretly business associates—their business being a conspiracy to wreck the water-works and defraud the city. I think such a document would interest Westville.”

“I should say it would!” exclaimed Old Hosie.

They whispered on, excitedly, hopefully; and when the two men had departed and Katherine had gone up to her room to try to snatch a few hours’ sleep, she continued to dwell eagerly upon the plan that seemed so near of consummation. She tossed about her bed, and heard the Court House clock sound three, and then four. Then the heat of her excitement began to pass away, and cold doubts began to creep into her mind. Perhaps Blake and Peck would refuse to sign. And even if they did sign, she began to see this prospective success as a thing of lesser

magnitude. The agreement would prove the alliance between Blake and Peck, and would make clear that a conspiracy existed. It was good, but it was not enough. It fell short by more than half. It would not clear her father, though his innocence might be inferred, and it would not prove Blake's responsibility for the epidemic.

As she lay there staring wide-eyed into the gloom of the night, listening to the town clock count off the hours of her last day, she realized that what she needed most of all, far more than Manning's document even should he get it, was the testimony which she believed was sealed behind the lips of Doctor Sherman, whose present whereabouts God only knew.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### AT ELSIE'S BEDSIDE

The day before election, a day of hope deferred, had dragged slowly by and night had at length settled upon the city. Doctor West had the minute before come in from a long, dinnerless day of hastening from case to case, and now he, Katherine, and her aunt were sitting about the supper table. To Katherine's eye her father looked very weary and white and frail. The day-and-night struggle at scores of bedsides was sorely wearing him down.

As for Katherine, she was hardly less worn. She scarcely touched the food before her. The fears that always assail one at a crisis, now swarmed in upon her. With the election but a few hours distant, with no word as yet from Mr. Manning, she saw all her high plans coming to naught and saw herself overwhelmed with utter defeat. From without there dimly sounded the beginning of the ferment of the campaign's final evening; it brought to her more keenly that to-morrow the city was going to give itself over unanimously to be despoiled. Across the table, her father, pale and worried, was a reminder that, when his fight of the plague was completed, he must return to jail. Her mind flashed now and then to Bruce; she saw him in prison; she saw not only his certain defeat on the morrow, but she saw him crushed and ruined for life as far as a career in Westville was concerned; and though she bravely tried to master her feeling, the throbbing anguish with which she looked upon his fate was affirmation of how poignant and deep-rooted was her love.

And yet, despite these flooding fears, she clung with a dizzy desperation to hope, and to the determination to fight on to the last second of the last minute.

While swinging thus between despair and desperate hope, she was maintaining, at first somewhat mechanically to be sure, a conversation with her father, whom she had not seen since their early breakfast together.

"How does the fever situation seem to-night?" she asked.

"Much better," said Doctor West. "There were fewer new cases reported to-day than any day for a week."

“Then you are getting the epidemic under control?”

“I think we can at last say we have it thoroughly in hand. The number of new cases is daily decreasing, and the old cases are doing well. I don’t know of an epidemic of this size on record where the mortality has been so small.”

She came out of her preoccupation and breathlessly demanded:

“Tell me, how is Elsie Sherman? I could not get around to see her to-day.”

He dropped his eyes to his plate and did not answer.

“You mean she is no better?”

“She is very low.”

“But she still has a chance?”

“Yes, she has a chance. But that’s about all. The fever is at its climax. I think to-night will decide which it’s to be.”

“You are going to her again to-night?”

“Right after supper.”

“Then I’ll go with you,” said Katherine. “Poor Elsie! Poor Elsie!” she murmured to herself. Then she asked, “Have they had any word from Doctor Sherman?”

“I asked his sister this afternoon. She said they had not.”

They fell silent for a moment or two. Doctor West nibbled at his ham with a troubled air.

“There is one feature of the case I cannot approve of,” he at length remarked “Of course the Shermans are poor, but I do not think Miss Sherman should have impaired Elsie’s chances, such as they are, from motives of economy.”

“Impaired Elsie’s chances?” queried Katherine.

“And certainly she should not have done so without consulting me,” continued Doctor West.

“Done what?”

“Oh, I forgot I had not had a chance to tell you. When I made my first call this

morning I learned that Miss Sherman had discharged the nurse.”

“Discharged the nurse?”

“Yes. During the night.”

“But what for?”

“Miss Sherman said they could not afford to keep her.”

“But with Elsie so dangerously sick, this is no time to economize!”

“Exactly what I told her. And I said there were plenty of friends who would have been happy to supply the necessary money.”

“And what did she say?”

“Very little. She’s a silent, determined woman, you know. She said that even at such a time they could not accept charity.”

“But did you not insist upon her getting another nurse?”

“Yes. But she refused to have one.”

“Then who is looking after Elsie?”

“Miss Sherman.”

“Alone?”

“Yes, alone. She has even discharged old Mrs. Murphy, who came in for a few hours a day to clean up.”

“It seems almost incomprehensible!” ejaculated Katherine. “Think of running such a risk for the sake of a few dollars!”

“After all, Miss Sherman isn’t such a bad nurse,” Doctor West’s sense of justice prompted him to admit. “In fact, she is really doing very well.”

“All the same, it seems incomprehensible!” persisted Katherine. “For economy’s sake——”

She broke off and was silent a moment. Then suddenly she leaned across the table.

“You are sure she gave no other reason?”

“None.”

“And you believe her?”

“Why, you don’t think she would lie to me, do you?” exclaimed Doctor West.

“I don’t say that,” Katherine returned rapidly. “But she’s shrewd and close-mouthed. She might not have told you the whole truth.”

“But what could have been her real reason then?”

“Something besides the reason she gave. That’s plain.”

“But what is it? Why, Katherine,” her father burst out, half rising from his chair, “what’s the matter with you?”

Her eyes were glowing with excitement. “Wait! Wait!” she said quickly, lifting a hand.

She gazed down upon the table, her brow puckered with intense thought. Her father and her aunt stared at her in gathering amazement, and waited breathlessly till she should speak.

After a minute she glanced up at her father. The strange look in her face had grown more strange.

“You saw no one else there besides Miss Sherman?” she asked quickly.

“No.”

“Nor signs of any one?”

“No,” repeated the bewildered old man. “What are you thinking of, Katherine?”

“I don’t dare say it—I hardly dare think it!”

She pushed back her chair and arose. She was quivering all over, but she strove to command her agitation.

“As soon as you’re through supper, father, I’ll be ready to go to Elsie.”

“I’m through now.”

“Come on, then. Let’s not lose a minute!”

They hurried out and entered the carriage which, at the city’s charge, stood always waiting Doctor West’s requirements. “To Mrs. Sherman’s—quick!” Katherine ordered the driver, and the horse clattered away through the crisp November night.

Already people were streaming toward the centre of the town to share in the excitement of the campaign’s closing night. As the carriage passed the Square, Katherine saw, built against the Court House and brilliantly festooned with vari-coloured electric bulbs, the speakers’ stand from which Blake and others of his party were later to address the final mass-meeting of the campaign.

The carriage turned past the jail into Wabash Avenue, and a minute afterward drew up beside the Sherman cottage. Pulsing with the double suspense of her conjecture and of her concern for Elsie’s life, Katherine followed her father into the sick chamber. As they entered the hushed room the spare figure of Miss Sherman rose from a rocker beside the bed, greeted them with a silent nod, and drew back to give place to Doctor West.

Katherine moved slowly to the foot of the bed and gazed down. For a space, one cause of her suspense was swept out of her being, and all her concern was for the flickering life before her. Elsie lay with eyes closed, and breathing so faintly that she seemed scarcely to breathe at all. So pale, so wasted, so almost wraithlike was she as to suggest that when her spirit fled, if flee it must, nothing could be left remaining between the sheets.

As she gazed down upon her friend, hovering uncertainly upon life’s threshold, a tingling chill pervaded Katherine’s body. Since her mother’s loss in unremembering childhood, Death had been kind to her; no one so dear had been thus carried up to the very brink of the grave. All that had been sweet and strong in her friendship with Elsie now flooded in upon her in a mighty wave of undefined emotion. She was immediately conscious only of the wasted figure before her, and its peril, but back of consciousness were unformed memories of their girlhood together, of the inseparable intimacy of their young womanhood, and of that shy and tender time when she had been the confidante of Elsie’s courtship.

There was a choking at her throat, tears slipped down her cheeks, and there surged up a wild, wild wish, a rebellious demand, that Elsie might come safely through her danger.



But, presently, her mind reverted to the special purpose that had brought her hither. She studied the face of Miss Sherman, seeking confirmation of the conjecture that had so aroused her—studying also for some method of approaching Miss Sherman, of breaking down her guard, and gaining the information she desired. But she learned nothing from the expression of those spare, self-contained features; and she realized that the lips of the Sphinx would be easier to unlock than those of this loyal sister of a fugitive brother.

That her conjecture was correct, she became every instant more convinced. She sensed it in the stilled atmosphere of the house; she sensed it in the glances of cold and watchful hostility Miss Sherman now and then stole at her. She was wondering what should be her next step, when Doctor West, who had felt Elsie's pulse and examined the temperature chart, drew Miss Sherman back to near where Katherine stood.

“Still nothing from Doctor Sherman?” he whispered in grave anxiety.

“Nothing,” said Miss Sherman, looking straight into her questioner's eyes.

“Too bad, too bad!” sighed Doctor West. “He ought to be home!”

Miss Sherman let the first trace of feeling escape from her compressed being.

“But still there is a chance?” she asked quickly.

“A fighting chance. I think we shall know which it's to be within an hour.”

At these words Katherine heard from behind her ever so faint a sound, a sound that sent a thrill through all her nerves. A sound like a stifled groan. For a minute or more she did not move. But when Doctor West and Miss Sherman had gone back to their places and Doctor West had begun the final fight for Elsie's life, she slowly turned about. Before her was a door. Her heart gave a leap. When she had entered she had searched the room with a quick glance, and that door had then been closed. It now stood slightly ajar.

Some one within must have noiselessly opened it to hear Doctor West's decree upon the patient.

Swiftly and silently Katherine slipped through the door and locked it behind her. For a moment she stood in the darkness, striving to master her throbbing excitement.

At length she spoke.

“Will you please turn on the light, Doctor Sherman,” she said.

There was no answer; only a black and breathless silence.

“Please turn on the light, Doctor Sherman,” Katherine repeated. “I cannot, for I do not know where the electric button is.”

Again there was silence. Then Katherine heard something like a gasp. There was a click, and then the room, Doctor Sherman’s study, burst suddenly into light.

Behind the desk, one hand still upon the electric key, stood Doctor Sherman. He was very thin and very white, and was worn, wild-eyed and dishevelled. He was breathing heavily and he stared at Katherine with the defiance of a desperate creature brought at last to bay.

“What do you want?” he demanded huskily.

“A little talk with you,” replied Katherine, trying to speak calmly.

“You must excuse me. With Elsie so sick, I cannot talk.”

She stood very straight before him. Her eyes never left his face.

“We must talk just the same,” she returned. “When did you come home?”

“Last night.”

“Why did you not let your friends know of your return? All day, in fact for several days, they have been sending telegrams to every place where they could conceive your being.”

He did not answer.

“It looks very much as if you were trying to hide.”

Again he did not reply.

“It looks very much,” she steadily pursued, “as if your sister discharged the nurse and the servant in order that you might hide here in your own home without risk of discovery.”

Still he did not answer.

“You need not reply to that question, for the reply is obvious. I guessed the meaning of the nurse’s discharge as soon as I heard of it. I guessed that you were secretly hovering over Elsie, while all Westville thought you were hundreds of miles away. But tell me, how did you learn that Elsie was sick?”

He hesitated, then swallowed.

“I saw a notice of it in a little country paper.”

“Ah, I thought so.”

She moved forward and leaned across the desk. Their eyes were no more than a yard apart.

“Tell me,” she said quietly, “why did you slip into town by night? Why are you hiding in your own home?”

A tremor ran through his slender frame. With an effort he tried to take the upperhand.

“You must excuse me,” he said, with an attempt at sharp dignity. “I refuse to be cross-examined.”

“Then I will answer for you. The reason, Doctor Sherman, is that you have a guilty conscience.”

“That is not——”

“Do not lie,” she interrupted quickly. “You realize what you have done, you are afraid it may become public, you are afraid of the consequences to yourself—and that is why you slipped back in the dead of night and lie hidden like a fugitive in your own house.”

A spasm of agony crossed his face.

“For God’s sake, tell me what you want and leave me!”

“I want you to clear my father.”

“Clear your father?” he cried. “And how, if you please?”

“By confessing that he is innocent.”

“When he is guilty!”

“You know he is not.”

“He’s guilty—he’s guilty, I tell you! Besides,” he added, wildly, “don’t you see that if I proclaim him innocent I proclaim myself a perjured witness?”

She leaned a little farther across the desk.

“Is not that exactly what you are, Doctor Sherman?”

He shrank back as though struck. One hand went tremulously to his chin and he stared at her.

“No! No!” he burst out spasmodically. “It’s not so! I shall not admit it! Would you have me ruin myself for all time? Would you have me ruin Elsie’s future! Would you have me kill her love for me?”

“Then you will not confess?”

“I tell you there is nothing to confess!”

She gazed at him steadily a moment. Then she turned back to the door, softly unlocked and opened it. He started to rush through, but she raised a hand and stopped him.

“Just look,” she commanded in a whisper.

He stared through the open door. They could see Elsie’s white face upon the pillow, with the two dark braids beside it; and could see Doctor West hovering over her. He had not heard them, but Miss Sherman had, and she directed at Katherine a pale and hostile glance.

The young husband twisted his hands in agony.

“Oh, Elsie! Elsie!” he moaned.

Katherine closed the door, and turned again to Doctor Sherman.

“You have seen your work,” she said. “Do you still persist in your innocence?”

He drew a deep, shivering breath and shrank away behind his desk, but did not answer.

Katherine followed him.

“Do you know how sick your wife is?”

“I heard your father say.”

“She is swinging over eternity by a mere thread.” Katherine leaned across the desk and her eyes gazed with an even greater fixity into his. “If the thread snaps, do you know who will have broken it?”

“Don’t! Don’t!” he begged.

“Her own husband,” Katherine went on relentlessly.

A cry of agony escaped him.

“You saw that old man in there bending over her,” she pursued, “trying with all his skill, with all his love, to save her—to save her from the peril you have plunged her into—and with never a bitter feeling against you in his heart. If she lives, it will be because of him. And yet that old man is ruined and has a blackened reputation. I ask you, do you know who ruined him?”

“Don’t! Don’t!” he cried, and he sank a crumpled figure at his desk, and buried his face in his arms.

“Look up!” cried Katherine sternly.

“Wait!” he moaned. “Wait!”

She passed around the desk and firmly raised his shoulders.

“Look me in the eyes!”

He lifted a face that worked convulsively.

She stood accusingly before him. “Out with the truth!” she commanded in a rising voice. “In the presence of your wife, perhaps dying, and dying as the result of your act—in the presence of that old man, whom you have ruined with your word—do you still dare to maintain your innocence? Out with the truth, I say!”

He sprang to his feet.

“I can stand it no longer!” he gasped in an agony that went to Katherine’s heart. “It’s killing me! It’s been tearing me apart for months! What I have suffered—oh, what I have suffered! I’ll tell you all—all! Oh, let me get it off my soul!”

The desperation of his outburst, the sight of his fine face convulsed with uttermost agony and repentance, worked a sudden revulsion in Katherine’s heart.

All her bitterness, her momentary sternness, rushed out of her, and there she was, quivering all over, hot tears in her eyes, gripping the hands of Elsie's husband.

"I'm so glad—not only for father's sake—but for your sake," she cried chokingly.

"Let me tell you at once! Let me get it out of myself!"

"First sit down," and she gently pressed him back into his chair and drew one up to face him. "And wait for a moment or two, till you feel a little calmer."

He bowed his head into his hands, and for a space breathed deeply and tremulously. Katherine stood waiting. Through the night sounded the brassy strains of "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Back at the Court House Blake's party was opening its great mass-meeting.

"I'm a coward—a coward!" Doctor Sherman groaned at length into his hands. And in a voice of utmost contrition he went on and told how, to gain money for the proper care of Elsie, he had been drawn into gambling in stocks; how he had made use of church funds to save himself in a falling market, and how this church money had, like his own, been swallowed down by Wall Street; how Blake had discovered the embezzlement, for the time had saved him, but later by threat of exposure had driven him to play the part he had against Doctor West.

"You must make this statement public, instantly!" Katherine exclaimed when he had finished.

He shrank back before that supreme humiliation. "Let me do it later—please, please!" he besought her.

"A day's delay will be——" She caught his arm. "Listen!" she commanded.

Both held their breath. Through the night came the stirring music of "The Star Spangled Banner."

"What is that?" he asked.

"The great rally of Mr. Blake's party at the Court House." Her next words drove in. "To-morrow Mr. Blake is going to capture the city, and be in position to rob it. And all because of your act, Doctor Sherman!"

"You are right, you are right!" he breathed.

She held out a pen to him.

“You must write your statement at once.”

“Yes, yes,” he cried, “only let it be short now. I’ll make it in full later.”

“You need write only a summary.”

He seized the pen and dipped it into the ink and for a moment held it shaking over a sheet of paper.

“I cannot shape it—the words won’t come.”

“Shall I dictate it then?”

“Do! Please do!”

“You are willing to confess everything?”

“Everything!”

Katherine stood thinking for a moment at his side.

“Ready, then. Write, ‘I embezzled funds from my church; Mr. Blake found me out, and replaced what I had taken, with no one being the wiser. Later, by the threat of exposing me if I refused, he compelled me to accuse Doctor West of accepting a bribe and still later he compelled me to testify in court against Doctor West. Mr. Blake’s purpose in so doing was to remove Doctor West from his position, ruin the water-works, and buy them in at a bargain. I hereby confess and declare, of my own free will, that I have been guilty of lying and of perjury.’ Do you want to say that?”

“Yes! Yes!”

“And I further confess and declare that Dr. David West is innocent in every detail of the charges made against him. Signed, Harold Sherman.”

He dropped his pen and sprang up.

“And now may I go in to Elsie?”

“You may.”

He hurried noiselessly across the room and through the door. Katherine, picking up the precious paper she had worked so many months to gain, followed him.



Miss Sherman saw them come in, but remained silent. Doctor West was bending over Elsie and did not hear their entrance.

Doctor Sherman tiptoed to the bedside, and stood gazing down, his breath held, hardly less pale than the soft-sleeping Elsie herself. Presently Doctor West straightened up and perceived the young minister. He started, then held out his hand.

“Why, Doctor Sherman!” he whispered eagerly. “I’m so glad you’ve come at last!”

The younger man drew back.

“You won’t be willing to shake hands with me—when you know.” Then he took a quick half step forward. “But tell me,” he breathed, “is there—is there any hope?”

“I dare not speak definitely yet—but I think she is going to live.”

“Thank God!” cried the young man.

Suddenly he collapsed upon the floor and embraced Doctor West about the knees, and knelt there sobbing out broken bits of sentences.

“Why—why,” stammered Doctor West in amazement, “what does this mean?”

Katherine moved forward. Her voice quavered, partly from joy, partly from pity for the anguished figure upon the floor.

“It means you are cleared, father! This will explain.” And she gave him Doctor Sherman’s confession.

The old man read it, then passed a bewildered hand across his face.

“I—I don’t understand this!”

“I’ll explain it later,” said Katherine.

“Is—is this true?” It was to the young minister that Doctor West spoke.

“Yes. And more. I can’t ask you to forgive me!” sobbed Doctor Sherman. “It’s beyond forgiveness! But I want to thank you for saving Elsie. At least you’ll let me thank you for that!”

“What I have done here has been only my duty as a physician,” said Doctor West gently. “As for the other matter”—he looked the paper through, still with bewilderment—“as for that, I’m afraid I am not the chief sufferer,” he said slowly, gently. “I have been under a cloud, it is true, and I won’t deny that it has hurt. But I am an old man, and it doesn’t matter much. You are young, just beginning life. Of us two you are the one most to be pitied.”

“Don’t pity me—please!” cried the minister. “I don’t deserve it!”

“I’m sorry—so sorry!” Doctor West shook his head. Apparently he had forgotten the significance of this confession to himself. “I have always loved Elsie, and I have always admired you and been proud of you. So if my forgiveness means anything to you, why I forgive you with all my heart!”

A choking sound came from the bowed figure, but no words. His embracing arms fell away from Doctor West. He knelt there limply, his head bowed upon his bosom. There was a moment of breathless silence. In the background Miss Sherman stood looking on, white, tense, dry-eyed.

Doctor Sherman turned slowly, fearfully, toward the bed.

“But, Elsie,” he whispered in a dry, lost voice. “It’s all bad—but that’s the worst of all. When she knows, she never can forgive me!”

Katherine laid a hand upon his shoulder.

“If you think that, then you don’t know Elsie. She will be pained, but she loves you with all her soul; she would forgive you anything so long as you loved her, and she would follow you through every misery to the ends of the world.”

“Do you think so?” he breathed; and then he crept to the bed and buried his face upon it.

Katherine looked down upon him for a moment. Then her own concerns began flooding back upon her. She realized that she had not yet won the fight. She had only gained a weapon.

“I must go now,” she whispered to her father, taking the paper from his hand.

Throbbing with returned excitement, she hurried out to the dimly comprehended, desperate effort that lay before her.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### BILLY HARPER WRITES A STORY

As Katherine crossed the porch and went down the steps she saw, entering the yard, a tall, square-hatted apparition.

“Is that you, Miss Katherine?” it called softly to her.

“Yes, Mr. Hollingsworth.”

“I was looking for you.” He turned and they walked out of the yard together. “I went to your house, and your aunt told me you were here. I’ve got it!” he added excitedly.

“Got what?”

“The agreement!”

She stopped short and seized his arm.

“You mean between Blake, Peck, and Manning?”

“Yes. I’ve got it!”

“Signed?”

“All signed!” And he slapped the breast pocket of his old frock-coat.

“Let me see it! Please!”

He handed it to her, and by the light of a street lamp she glanced it through.

“Oh, it’s too good to believe!” she murmured exultantly. “Oh, oh!” She thrust it into her bosom, where it lay beside Doctor Sherman’s confession. “Come, we must hurry!” she cried. And with her arm through his they set off in the direction of the Square.

“When did Mr. Manning get this?” she asked, after a moment.

“I saw him about an hour ago. He had then just got it.”

“It’s splendid! Splendid!” she ejaculated. “But I have something, too!”

“Yes?” queried the old man.

“Something even better.” And as they hurried on she told him of Doctor Sherman’s confession.

Old Hosie burst into excited congratulations, but she quickly checked him.

“We’ve no time now to rejoice,” she said. “We must think how we are going to use these statements—how we are going to get this information before the people, get it before them at once, and get it before them so they must believe it.”

They walked on in silent thought. From the moment they had left the Shermans’ gate the two had heard a tremendous cheering from the direction of the Square, and had seen a steady, up-reaching glow, at intervals brilliantly bespangled by rockets and roman candles. Now, as they came into Main Street, they saw that the Court House yard was jammed with an uproarious multitude. Within the speakers’ stand was throned the Westville Brass Band; enclosing the stand in an imposing semicircle was massed the Blake Marching Club, in uniforms, their flaring torches adding to the illumination of the festoons of incandescent bulbs; and spreading fanwise from this uniformed nucleus it seemed that all of Westville was assembled—at least all of Westville that did not watch at fevered bedsides.

At the moment that Katherine and Old Hosie, walking along the southern side of Main Street, came opposite the stand, the first speaker concluded his peroration and resumed his seat. There was an outburst of “Blake! Blake! Blake!” from the enthusiastic thousands; but the Westville Brass Band broke in with the chorus of “Marching Through Georgia.” The stirring thunder of the band had hardly died away, when the thousands of voices again rose in cries of “Blake! Blake! Blake!”

The chairman with difficulty quieted the crowd, and urged them to have patience, as all the candidates were going to speak, and Blake was not to speak till toward the last. Kennedy was the next orator, and he told the multitude, with much flinging heavenward of loose-jointed arms, what an unparalleled administration the officers to be elected on the morrow would give the city, and how first and foremost it would be their purpose to settle the problem of the water-works in such a manner as to free the city forever from the dangers of

another epidemic such as they were now experiencing. As supreme climax to his speech, he lauded the ability, character and public spirit of Blake till superlatives could mount no higher.

When he sat down the crowd went well-nigh mad. But amid the cheering for the city's favourite, some one shouted the name of Doctor West and with it coupled a vile epithet. At once Doctor West's name swept through the crowd, hissed, jeered, cursed. This outbreak made clear one ominous fact. The enthusiasm of the multitude was not just ordinary, election-time enthusiasm. Beneath it was smouldering a desire of revenge for the ills they had suffered and were suffering—a desire which at a moment might flame up into the uncontrollable fury of a mob.

Katherine clutched Old Hosie's arm.

“Did you hear those cries against my father?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I know now what I shall do!”

He saw that her eyes were afire with decision.

“What?”

“I am going across there, watch my chance, slip out upon the speakers' stand, and expose and denounce Mr. Blake before Mr. Blake's own audience!”

The audacity of the plan for a moment caught Old Hosie's breath. Then its dramatic quality fired his imagination.

“Gorgeous!” he exclaimed.

“Come on!” she cried.

She started across the street, with Old Hosie at her heels. But before she reached the opposite curb she paused, and turned slowly back.

“What's the matter?” asked Old Hosie.

“It won't do. The people on the stand would pull me down before I got started speaking. And even if I spoke, the people would not believe me. I have got to put this evidence”—she pressed the documents within her bosom—“before their very eyes. No, we have got to think of some other way.”

By this time they were back in the seclusion of the doorway of the *Express* Building, where they had previously been standing. For several moments the hoarse, vehement oratory of a tired throat rasped upon their heedless ears. Once or twice Old Hosie stole a glance at Katherine's tensely thoughtful face, then returned to his own meditation.

Presently she touched him on the arm. He looked up.

"I have it this time!" she said, with the quiet of suppressed excitement.

"Yes?"

"We're going to get out an extra!"

"An extra?" he exclaimed blankly.

"Yes. Of the *Express*!"

"An extra of the *Express*?"

"Yes. Get it out before this crowd scatters, and in it reproductions of these documents!"

He stared at her. "Son of Methuselah!" Then he whistled. Then his look became a bit strange, and there was a strange quality to his voice when he said:

"So you are going to give Arnold Bruce's paper the credit of the exposure?"

His tone told her the meaning that lay behind his words. He had known of the engagement, and he knew that it was now broken. She flushed.

"It's the best way," she said shortly.

"But you can't do it alone!"

"Of course not." Her voice began to gather energy. "We've got to get the *Express* people here at once—and especially Mr. Harper. Everything depends on Mr. Harper. He'll have to get the paper out."

"Yes! Yes!" said Old Hosie, catching her excitement.

"You look for him here in this crowd—and, also, if you can see to it, send some one to get the foreman and his people. I'll look for Mr. Harper at his hotel. We'll meet here at the office."

With that they hurried away on their respective errands. Arrived at the National House, where Billy Harper lived, Katherine walked into the great bare office and straight up to the clerk, whom the mass-meeting had left as the room's sole occupant.

"Is Mr. Harper in?" she asked quickly.

The clerk, one of the most prodigious of local beaux, was startled by this sudden apparition.

"I—I believe he is."

"Please tell him at once that I wish to see him."

He fumbled the white wall of his lofty collar with an embarrassed hand.

"Excuse me, Miss West, but the fact is, I'm afraid he can't see you."

"Give him my name and tell him I simply *must* see him."

The clerk's embarrassment waxed greater.

"I—I guess I should have said it the other way around," he stammered. "I'm afraid you won't want to see him."

"Why not?"

"The fact is—he's pretty much cut up, you know—and he's been so worried that—that—well, the plain fact is," he blurted out, "Mr. Harper has been drinking."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"Much?"

"Well—I'm afraid quite a little."

"But he's here?"

"He's in the bar-room."

Katherine's heart had been steadily sinking.

"I must see him anyhow!" she said desperately. "Please call him out!"

The clerk hesitated, in even deeper embarrassment. This affair was quite without precedent in his career.

“You must call him out—this second! Didn’t you hear me?”

“Certainly, certainly.”

He came hastily from behind his desk and disappeared through a pair of swinging wicker doors. After a moment he reappeared, alone, and his manner showed a degree of embarrassment even more acute.

Katherine crossed eagerly to meet him.

“You found Mr. Harper?”

“Yes.”

“Well?”

“I couldn’t make him understand. And even if I could, he’s—he’s—well,” he added with a painful effort, “he’s in no condition for you to talk to, Miss West.”

Katherine gazed whitely at the clerk for a moment. Then without a word she stepped by him and passed through the wicker door. With a glance she took in the garishly lighted room—its rows of bottles, its glittering mirrors, its white-aproned bartender, its pair of toppers whose loyalty to the bar was stronger than the lure of oratory and music at the Square. And there at a table, his head upon his arms, sat the loosely hunched body of him who was the foundation of all her present hopes.

She moved swiftly across the sawdusted floor and shook the acting editor by the shoulder.

“Mr. Harper!” she called into his ear.

She shook him again, and again she called his name.

“Le’ me ’lone,” he grunted thickly. “Wanter sleep.”

She was conscious that the two toppers had paused in mid-drink and were looking her way with a grinning, alcoholic curiosity. She shook the editor with all her strength.

“Mr. Harper!” she called fiercely.



“G’way!” he mumbled. “’M busy. Wanter sleep.”

Katherine gazed down at the insensate mass in utter hopelessness. Without him she could do nothing, and the precious minutes were flying. Through the night came a rumble of applause and fast upon it the music of another patriotic air.

In desperation she turned to the bartender.

“Can’t you help me rouse him?” she cried. “I’ve simply *got* to speak to him!”

That gentleman had often been appealed to by frantic women as against customers who had bought too liberally. But Katherine was a new variety in his experience. There was a great deal too much of him about the waist and also beneath the chin, but there was good-nature in his eyes, and he came from behind his counter and bore himself toward Katherine with a clumsy and ornate courtesy.

“Don’t see how you can, Miss. He’s been hittin’ an awful pace lately. You see for yourself how far gone he is.”

“But I must speak to him—I must! Surely there is some extreme measure that would bring him to his senses!”

“But, excuse me; you see, Miss, Mr. Harper is a reg’lar guest of the hotel, and I wouldn’t dare go to extremes. If I was to make him mad——”

“I’ll take all the blame!” she cried. “And afterward he’ll thank you for it!”

The bartender scratched his thin hair.

“Of course, I want to help you, Miss, and since you put it that way, all right. You say I can go the limit?”

“Yes! Yes!”

The bartender retired behind his bar and returned with a pail of water. He removed the young editor’s hat.

“Stand back, Miss; it’s ice cold,” he said; and with a swing of his pudgy arms he sent the water about Harper’s head, neck, and upper body.

The young fellow staggered up with a gasping cry. His blinking eyes saw the bartender, with the empty pail. He reached for the tumbler before him.

“Damn you, Murphy!” he growled. “I’ll pay you——”

But Katherine stepped quickly forward and touched his dripping sleeve.

“Mr. Harper!” she said.

He slowly turned his head. Then the hand with the upraised tumbler sank to the table, and he stared at her.

“Mr. Harper,” she said sharply, slowly, trying to drive her words into his dulled brain, “I’ve got to speak to you! At once!”

He continued to blink at her stupidly. At length his lips opened.

“Miss West,” he said thickly.

She shook him fiercely.

“Pull yourself together! I’ve got to speak to you!”

At this moment Mr. Murphy, who had gone once more behind his bar, reappeared bearing a glass. This he held out to Harper.

“Here, Billy, put this down. It’ll help straighten you up.”

Harper took the glass in a trembling hand and swallowed its contents.

“And now, Miss,” said the bartender, putting Harper’s dry hat on him, “the thing to do is to get him out in the cold air, and walk him round a bit. I’d do it for you myself,” he added gallantly, “but everybody’s down at the Square and there ain’t no one here to relieve me.”

“Thank you very much, Mr. Murphy.”

“It’s nothing at all, Miss,” said he with a grandiloquent gesture of a hairy, bediamonded hand. “Glad to do it.”

She slipped her arm through the young editor’s.

“And now, Mr. Harper, we must go.”

Billy Harper vaguely understood the situation and there was a trace of awakening shame in his husky voice.

“Are you sure—you want to be seen with me—like this?”

“I must, whether I want to or not,” she said briefly; and she led him through the side door out into the frosty night.

The period that succeeded will ever remain in Katherine’s mind as matchless in her life for agonized suspense. She was ever crying out frantically to herself, why did this man she led have to be in such a condition at this the time when he was needed most? While she rapidly walked her drenched and shivering charge through the deserted back streets, the enthusiasm of Court House Square reverberated maddeningly in her ears. She realized how rapidly time was flying—and yet, aflame with desire for action as she was, all she could do was to lead this brilliant, stupefied creature to and fro, to and fro. She wondered if she would be able to bring him to his senses in time to be of service. To her impatience, which made an hour of every moment, it seemed she never would. But her hope was all on him, and so doggedly she kept him going.

Presently he began to lurch against her less heavily and less frequently; and soon, his head hanging low in humiliation, he started shiveringly to mumble out an abject apology. She cut him short.

“We’ve no time for apologies. There’s work to be done. Is your head clear enough to understand?”

“I think so,” he said humbly, albeit somewhat thickly.

“Listen then! And listen hard!”

Briefly and clearly she outlined to him her discoveries and told him of the documents she had just secured. She did not realize it, but this recital of hers was, for the purpose of sobering him, better far than a douche of ice-water, better far than walking in the tingling air. She was appealing to, stimulating, the most sensitive organ of the born newspaper man, his sense of news. Before she was through he had come to a pause beneath a sputtering arc light, and was interrupting her with short questions, his eyes ablaze with excitement.

“God!” he ejaculated when she had finished, “that would make the greatest newspaper story that ever broke loose in this town!”

She trembled with an excitement equal to his own.

“And I want you to make it into the greatest newspaper story that ever broke loose in this town!”

“But to-morrow the voting——”

“There’s no to-morrow about it! We’ve got to act to-night. You must get out an extra of the *Express*.”

“An extra of the *Express*!”

“Yes. And it must be on the streets before that mass-meeting breaks up.”

“Oh, my God, my God!” Billy whispered in awe to himself, forgetting how cold he was as his mind took in the plan. Then he started away almost on a run. “We’ll do it! But first, we’ve got to get the press-room gang.”

“I’ve seen to that. I think we’ll find them waiting at the office.”

“You don’t say!” ejaculated Billy. “Miss West, to-morrow, when there’s more time, I’m going to apologize to you, and everybody, for——”

“If you get out this extra, you won’t need to apologize to anybody.”

“But to-night, if you’ll let me,” continued Billy, “I want you to let me say that you’re a wonder!”

Katherine let this praise go by unheeded, and as they hurried toward the Square she gave him details she had omitted in her outline. When they reached the *Express* office they found Old Hosie, who told them that the foreman and the mechanical staff were in the press-room. A shout from Billy down the stairway brought the foreman running up.

“Do you know what’s doing, Jake?” cried Billy.

“Yes. Mr. Hollingsworth told me.”

“Everything ready?”

“Sure, Billy. We’re waiting for your copy.”

“Good! First of all get these engraved.” He excitedly handed the foreman Katherine’s two documents. “Each of ’em three columns wide. We’ll run ’em on the front page. And, Jake, if you let those get lost, I’ll shoot you so full of holes your wife’ll think she’s married to a screen door! Now chase along with you!”

Billy threw off his drenched coat, slipped into an old one hanging on a hook, dropped into a chair before a typewriter, ran in a sheet of paper, and without an

instant's hesitation began to rattle off the story—and Katherine, in a sort of fascination, stood gazing at that worth-while spectacle, a first-class newspaperman in full action.

But suddenly he gave a cry of dismay and his arms fell to his sides.

“My mind sees the story all right,” he groaned. “I don’t know whether it’s that ice-water or the drink, but my arms are so shaky I can’t hit the keys straight.”

On the instant Katherine had him out of the chair and was in his place.

“I studied typewriting along with my law,” she said rapidly. “Dictate it to me on the machine.”

There was not a word of comment. At once Billy began talking, and the keys began to whir beneath Katherine’s hands. The first page finished, Billy snatched it from her, gave a roar of “Copy!” glanced it through with a correcting pencil, and thrust it into the hands of an in-rushing boy.

As the boy scuttled away, a thunderous cheering arose from the Court House yard—applause that outsounded a dozen-fold all that had gone before.

“What’s that?” asked Katherine of Old Hosie, who stood at the window looking down upon the Square.

“It’s Blake, trying to speak. They’re giving him the ovation of his life!”

Katherine’s face set. “H’m!” said Billy grimly, and plunged again into his dictation. Now and then the uproar that followed a happy phrase of Blake almost drowned the voice of Billy, now and then Old Hosie from his post at the window broke in with a sentence of description of the tumultuous scene without; but despite these interruptions the story rattled swiftly on. Again and again Billy ran to the sink at the back of the office and let the clearing water splash over his head; his collar was a shapeless rag; he had to keep thrusting his dripping hair back from his forehead; his slight, chilled body was shivering in every member; but the story kept coming, coming, coming, a living, throbbing creation from his thin and twitching lips.

As Katherine’s flying hands set down the words, she thrilled as though this story were a thing entirely new to her. For Billy Harper, whatever faults inheritance or habit had fixed upon him, was a reporter straight from God. His trained mind had instantly seized upon and mastered all the dramatic values of the

complicated story, and his English, though crude and rough-and-tumble from his haste, was vivid passionate, rousing. He told how Doctor West was the victim of a plot, a plot whose great victim was the city and people of Westville, and this plot he outlined in all its details. He told of Doctor Sherman's part, at Blake's compulsion. He told of the secret league between Blake and Peck. He declared the truth of the charges for which Bruce was then lying in the county jail. And finally—though this he did at the beginning of his story—he drove home in his most nerve-twanging words the fact that Blake the benefactor, Blake the applauded, was the direct cause of the typhoid epidemic.

As a fresh sheet was being run into the machine toward the end of the story there was another tremendous outburst from the Square, surpassing even the one of half an hour before.

"Blake's just finished his speech," called Old Hosie from the window. "The crowd wants to carry him on their shoulders."

"They'd better hurry up; this is one of their last chances!" cried Billy.

Then he saw the foreman enter with a look of concern. "Any thing wrong, Jake?"

"One of the linotype men has skipped out," was the answer.

"Well, what of that?" said Harper. "You've got one left."

"It means that we'll be delayed in getting out the paper. I hadn't noticed it before, but Grant's been gone some time. We're quite a bit behind you, and Simmons alone can't begin to handle that copy as fast as you're sending it down."

"Do the best you can," said Billy.

He started at the dictation again. Then he broke off and called sharply to the foreman:

"Hold on, Jake. D'you suppose Grant slipped out to give the story away?"

"I don't know. But Grant was a Blake man."

Billy swore under his breath.

"But he hadn't seen the best part of the story," said the foreman. "I'd given him

only that part about Blake and Peck.”

“Well, anyhow, it’s too late for him to hurt us any,” said Billy, and once more plunged into the dictation.

Fifteen minutes later the story was finished, and Katherine leaned back in her chair with aching arms, while Billy wrote a lurid headline across the entire front page. With this he rushed down into the composing-room to give orders about the make-up. When he returned he carried a bunch of long strips.

“These are the proofs of the whole thing, documents and all, except the last part of the story,” he said. “Let’s see if they’ve got it all straight.”

He laid the proofs on Katherine’s desk and was drawing a chair up beside her, when the telephone rang.

“Who can want to talk to us at such an hour?” he impatiently exclaimed, taking up the receiver.

“Hello! Who’s this?... What!... All right. Hold the wire.”

With a surprised look he pushed the telephone toward Katherine.

“Somebody to talk to you,” he said.

“To talk to me!” exclaimed Katherine. “Who?”

“Harrison Blake,” said Billy.



## CHAPTER XXV

### KATHERINE FACES THE ENEMY

Katherine took up the receiver in tremulous hands.

“Hello! Is this Mr. Blake?”

“Yes,” came a familiar voice over the wire. “Is this Miss West?”

“Yes. What is it?”

“I have a matter which I wish to discuss with you immediately.”

“I am engaged for this evening,” she returned, as calmly as she could. “If to-morrow you still desire to see me, I can possibly arrange it then.”

“I must see you to-night—at once!” he insisted. “It is a matter of the utmost importance. Not so much to me as to you,” he added meaningly.

“If it is so important, then suppose you come here,” she replied.

“I cannot possibly do so. I am bound here by a number of affairs. I have anticipated that you would come, and have sent my car for you. It will be there in two minutes.”

Katherine put her hand over the mouthpiece, and repeated Blake’s request to Old Hosie and Billy Harper.

“What shall I do?” she asked.

“Tell him to go to!” said Billy promptly. “You’ve got him where you want him. Don’t pay any more attention to him.”

“I’d like to know what he’s up to,” mused Old Hosie.

“And so would I,” agreed Katherine, thoughtfully. “I can’t do anything more here; he can’t hurt me; so I guess I’ll go.”

She removed her hand from the mouthpiece and leaned toward it.



“Where are you, Mr. Blake?”

“At my home.”

“Very well. I am coming.”

She stood up.

“Will you come with me?” she asked Old Hosie.

“Of course,” said the old lawyer with alacrity. And then he chuckled. “I’d like to see how the Senator looks to-night!”

“I’ll just take these proofs along,” she said, thrusting them inside her coat.

The next instant she and Old Hosie were hurrying down the stairway. As they came into the street the Westville Brass Band blew the last notes of “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean,” out of cornets and trombones; the great crowd, intoxicated with enthusiasm, responded with palm-blistering applause; and then the candidate for president of the city council arose to make his oratorical contribution. He had got no further than his first period when Blake’s automobile glided up before the *Express* office, and at once Katherine and Old Hosie stepped into the tonneau.

They sped away from this maelstrom of excitement into the quiet residential streets, Katherine wondering what Blake desired to see her about, and wondering if there could possibly be some flaw in her plan that she had overlooked, and if after all Blake still had some weapon in reserve with which he could defeat her. Five minutes later they were at Blake’s door. They were instantly admitted, and Katherine was informed that Blake awaited her in his library.

She had had no idea in what state of mind she would find Blake, but she had at least expected to find him alone. But instead, when she entered the library with Old Hosie, a small assembly rose to greet her. There was Blake, Blind Charlie Peck, Manning, and back in a shadowy corner a rather rotund gentleman, whom she had observed in Westville the last few days, and whom she knew to be Mr. Brown of the National Electric & Water Company.

Blake’s face was pale and set, and his dark eyes gleamed with an unusual brilliance. But in his compressed features Katherine could read nothing of what was in his mind.

“Good evening,” he said with cold politeness.

“Will you please sit down, Miss West. And you also, Mr. Hollingsworth.”

Katherine thanked him with a nod, and seated herself. She found her chair so placed that she was the centre of the gaze of the little assembly.

“I take it for granted, Miss West,” Blake began steadily, formally, “that you are aware of the reason for my requesting you to come here.”

“On the other hand, I must confess myself entirely ignorant,” Katherine quietly returned.

“Pardon me if I am forced to believe otherwise. But nevertheless, I will explain. It has come to me that you are now engaged in getting out an issue of the *Express*, in which you charge that Mr. Peck and myself are secretly in collusion to defraud the city. Is that correct?”

“Entirely so,” said Katherine.

She felt full command of herself, yet every instant she was straining to peer ahead and discover, before it fell, the suspected counter-stroke.

“Before going further,” Blake continued, “I will say that Mr. Peck and I, though personal and political enemies, must join forces against such a libel directed at us both. This will explain Mr. Peck’s presence in my house for the first time in his life. Now, to resume our business. What you are about to publish is a libel. It is for your sake, chiefly, that I have asked you here.”

“For my sake?”

“For your sake. To warn you, if you are not already aware of it, of the danger you are plunging into headlong. But surely you are acquainted with our libel laws.”

“I am.”

His face, aside from its cold, set look, was still without expression; his voice was low-pitched and steady.

“Then of course you understand your risk,” he continued. “You have had a mild illustration of the working of the law in the case of Mr. Bruce. But the case against him was not really pressed. The court might not deal so leniently with

you. I believe you get my meaning?”

“Perfectly,” said Katherine.

There was a silence. Katherine was determined not to speak first, but to force Blake to take the lead.

“Well?” said he.

“I was waiting to hear what else you had to say,” she replied.

“Well, you are aware that what you purpose printing is a most dangerous libel?”

“I am aware that you seem to think it so.”

“There is no thinking about it; it *is* libel!” he returned. For the first time there was a little sharpness in his voice. “And now, what are you going to do?”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Suppress the paper.”

“Is that advice, or a wish, or a command?”

“Suppose I say all three.”

Her eyes did not leave his pale, intent face. She was instantly more certain that he had some weapon in reserve. But still she failed to guess what it might be.

“Well, what are you going to do?” he repeated.

“I am going to print the paper,” said Katherine.

An instant of stupefied silence followed her quiet answer.

“You are, are you?” cried Blind Charlie, springing up. “Well, let me——”

“Sit down, Peck!” Blake ordered sharply

“Come, give me a chance at her!”

“Sit down! I’m handling this!” Blake cried with sudden harshness.

“Well, then, show her where she’s at!” grumbled Blind Charlie, subsiding into his chair.

Blake turned back to Katherine. His face was again impassive.

“And so it is your intention to commit this monstrous libel?” he asked in his former composed tone.

“Perhaps it is not libel,” said Katherine.

“You mean that you think you have proofs?”

“No. That is not my meaning.”

“What then do you mean?”

“I mean that I *have* proofs.”

“Ah, at last we are coming to the crux of the matter. Since you have proofs for your statements, you think there is no libel?”

“I believe that is sound law,” said Katherine.

“It is sound enough law,” he said. He leaned toward her, and there was now the glint of triumph in his eyes. “But suppose the proofs were not sound?”

Katherine started.

“The proofs not sound?”

“Yes. I suppose your article is based upon testimony?”

“Of course.”

His next words were spoken slowly, that each might sink deeply in.

“Well, suppose your witnesses had found they were mistaken and had repudiated their testimony? What then?”

She sank back in her chair. At last the expected blow had fallen. She sat dazed, thinking wildly. Had they got to Doctor Sherman since she had seen him, and forced him to recant? Had Manning, offered the world by them in this crisis, somehow sold her out? She searched the latter’s face with consternation. But he wore a rather stolid look that told her nothing.

Blake read the effect of his words in her white face and dismayed manner.

“Suppose they have repudiated their statements? What then?” he crushingly

persisted.

She caught desperately at her courage and her vanishing triumph.

“But they have not repudiated.”

“You think not? You shall see!”

He turned to Blind Charlie. “Tell him to step in.”

Blind Charlie moved quickly to a side door. Katherine leaned forward and stared after him, breathless, her heart stilled. She expected the following moment to see the slender figure of Doctor Sherman enter the room, and hear his pallid lips deny he had ever made the confession of a few hours before.

Blind Charlie opened the door.

“They’re ready for you,” he called.

It was all Katherine could do to keep from springing up and letting out a sob of relief. For it was not Doctor Sherman who entered. It was the broad and sumptuous presence of Elijah Stone, detective. He crossed and stood before Blake.

“Mr. Stone,” said Blake, sharply, “I want you to answer a few questions for the benefit of Miss West. First of all, you were employed by Miss West on a piece of detective work, were you not?”

“I was,” said Mr. Stone, avoiding Katherine’s eye.

“And the nature of your employment was to try to discover evidence of an alleged conspiracy against the city on my part?”

“It was.”

“And you made to her certain reports?”

“I did.”

“Let me inform you that she has used those reports as the basis of a libellous story which she is about to print. Now answer me, did you give her any real evidence that would stand the test of a court room?”

Mr. Stone gazed at the ceiling.

“My statements to her were mere surmises,” he said with the glibness of a rehearsed answer. “Nothing but conjecture—no evidence at all.”

“What is your present belief concerning these conjectures?”

“I have since discovered that my conjectures were all mistakes.”

“That will do, Mr. Stone!”

Blake turned quickly upon Katherine. “Well, now what have you got to say?” he demanded.

She could have laughed in her joy.

“First of all,” she called to the withdrawing detective, “I have this to say to you, Mr. Stone. When you sold out to these people, I hope you made them pay you well.”

The detective flushed, but he had no chance to reply.

“This is no time for levity, Miss West!” Blake said sharply. “Now you see your predicament. Now you see what sort of testimony your libel is built upon.”

“But my libel is not built upon that testimony.”

“Not built——” He now first observed that Katherine was smiling. “What do you mean?”

“Just what I said. That my story is not based on Mr. Stone’s testimony.”

There were exclamations from Mr. Brown and Blind Charlie.

“Eh—what?” said Blake. “But you hired Stone as a detective?”

“And he was eminently successful in carrying out the purpose for which I hired him. That purpose was to be watched, and bought off, by you.”

Blake sank back and stared at her.

“Then your story is based——”

“Partly on the testimony of Doctor Sherman,” she said.

Blake came slowly up to his feet.

“Doctor Sherman?” he breathed.

“Yes, of Doctor Sherman.”

Blind Charlie moved quickly forward.

“What’s that?” he cried.

“It’s not true!” burst from Blake’s lips. “Doctor Sherman is in Canada!”

“When I saw him two hours ago he was at his wife’s bedside.”

“It’s not true!” Blake huskily repeated.

“And I might add, Mr. Blake,” Katherine pursued, “that he made a full statement of everything—everything!—and that he gave me a signed confession.”

Blake stared at her blankly. A sickly pallor was creeping over his face.

Katherine stood up.

“And I might furthermore add, gentlemen,” she went on, now also addressing Blind Charlie, “that I know all about the water-works deal, and the secret agreement among you.”

“Hold on! You’re going too far!” the old politician cried savagely. “You’ve got no evidence against me!”

“I could hardly help having it, since I was present at your proceedings.”

“You?”

“Personally and by proxy. I am the agent of Mr. Seymour of New York. Mr. Hartsell here, otherwise Mr. Manning, has represented me, and has turned over to me the agreement you signed to-day.”

They whirled about upon Manning, who continued unperturbed in his chair.

“What she says is straight, gentlemen,” he said. “I have only been acting for Miss West.”

A horrible curse fell from the thick, loose lips of Blind Charlie Peck. Blake, his sickly pallor deepening, stared from Manning to Katherine.

“It isn’t so! It can’t be so!” he breathed wildly.

“If you want to see just what I’ve got, here it is,” said Katherine, and she tossed the bundle of proofs upon the desk.

Blake seized the sheets in feverish hands. Blind Charlie stepped to his side, and Mr. Brown slipped forward out of his corner and peered over their shoulders. First they saw the two facsimiles, then their eyes swept in the leading points of Billy Harper’s fiery story. Then a low cry escaped from Blake. He had come upon Billy Harper’s great page-wide headline:

“BLAKE CONSPIRES TO SWINDLE WESTVILLE;  
DIRECT CAUSE OF CITY’S SICK AND DEAD.”

At that Blake collapsed into his chair and gazed with ashen face at the black, accusing letters. This relentless summary of the situation appalled them all into a moment’s silence.

Blind Charlie was the first to speak.

“That paper must never come out!” he shouted.

Blake raised his gray-hued face.

“How are you going to stop it?”

“Here’s how,” cried Peck, his one eye ablaze with fierce energy. “That crowd at the Square is still all for you, Blake. Don’t let the girl out of the house! I’ll rush to the Square, rouse the mob properly, and they’ll raid the office, rip up the presses, plates, paper, every damned thing!”

“No—no—I’ll not stand for that!” Blake burst out.

But Blind Charlie had already started quickly away. Not so quickly, however, but that the very sufficient hand of Manning was about his wrist before he reached the door.

“I guess we won’t be doing that to-night, Mr. Peck,” Manning said quietly.

The old politician stood shaking with rage and erupting profanity. But presently this subsided, and he stood, as did the others, gazing down at Blake. Blake sat in his chair, silent, motionless, with scarcely a breath, his eyes fixed on the headline. His look was as ghastly as a dead man’s, a look of utter ruin, of ruin so terrible and complete that his dazed mind could hardly comprehend it.



There was a space of profound silence in the room. But after a time Blind Charlie's face grew malignantly, revengefully jocose.

"Well, Blake," said he, "I guess this won't hurt me much after all. I guess I haven't much reputation to lose. But as for you, who started this business—you the pure, moral, high-minded reformer——"

He interrupted himself by raising a hand.

"Listen!"

Faintly, from the direction of the Square, came the dim roar of cheering, and then the outburst of the band. Blind Charlie, with a cynical laugh, clapped a hand upon Blake's shoulder.

"Don't you hear 'em, Blake? Brace up! The people still are for you!"

Blake did not reply. The old man bent down, his face now wholly hard.

"And anyhow, Blake, I'm getting this satisfaction out of the business. I've had it in for you for a dozen years, and now you're going to get it good and plenty! Good night and to hell with you!"

Blake did not look up. Manning slipped an arm through the old man's.

"I'll go along with you for a little while," said Manning quietly. "Just to see that you don't start any trouble."

As the pair were going out Mr. Brown, who had thus far not said a single word, bent his fatherly figure over Blake.

"Of course, you realize, Mr. Blake, that our relations are necessarily at an end," he said in a low voice.

"Of course," Blake said dully.

"I'm very sorry we cannot help you, but of course you realize we cannot afford to be involved in a mess like this. Good night." And he followed the others out, Old Hosie behind him.

For a space Katherine stood alone, gazing down upon Blake's bowed and silent figure. Now that it was all over, now that his allies had all deserted him, to see this man whom she had known as so proud, so strong, so admired, with such a boundless future—who had once been her own ideal of a great man—who had

once declared himself her lover—to see this man now brought so low, stirred in her a strange emotion, in which there was something of pity, something of sympathy, and a tugging remembrance of the love he long ago had offered.

But the noise of the front door closing upon the men recalled her to herself, and very softly, so as not to disturb him, she started away. Her hand was on the knob, when there sounded a dry and husky voice from behind her.

“Wait, Katherine! Wait!”



## CHAPTER XXVI

### AN IDOL'S FALL

She turned. Blake had risen from his chair.

“What is it?” she asked.

He came up to her, the proofs still in his hands. He was unsteady upon his feet, like a man dizzy from a heavy blow. The face which she had been accustomed to see only as full of poise and strength and dignity was now supremely haggard. When he spoke he spoke in uttermost despair—huskily, chokingly, yet with an effort at control.

“Do you know what this is going to do to me?” he asked, holding out the proof-sheets.

“Yes,” she said.

“It is going to ruin me—reputation, fortune, future! Everything!”

She did not answer him.

“Yes, that is going to be the result,” he continued in his slow, husky voice. “Only one thing can save me.”

“And that?”

He stared at her for a moment with wildly burning eyes. Then he wet his dry lips.

“That is for you to countermand this extra.”

“You ask me to do that?”

“It is my only chance. I do.”

“I believe you are out of your mind!” she cried.

“I believe I am!” he said hoarsely.

“Think just a moment, and you will see that what you ask is quite impossible. Just think a moment.”

He was silent for a time. A tremor ran through him, his body stiffened.

“No, I do not ask it,” he said. “I am not trying to excuse myself now, but when a thing falls so unexpectedly, so suddenly——” A choking at the throat stopped him. “If I have seemed to whimper, I take it back. You have beaten me, Katherine. But I hope I can take defeat like a man.”

She did not answer.

They continued gazing at one another. In the silence of the great house they could hear each other’s agitated breathing. Into his dark face, now turned so gray, there crept a strange, drawn look—a look that sent a tingling through all her body.

“What is it?” she asked.

“To think,” he exclaimed in a low, far-away voice, almost to himself, “that I have lost everything through you! Through you, through whom I might have gained everything!”

“Gained everything? Through me?” she repeated. “How?”

“I am sure I would have kept out of such things—as this—if, five years ago, you had said ‘yes’ instead of ‘no’.”

“Said yes?” she breathed.

“I think you would have kept me in the straight road. For I would not have dared to fall below your standards. For I”—he drew a deep, convulsive breath—“for I loved you, Katherine, better than anything in all the world!”

She trembled at the intensity of his voice.

“You loved me—like that?”

“Yes. And since I have lost you, and lost everything, there is perhaps no harm in my telling you something else. Only on that one night did I open my lips about love to you—but I have loved you through all the years since then. And ... and I still love you.”

“You still love me?” she whispered.

“I still love you.”

She stared at him.

“And yet all these months you have fought against me!”

“I have not fought against *you*,” he said. “Somehow, I got started in this way, and I have fought to win—have fought against exposure, against defeat.”

“And you still love me?” she murmured, still amazed.

As she gazed at him there shot into her a poignant pang of pity for this splendid figure, tottering on the edge of the abyss. For an instant she thought only of him.

“You asked me a moment ago to suppress the paper,” she cried impulsively. “Shall I do it?”

“I now ask nothing,” said he.

“No—no—I can’t suppress the paper!” she said in anguish. “That would be to leave father disgraced, and Mr. Bruce disgraced, and the city——But what are you going to do?”

“I do not know. This has come so suddenly. I have had no time to think.”

“You must at least have time to think! If you had an hour—two hours?”

There was a momentary flash of hope in his eyes.

“If I had an hour——”

“Then we’ll delay the paper!” she cried.

She sprang excitedly to the telephone upon Blake’s desk. The next instant she had Billy Harper on the wire, Blake watching her, motionless in his tracks.

“Mr. Harper,” she said, “it is now half-past ten. I want you to hold the paper back till eleven-thirty.... What’s that?”

She listened for a moment, then slowly hung up the receiver. She did not at once turn round, but when she did her face was very white.

“Well?” Blake asked.

“I’m sorry,” she said, barely above a whisper. “The paper has been upon the street for ten minutes.”

They gazed at one another for several moments, both motionless, both without a word. Then thin, sharp cries penetrated the room. Blake’s lips parted.

“What is that?” he asked mechanically.

Katherine crossed and raised a window. Through it came shrill, boyish voices:

“Extry! Extry! All about the great Blake conspiracy!”

These avant couriers of Blake’s disgrace sped onward down the avenue. Katherine turned slowly back to Blake. He still stood in the same posture, leaning heavily upon an arm that rested on his mahogany desk. He did not speak. Nor was there anything that Katherine could say.

It was for but a moment or two that they stood in this strained silence. Then a dim outcry sounded from the centre of the town. In but a second, it seemed, this outcry had mounted to a roar.

“It is the crowd—at the Square,” said Blake, in a dry whisper.

“Yes.”

“The extra—they have seen it.”

The roar rose louder—louder. It was like the thunder of an on-rushing flood that has burst its dam. It began to separate into distinct cries, and the shuffle of running feet.

“They are coming this way,” said Blake in his same dry, mechanical tone.

There was no need for Katherine to reply. The fact was too apparent. She moved to the open window, and stood there waiting. The roar grew nearer—nearer. In but a moment, it seemed to her, the front of this human flood appeared just beyond her own house. The next moment the crowd began to pour into Blake’s wide lawn—by the hundreds—by the thousands. Many of them still carried in clenched hands crumpled copies of the *Express*. Here and there, luridly illuminating the wild scene, blazed a smoking torch of a member of the Blake Marching Club. And out of the mouths of this great mob, which less than a short hour before had lauded him to the stars—out of the mouths of these his erewhile idolaters, came the most fearful imprecations, the most fearful cries for

vengeance.

Katherine became aware that Blake was standing behind her gazing down upon this human storm. She turned, and in his pallid face she plainly read the passionate regret that was surging through his being. His had been the chance to serve these people, and serve them with honour to himself—honour that hardly had a limit. And now he had lost them, lost them utterly and forever, and with them had lost everything!

Some one below saw his face at the window and swore shriekingly to have his life. Blake drew quickly back and stood again beside his desk. He was white—living flesh could not be more white—but he still maintained that calm control which had succeeded his first desperate consternation.

“What are you going to do?” Katherine asked.

He very quietly drew out a drawer of his desk and picked up a pistol.

“What!” she cried. “You are not going to fight them off!”

“No. I have injured enough of them already,” he replied in his measured tone. “Keep all this from my mother as long as you can—at least till she is stronger.”

As she saw his intention Katherine sprang forward and caught the weapon he was turning upon himself.

“No! No! You must not do that!”

“But I must,” he returned quietly. “Listen!”

The cries without had grown more violent. The heavy front door was resounding with blows.

“Don’t you see that this is the only thing that’s left?” he asked.

“And don’t you see,” she said rapidly, “its effect upon your mother? In her weakened condition, your death will be her death. You just said you had injured enough already. Do you want to kill one more? And besides, and in spite of all,” she added with a sudden fire, “there’s a big man in you! Face it like that man!”

He hesitated. Then he relaxed his hold upon the pistol, still without speaking. Katherine returned it to its place and closed the drawer.

At this instant Old Hosie, who had been awaiting Katherine below, rushed

excitedly into the library.

“Don’t you know hell’s broke loose?” he cried to Katherine. “They’ll have that front door down in a minute! Come on!”

But Katherine could not take her gaze from Blake’s pale, set face.

“What are you going to do?” she asked again.

“What is he going to do?” exclaimed Old Hosie. “Better ask what that mob is going to do. Listen to them!”

A raging cry for Blake’s life ascended, almost deafening their ears.

“No, no—they must not do that!” exclaimed Katherine, and breathlessly she darted from the room.

Old Hosie looked grimly at Blake.

“You deserve it, Blake. But I’m against mob law. Quick, slip out the back way. You can just catch the eleven o’clock express and get out of the State.”

Without waiting to see the effect of his advice Old Hosie hurried after Katherine. She had reached the bottom of the stairway just as cooperated shoulders crashed against the door and made it shiver on its hinges. Her intention was to go out and speak to the crowd, but to open the front door was to admit and be overwhelmed by the maddened mob. She knew the house almost as well as she knew her own, and she recalled that the dining-room had a French window which opened upon the piazza on the side away from the crowd. She ran back through the darkened rooms, swung open this window and ran about the piazza to the front door. As she reached it, the human battering-ram drew back for another infuriated lunge.

She sprang between the men and the door.

“Stop! Stop!” she cried.

“What the hell’s this!” ejaculated the leader of the assault.

“Say, if it ain’t a woman!” cried a member of the battering-ram.

“Out of the way with you!” roared the leader in a fury.

But she placed her back against the door.



“Stop—men! Give me just one word!”

“Better stop this, boys!” gasped a man at the foot of the steps, struggling in half a dozen pairs of arms. “I warn you! It’s against the law!”

“Shut up, Jim Nichols; this is our business!” cried the leader to the helpless sheriff. “And now, you”—turning again to Katherine—“out of the way!”

The seething, torch-lit mob on the lawn below repeated his cry. The leader, his wrath increasing, seized Katherine roughly by the arm and jerked her aside:

“Now, all together, boys!” he shouted.

But at that instant upon the front of the mob there fell a tall, lean fury with a raging voice and a furiously swinging cane. It was Old Hosie. Before this fierce chastisement, falling so suddenly upon their heads, the battering-ram for a moment pressed backward.

“You fools! You idiots!” the old man cried, and his high, sharp voice cut through all the noises of the mob. “Is that the way you treat the woman that saved you!”

“Saved us?” some one shouted incredulously. “Her save us?”

“Yes, saved you!” Old Hosie cried in a rising voice down upon the heads of the crowd. His cane had ceased its flailing; the crowd had partially ceased its uproar. “Do you know who that woman is? She’s Katherine West!”

“Oh, the lady lawyer!” rose several jeering voices.

For the moment Old Hosie’s tall figure, with his cane outstretched, had the wrathful majesty of a prophet of old, denouncing his foolish and reprobate people.

“Go on, all of you, laugh at her to-night!” he shouted. “But after to-night you’ll all slink around Westville, ashamed to look anything in the face higher than a dog! For half a year you’ve been sneering at Katherine West. And see how she’s paid you back! It was she that found out your enemy. It was she that dug up all the facts and evidence you’ve read in those papers there. It was she that’s saved you from being robbed. And now——”

“She done all that?” exclaimed a voice from the now stilled mob.

“Yes, she done all that!” shouted Old Hosie. “And what’s more, she got out that

paper in your hands. While you've been sneering at her, she's been working for you. And now, after all this, you're not even willing to listen to a word from her!" His voice rose in its contemptuous wrath still one note higher. "And now listen to me! I'm going to tell you exactly what you are! You are all——"

But Westville never learned exactly what it was. Just then Old Hosie was firmly pulled back by the tails of his Prince Albert coat and found himself in the possession of the panting, dishevelled sheriff of Galloway County.

"You've made your point, Hosie," said Jim Nichols. "They'll listen to her now."

Katherine stepped forward into the space Old Hosie had involuntarily vacated. With the torchlights flaring up into her face she stood there breathing deeply, awed into momentary silence by the great crowd and by the responsibility that weighed upon her.

"If, as Mr. Hollingsworth has said," she began in a tremulous but clear voice that carried to the farthest confines of the lawn, "you owe me anything, all I ask in return is that you refrain from mob violence;" and she went on to urge upon them the lawful course. The crowd, taken aback by the accusations and revelations Old Hosie had flung so hotly into their faces, strangely held by her impassioned woman's figure pedestalled above them on the porch, listened to her with an attention and respect which they as yet were far from understanding.

She felt that she had won her audience, that she had turned them back to lawful measures, when suddenly there was a roar of "Blake! Blake!"—the stilled crowd became again a mob—and she saw that the focus of their gaze had shifted from her to a point behind her. Looking about, she saw that the door had opened, and that Blake, pale and erect, was standing in the doorway. The crowd tried to surge forward, but the front ranks, out of their new and but half-comprehended respect for Katherine, stood like a wall against the charge that would have overwhelmed her.

Blake moved forward to her side.

"I should like to speak to them, if I can," he said quietly.

Katherine held up her hand for silence. The mob hissed and cursed him, and tried to break through the human fortification of the front ranks. Through it all Blake stood silent, pale, without motion. Katherine, her hand still upraised, continued to cry out for silence; and after a time the uproar began in a measure

to diminish.

Katherine took quick advantage of the lull.

“Gentlemen,” she called out, “won’t you please give Mr. Blake just a word!”

Cries that they should give him a chance to speak ran through the crowd, and thus abjured by its own members the mob quieted yet further. While they were subsiding into order Blake looked steadily out upon this sea of hostile faces. Katherine watched him breathlessly, wondering what he was about to say. It swept in upon her, with a sudden catching of the throat, that he made a fine figure standing there so straight, so white, with so little sign of fear; and despite what the man had done, again some of her old admiration for him thrilled through her, and with it an infinite pang of regret for what he might have been.

At length there was moderate order, and Blake began to speak. “Gentlemen, I do not wish to plead for myself,” he said quietly, yet in his far-carrying voice. “What I have done is beyond your forgiveness. I merely desire to say that I am guilty; to say that I am here to give myself into your hands. Do with me as you think best. If you prefer immediate action, I shall go with you without resistance. If you wish to let the law take its course, then”—here he made a slight gesture toward Jim Nichols, who stood beside him—“then I shall give myself into the hands of the sheriff. I await your choice.”

With that he paused. A perfect hush had fallen on the crowd. This man who had dominated them in the days of his glory, dominated them for at least a flickering moment in this the hour of his fall. For that brief moment all were under the spell of their habit to honour him, the spell of his natural dignity, the spell of his direct words.

Then the spell was over. The storm broke loose again. There were cries for immediate action, and counter cries in favour of the law. The two cries battled with each other. For a space there was doubt as to which was the stronger. Then that for the law rose louder and louder and drowned the other out.

Sheriff Nichols slipped his arm through Blake’s.

“I guess you’re going to come with me,” he said.

“I am ready,” was Blake’s response.

He turned about to Katherine.

“You deserved to win,” he said quietly. “Thank you. Good-by.”

“Good-by,” said she.

The sheriff drew him away. Katherine, panting, leaning heavily against a pillar of the porch, watched the pair go down the steps—watched the great crowd part before them—watched them march through this human alley-way, lighted by smoking campaign torches—watched them till they had passed into the darkness in the direction of the jail. Then she dizzily reached out and caught Old Hosie’s arm.

“Help me home,” she said weakly. “I—I feel sick.”



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE END OF THE BEGINNING

It was the following night, and the hour was nine. Old Hosie stood in the sheriff's office in Galloway County jail, while Jim Nichols scrutinized a formal looking document his visitor had just delivered into his hands.

"It's all right, isn't it?" said the old lawyer.

"Yep." The sheriff thrust the paper into a drawer. "I'll fetch him right down."

"Remember, don't give him a hint!" Old Hosie warned again. "You're sure," he added anxiously, "he hasn't got on to anything?"

"How many more times have I got to tell you," returned the sheriff, a little irritated, "that I ain't said a word to him—just as you told me! He heard some of the racket last night, sure. But he thought it was just part of the regular campaign row."

"All right! All right! Hurry him along then!"

Left alone, Old Hosie walked excitedly up and down the dingy room, whose sole pretension in an æsthetic way was the breeze-blown "yachting girl" of a soap company's calendar, sailing her bounding craft above the office cuspidor.

The old man grinned widely, rubbed his bony hands together, and a concatenation of low chuckles issued from his lean throat. But when Sheriff Nichols reappeared, ushering in Arnold Bruce, all these outward manifestations of satisfaction abruptly terminated, and his manner became his usual dry and sarcastic one with his nephew.

"Hello, Arn!" he said. "H'are you?"

"Hello!" Bruce returned, rather gruffly, shaking the hand his uncle held out. "What's this the sheriff has just told me about a new trial?"

"It's all right," returned Old Hosie. "We've fought on till we've made 'em give it to us."

“What’s the use of it?” Bruce growled. “The cards will be stacked the same as at the other trial.”

“Well, whatever happens, you’re free till then. I’ve got you out on bail, and I’m here to take you home with me. So come along with you.”

Old Hosie pushed him out and down the jail steps and into a closed carriage that was waiting at the curb. Bruce was in a glowering, embittered mood, as was but natural in a man who keenly feels that he has suffered without justice and has lost all for which he fought.

“You know I appreciate your working for the new trial,” he remarked dully, as the carriage rattled slowly on. “How did you manage it?”

“It’s too long a story for now. I’ll tell you when we get home.”

Bruce was gloomily silent for a moment.

“Of course the Blake crowd swept everything at the election to-day?”

“Well, on the whole, their majority wasn’t as big as they’d counted on,” returned Old Hosie.

They rode on, Bruce sunk in his bitter, rebellious dejection. The carriage turned into the street that ran behind the Court House, then after rattling over the brick pavement for a few moments came to a pause. Hosie opened the door and stepped out.

“Hello! what are we stopping here for?” demanded Bruce. “This is the Court House. I thought you said we were going home?”

“So we are, so we are,” Old Hosie rapidly returned, an agitation in his manner that he could not wholly repress. “But first we’ve got to go into the Court House. Judge Kellog is waiting for us; there’s a little formality or two about your release we’ve got to settle with him. Come along.” And taking his arm Old Hosie hurried him into the Court House yard, allowing no time for questioning the plausibility of this explanation.

But suddenly Bruce stopped short.

“Look at that, won’t you!” he cried in amazement. “See how the front of the yard is lighted up, and see how it’s jammed with people! And there goes the band! What the dickens——”

At that moment some one on the outskirts of the crowd sighted the pair. "There's Bruce!" he shouted.

Immediately there was an uproar. "Hurrah for Bruce! Hurrah for Bruce!" yelled the crowd, and began to rush to the rear of the yard, cheering as they ran.

Bruce gripped Old Hosie's arm.

"What's this mean?"

"It means we've got to run for it!" And so saying the old man, with a surprising burst of speed left over from his younger years, dragged his nephew up the walk and through the rear door of the Court House, which he quickly locked upon their clamorous pursuers.

Bruce stared at his uncle in bewilderment.

"Hosie—Hosie—what's this mean?"

The old man's leathery face was twitching in a manner remarkable to behold.

"Drat it," he grumbled, with a quaver in his voice, "why don't you read the *Express* and keep up with the news!"

"What's this mean?" demanded Bruce.

"Well, here's a copy of your old rag. Read it and see for yourself."

Bruce seized the *Express* the old man held out to him. Up in one corner were the words "*Election Extra*," and across the top of the page ran the great headline:

"BRUCE TICKET SWEEPS CITY"

Bruce looked slowly up, stupefied, and steadied himself with a hand against the door.

"Is—is that true?"

"For my part," declared Old Hosie, the quaver in his voice growing more prominent, "I don't believe more'n half I see in that dirty sheet!"

"Then—it's true?"

"Don't you hear them wild Indians yelling for Mayor Bruce?"

Bruce was too dazed to speak for a moment.

“Tell me—how did it happen?”

“Oh, read your old rag and see!”

“For God’s sake, Hosie, don’t fool with me!” he cried. “How did it happen? Somebody has been at work. Who did it?”

“Eh! You really want to know that?”

“Yes, yes! Who did it?”

“It was done,” said Old Hosie, looking at him very straight and blinking his eyes, “by a party that I understand you thought couldn’t do much of anything.”

“But who? Who?”

“If you really want to know, the party’s name is Miss Katherine West.”

Bruce’s stupefaction outdid itself.

“Katherine West!” he repeated.

Old Hosie could maintain his rôle no longer.

“Yes, Katherine West!” he burst out in triumphant joy, his words tumbling over one another. “She did it all—every bit of it! And that mob out in front is there to celebrate your election. We knew how things were going to turn out, so we were safe in getting this thing ready in advance. And I don’t mind telling you, young fellow, that this celebration is just as much for her as it is for you. The town has simply gone crazy about her and is looking for a chance to kiss her feet. She said she wouldn’t come to-night, but we all insisted. I promised to bring her, and I’ve got to be off. So good-by!”

Bruce caught his arm.

“Wait, Hosie! Tell me what she did! Tell me the rest!”

“Read that paper I gave you! And here, I brought this for you, too.” He took from his inside pocket a copy of the extra Katherine and Billy Harper had got out the night before. “Those two papers will tell you all there is to tell. And now,” he continued, opening a door and pushing Bruce through it, “you just wait in there so I’ll know where to find you when I want you. I’ve got to hustle for a



while, for I'm master of ceremonies of this show. How's that for your old uncle? It's the first time I've ever been connected with a popular movement in my life except to throw bricks at it, and I ain't so sure I can stand popularity for one whole night."

With that he was gone. Bruce recognized the room into which he had been thrust as the court room in which he had been tried and sentenced, in which Katherine had pleaded her father's case. Over the judge's desk, as though in expectation of his coming, a green-shaded drop lamp shed its cone of light. Bruce stumbled forward to the desk, sank into the judge's chair, and began feverishly to devour the two copies of his paper.

Billy Harper, penitently sober and sworn to sobriety for all his days, had outdone himself on that day's issue. He told how the voters crowded to the polls in their eagerness to vote for Bruce, and he gave with a tremendous exultation an estimate of Bruce's majority, which was so great as to be an almost unanimous election. Also he told how Blind Charlie Peck had prudently caught last night's eleven o'clock express and was now believed to be repairing his health down at Hot Springs, Arkansas. Also he gave a deal of inside history: told how the extra had been gotten out the night before, with the Blake mass-meeting going on beneath the *Express's* windows; told of the scene at the home of Blake, and Blake's strange march to jail; and, freed from the restraint of Katherine's presence, who would have forbidden him, he told with a world of praise the story of how she had worked up the case.

The election extra finished, Bruce spread open the extra of the night before, the paper that had transferred him from a prison cell to the mayor's office, and read the mass of Katherine's evidence that Billy had so stirringly set forth. Then the head of the editor of the *Express*, of the mayor of Westville, sank forward into his folded arms and he sat bowed, motionless, upon the judge's desk.

A great outburst of cheering from the crowd, though louder far than those that had preceded it, did not disturb him; and he did not look up until he heard the door of the court room open. Then he saw that Old Hosie had entered, and with him Katherine.

"I'll just leave you two for a minute," Old Hosie said rapidly, "while I go out and start things going by introducing the Honourable Hiram Cogshell."

With that the old man took the arm of Katherine's father, who had been standing just behind, slipped through the door and was gone. A moment later, from in

front, there arose a succession of cheers for Doctor West.

Bruce came slowly down from behind the railing of Judge Kellog's desk and paused before Katherine. She was very white, her breath came with a tremulous irregularity, and she looked at him with wide, wondering, half-fearful eyes.

At first Bruce could not get out a word, such a choking was there in his throat, such a throbbing and whirling through all his being. He dizzily supported himself with a hand upon the back of a bench, and stood and gazed at her.

It was she that broke the silence.

"Mr. Hollingsworth did not tell me—you were here. I'd better go." And she started for the door.

"No—no—don't!" he said. He drew a step nearer her. "I've just read"—holding up the two papers—"what you have done."

"Mr. Harper has—has exaggerated it very much," she returned. Her voice seemed to come with as great a difficulty as his own.

"And I have read," he continued, "how much I owe you."

"It's—it's——" She did not finish in words, but a gesture disclaimed all credit.

"It has made me. And I want to thank you, and I do thank you. And I do thank you," he repeated lamely.

She acknowledged his gratitude with an inclination of her head. Motions came easier than words.

"And since I owe it all to you, since I owe nothing to any political party, I want to tell you that I am going to try to make the very best mayor that I can!"

"I am sure of that," she said.

"I realize that it's not going to be easy," he went on. "The people seem to be with me now, thanks to you—but as soon as I try to carry out my ideas, I know that both parties will rise up and unite against me. The big fight is still ahead. But since—since you have done it all—I want you to know that I am going to fight straight ahead for the people, no matter what happens to me."

"I know," she said.

“My eyes have been opened to many things about politics,” he added.

She did not speak.

Silence fell between them; the room was infiltrated by a multitudinous hum from without. Presently the thought, and with it the fear, that had been rising up stronger and stronger in Bruce for the last half hour, forced itself through his lips.

“I suppose that now—you’ll be going back to New York?”

“No. I have had several cases offered me to-day. I am going to stay in Westville.”

“Oh!” he said—and was conscious of a dizzy relief. Then, “I wish you success.”

“Thank you.”

Again there was a brief silence, both standing and looking in constraint at one another.

“This celebration is very trying, isn’t it?” she said. “I suppose we might sit down while we wait.”

“Yes.”

They each took the end of a different bench, and rather stiffly sat gazing into the shadowy severity of the big room. Sounding from the front of the Court House they heard rather vaguely the deep-chested, sonorous rhetoric of the Honourable Hiram.

But they heard it for but an instant. Suddenly the court room door flew open and Old Hosie marched straight up before them.

“You’re the dad-blastedest pair of idiots I ever saw!” he burst out, with an exasperation that was not an entire success, for it was betrayed by a little quaver.

They stood up.

“What’s the matter?” stammered Bruce.

“Matter?” cried Old Hosie. “What d’you suppose I left you two people here together for?”

“You said you had to start——”

“Well, couldn’t I have another and a bigger reason? I’ve been listening outside the door here, and the way you people have acted! See here, you two know you love one another, and yet you act toward each other like a pair of tame icebergs that have just been introduced!”

He turned in a fury upon his nephew, blinking to keep the moisture from his eyes.

“Don’t you love her?” he demanded, pointing to Katherine, who had suddenly grown yet more pale.

“Why—yes—yes——”

“Then why in the name of God don’t you tell her so?”

“I’m—I’m afraid she won’t care to hear it,” stammered Bruce, not daring to look at Katherine.

“Tell her so, and see what she says,” shouted Old Hosie. “How else are you going to find out? Tell her what a fool you’ve been. Tell her she’s proved to you you’re all wrong about what you thought she ought to do. Tell her unless you get some one of sense to help run you, you’re going to make an all-fired mess of this mayor’s job. Tell her”—there was a choking in his voice—“oh, boy, just tell her what you feel!

“And now,” he added quickly, and again sharply, “that mob outside won’t listen to the Honourable Hiram much longer. They want you folks. I give you just two minutes to fix things up. Two minutes—no more!”

And pulling his high hat down upon his forehead, Old Hosie turned abruptly and again left the room.

Bruce looked slowly about upon Katherine. His rugged, powerful face was working with emotion.

“What Uncle Hosie has said is all true,” he stammered fearfully. “You know I love you, Katherine. And there isn’t anything you’ll want to do that I’ll not be glad to have you do. Won’t you forget, Katherine, and won’t you——”

He stretched out his arms to her. “Oh, Katherine!” he cried. “I love you! I want

you! I need you!”

While he spoke her face had grown radiant. “And I—and I”—she choked, then her voice went on with an uprush of happiness—“and I—oh, Arnold, I need you!”

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When Old Hosie reëntered a minute later and saw what there was to be seen, he let out a little cry of joy and swooped down upon them.

“Look out, Katherine,” he warned, quaveringly, “for I’m going to kiss you!” But despite this warning the old man succeeded in his enterprise. “This is great!—great!” he cried, shaking a hand of each. “But we’ll have to cut this hallelujah business short till that little picnic outside is over. I just pulled the Honourable Hiram down—and, say, just listen to that roar!”

A roar it was indeed. Of a bursting brass band, of thousands of eager people.

“And who do you suppose they’re shouting for?” inquired the joyous Hosie.

Katherine smiled a tear-bright smile at Bruce.

“For the new mayor,” she said.

“No, no! All for you!” said he.

“Well, come on and we’ll see who it’s for!” cried Old Hosie.

And taking an arm of each he led them out to face the cheering multitude.

**THE END**

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