TWO FLIGHTS UP

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

Title: Two Flights Up
Date of first publication: 1928
Author: Mary Roberts Rinehart (1876-1958)
Date first posted: November 8, 2024
Date last updated: November 8, 2024
Faded Page eBook #20241106

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Jen Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

This file was produced from images generously made available by HathiTrust Digital Library

TWO FLIGHTS UP

BY

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

AUTHOR OF

THE MAN IN LOWER TEN,
THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE,
DANGEROUS DAYS, ETC.

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES AT THE
COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

CONTENTS

TWO FLIGHTS UP

CHAPTER ONE

ANSWERING the front door at the Bayne house was a lengthy matter. The postman had learned this long ago, and now he merely laid the mail in the vestibule and went away.

First, Mrs. Bayne would look in the old reflecting mirror which still hung from her bedroom window and take note of the ringer. Then she would whisper cautiously over the stair rail:

"It's the milk bill. I'm not in." Or, as had been happening more and more frequently for the last six months: "It's Furness, Holly. Come right up, and I'll send down your Aunt Margaret to receive him."

And Margaret, who was Mrs. Bayne's sister, would put down the napkins she was hemming by hand for a department store and sulkily take off her apron and smooth her hair. The forefinger of her left hand was roughened with the needle, although she kept a piece of pumice stone on her washstand to smooth it. Mrs. Bayne thought no lady should have a roughened forefinger, and so Margaret had formed the habit of keeping that hand shut with the finger tucked away, so to speak. As a result she rather gave the appearance of meeting the world with one hand clenched.

On the staircase perhaps she would pass Holly running up, escaping, one might say, from the kitchen. The bell would ring again, and without haste but with an air of slight impatience at some invisible servant, Aunt Margaret would open the door.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Brooks! I *thought* I heard the bell. Really, these days . . ."

But by that time Mr. Brooks would be inside, putting his hat on the old table, with his gloves beside it, and his stick leaning against a chair.

"Anybody at home?" he would ask.

And Margaret would say archly: "Well, *I'm* at home, and I dare say we can locate Holly somewhere."

He would wander into the long parlour, which Mrs. Bayne always called the drawing room: a faded chamber, with overstuffed furniture neatly mended, for the Bayne house had been furnished before the vogue for old things came in; and to cover the sounds of stealthy movements overhead Margaret would make conversation. For instance:

"I saw Mrs. Rodney White downtown the other day. She's growing very stout, isn't she?"

"Eats too much," Mr. Brooks would say calmly. "By the way, I heard a good story about him last night. The other day at the Rossiters' dinner, he . . ." And so on.

Margaret would listen absorbedly. Mr. Brooks had an endless fund of gossip which Margaret would absorb as eagerly as perhaps Eve may have listened to whispers about her lost Paradise. Every evening he dined somewhere, but always with the Right People, of course, and until the last six months he had been accustomed to wander, after business hours, from one tea table to another.

Not that he cared for tea. As a matter of fact, he loathed tea. But there was always talk and sometimes whisky and soda, and he managed to pick up quite a little of both. He was a tall, rather thin young man; as Mrs. Bayne said, he was not handsome, but he was distinguished. As a matter of fact, he was neither.

For the last six months, however, he had been calling at Kelsey Street instead. There was no whisky and soda there, only tea. However, there was Holly. Her full name was Hollister, which had been her mother's; after Mrs. Bayne's—well, what you might term widowhood, she had been strongly tempted to call herself Mrs. Hollister Bayne, but Margaret had been so absurd about it that she had not.

In the drawing room the tea table would be ready. Mrs. Bayne always laid it after luncheon, before she went upstairs for what she termed her siesta. It was only necessary in case of a caller to light the spirit kettle, and "not bother to ring." Furness Brooks had been coming twice a week for months, and he had not yet discovered that the Baynes kept no servant. Margaret Hollister would put a match to the lamp under the kettle, and then ooze out.

"If you don't mind, I have some notes to write. And I'll tell Holly you're here."

But on the October day this story opens, the routine had been changed. Mrs. Bayne, dressed in black silk, had sat all morning in the drawing room and most of the afternoon, and in the third-story front room Holly was working like a young fury. Only Margaret continued grimly to hem napkins, holding them close to her eyes; she needed glasses, but specialists were expensive.

It was one of Mrs. Bayne's pet fictions that if dear Margaret did not do so much "fancy work" she would have fewer headaches.

When at last the doorbell rang, the sounds on the third floor ceased, and the hush of gentility descended on the house. It rang a second time before Mrs. Bayne moved. Then, picking up a book and inserting a finger in it, she went to the front door and opened it. A burly young man was standing outside.

"I *thought* I heard the bell," said Mrs. Bayne graciously, looking back over her shoulder for an imaginary servant. "Really, these days . . ."

She looked again at the young man. He seemed respectable but not particularly affluent. Not that he was shabby, of course, but compared with the spick-and-span-ness of Furness Brooks—of course, Furness Brooks had his own bodyservant. A Filipino. And then the man on the doorstep was young; she had not considered that possibility.

It took only a second, all this. She appraised the young man, and he looked at her. Then he coughed apologetically.

"I believe—but perhaps I have made a mistake. There was an advertisement of a room for rent, and it gave this number."

"Ah," breathed Mrs. Bayne, as if she had just remembered. "Yes. Of course. Come in, please."

But she did not show him the room at once. She led the way into the drawing room, and the elegance of that apartment plus the tea table quite overcame him. He had none of Mr. Brooks's *savoir faire*, and he had not seen a tea table in a private house for a long time. Not since he left home, in fact.

"Please sit down," said Mrs. Bayne graciously, and sat herself. "You see, we are three women alone here—*do* sit down!—and we really should have a man in the house. A gentleman, of course."

“I should try to qualify,” said the applicant, smiling. He had rather a nice smile. “I can only give my business references. I sell bonds—that is, when I can sell them.”

A sudden recollection broadened his smile. He had gone back to his class reunion the year after he came back from the war, and one of the banners they had carried read: “99 per cent of us are selling bonds.” It had seemed funny then. Maybe it was not quite so humorous now.

But Mrs. Bayne was looking pained.

“By a gentleman,” she said, “I mean birth and breeding. Those are what count, don’t you think? May I give you a cup of tea?”

The young man glanced at the tea table with its silver and old china, and it occurred to him that one of the tests of a gentleman might be the way he drank his tea! So he took a cup and managed it successfully. By and large he had rented a number of furnished rooms, but never before had the acid test of tea been offered.

It was not until tea had been drunk and Mrs. Bayne established as a hostess rather than a landlady that he was allowed to see the room. He was in a slightly dazed condition as she rustled up the stairs ahead of him, and so delicate was her manner of showing it that he did not like to ask the location of the bathroom—the result being that the evening he came, searching for it, he walked into Margaret in her nightgown; her room was across the hall from his.

For in the end he was accepted, Mrs. Bayne not thinking to ask him if the room suited him. Still in the slightly dazed condition he went down the stairs and out the front door, and it was only on the pavement that he sufficiently recovered to mutter that he’d be damned, or words to that effect.

In such fashion did one Howard Rush Warrington, late of Elkhart, Indiana, become a part of the establishment at Ninety-one Kelsey Street, to become gradually a part of its life. Names that meant nothing to him then were to fill his thoughts and alter his life, but he had never even heard them; Margaret and James Cox and Mr. Steinfeldt, Furness Brooks and the McCook woman, Tom Bayne and Holly, even Phelps, the District Attorney.

Do we exist? Or are we only registered in the sensorium of the beholder? If this last is true, none of them existed then at all. But by this act of his, of walking up the steps at Ninety-one Kelsey Street, Warrington had called them into his life.

And they were to do their best to wreck it.

CHAPTER TWO

HOLLY BAYNE could not remember when she had not been told that there were some things no lady did. In the old days at Grandmother Hollister's it had been rather awful. Once—only she did not remember this—the milkman had stopped her nurse on the street, and little Holly had held out her hand to him.

"Just as if she knew he brought her her milk!" reported the nursemaid fondly.

"And you let her shake hands with the milkman?" demanded Grandmother Hollister.

"Well, I'm sure, if he's clean enough to bring the milk, he's——"

"That will do," thundered Grandmother Hollister. And shortly after the girl was dismissed, although, of course, this may not have been the reason. Later on she married the milkman, too. But that is neither here nor there.

When Holly was eight—that was before the trouble came—they took her out of the dancing class because the Mayor's son had been admitted to it. Grandma was dead then, and Aunt Margaret was living with them. And Aunt Margaret had said it was absurd; the boy was a nice child. Mrs. Bayne, however, was adamant.

"Once the bars are down, all sorts of common people will be let in," she said. "I have told Mrs. Finch exactly what I think of her."

But those days were rather dreamlike to Holly now, although they had made their impression on her character. Mostly what she remembered was of movement, of people coming and going and of parcels arriving to be piled between the fireplace and the wardrobe until they were opened. Sometimes she was even allowed to see them opened, and all sorts of beautiful things

would be spread out on her mother's bed, lace shawls and fans and bright shiny slippers.

But mostly, after Mademoiselle had gone, she had stayed with Aunt Margaret. She saw comparatively little of her parents. They were almost always either out, or dressing to go out. Almost every day Otto, the butler, would press her father's dinner or dress clothes and carry them upstairs, and the limousine would come around at a quarter to eight o'clock. The other evenings there would be a party at the house; at six o'clock two or three strange men would take off their coats in the pantry and begin laying out china and silver. Aunt Margaret, who did not always dine downstairs on these nights, would carry down the long banquet cloth, bought very probably from Mr. Cox; gilt chairs would come in the back door from the caterer's; and as if by magic the dining room would begin to bloom.

At each place there would be a tiny glass for sherry, a taller one for sauterne, and, crowning glory of all to Holly's childish eyes, a champagne glass with a queer hollow stem and a flat bowl.

"I should think they would spill," she said once to Aunt Margaret.

"It's a pity they don't," said Aunt Margaret tartly.

She had a diagram in her hand and was putting down funny little cards at each place, each with a name on it.

At five minutes to eight Mother would come down the stairs and Father would follow her, and then, like the dining table, the staircase would begin to bloom. Ladies in evening dress would come up, give their wraps to the housemaid, all in black with a neat white apron, and wait for gentlemen who were laying off shiny high hats and overcoats somewhere else. From the third-floor landing Holly, looking down on them, had a curious impression of nakedness. Everything was lost to her from above but their bare shoulders, backs and bosoms.

On the hall table Otto had carefully laid out tiny envelopes, each with a tinier card inside it, and as each gentleman went down he received one, looked at the name on the card and tucked it into his waistcoat pocket. It was the name of the lady he was to "take in."

Up to the top landing would come a strange medley of odours, perfume and soup and tobacco smoke, and through it came Otto's voice, announcing sonorously, "Mr. and Mrs. Wrigley," "Miss Van Dusen," "Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby-Jones," and so on, and then there would be a procession of

queer, foreshortened figures past the newel post below toward the dining room, and it would be all over.

She would crawl back into bed in the third-floor front room, to which she had been temporarily moved for the party, and the street lights would make strange shadows on the walls. . . .

On the day Warrington was to move in Holly stood in that same room and remembered those things. She had, curiously enough, no recollection of her father's going away. He had not entered her daily life sufficiently for her even to notice his absence immediately. He might have been gone three days or a month before she asked her Aunt Margaret where he was. And Margaret had said:

"He's gone away, dear."

"Gone where?"

"He's gone abroad," said Margaret, after a moment's thought. "I wouldn't talk to your mother about it. She isn't very well."

For some years Holly really thought he had gone abroad. She was thirteen when they told her; they had to, then, because at the public school somebody had said something. Oh, yes, she had gone to the public school. When her mother had objected Aunt Margaret had insisted on that.

"You don't want her an ignoramus, do you?" she had demanded.

So she knew. It did not greatly hurt her. She had been a quiet child, softly pretty, and as she was never allowed to play with the other children anyhow, she felt no ostracism. And then she had found a way to assert herself which puzzled them and left them at a loss.

"Holly, Holly, oh, my golly!" they would call after her.

And she would answer them in French.

"I despise you, and you cannot injure me," she would say. It left them uncomfortable and thwarted.

She had, as she grew up, no world outside of the schoolroom and the quiet house where now her mother and Margaret lived and slowly "rotted," as Margaret put it. Once a year the Parker car stopped at the door, and Sally Parker, Mrs. Bayne's cousin, got out and came in. Sam, her husband, was making them a small allowance and had secured them the house. Occasionally, too, the chauffeur would leave a box, and after that for a while

Mrs. Bayne or Margaret or Holly, as the case might be, would blossom out in fresh garments and maybe go to church.

Mrs. McCook, who kept boarders across the street, was not blind to these coincidences.

"I haven't seen that before, Clara," she would say to her maid of all work. "Come here and look. Did you notice that car here last week?"

And Clara would answer yes or no, as the case might be.

It was, as a matter of fact, due to one of Sally Parker's madeover velvet suits that Holly had met Furness Brooks again. She had gone to St. Andrews, sitting well to the back, for the one-time despised mayor had taken the Bayne pew and become a vestryman. And Furness had seen her and asked who she was.

"Holly Bayne!" he said. "Why, I used to know her at dancing school!"

He had spoken to her afterward, and walked home with her. (Perhaps, to that list of names which were to alter Howard Warrington's life and nearly wreck it, it would be well to add Sally Parker's.)

A certain amount of all this went through Holly's head that afternoon. The room was ready; it was swept and scoured and dusted. The big chair which had been moved up there when her father went away was by the hearth, although just why was problematical. They had not arranged to supply the roomer with a fire, so she had not laid one.

"If he wants a fire he will have to pay extra," Mrs. Bayne had replied sharply to her suggestion. "When it's cold enough, we'll light the furnace."

"I thought just as a sort of welcome . . ."

"If you start it you'll have to keep it up. And what do you mean by welcome? He's not entering the family!"

"No," said Holly. "I suppose not. Still, he's to be in our house. He'll be a part of us, whether we like it or not."

"Why? He's not getting his food here. He'll be in and out, that's all, and mostly out."

Margaret—this was in the drawing room at tea; they mostly had tea there and then no supper, or some bread and jam before going to bed—Margaret had smiled faintly over her sewing. But Mrs. Bayne had not noticed her; she seldom did.

The result of all this was that Holly was puzzled, as she surveyed the room.

She had never seen this young stranger, but soon he would be there. How did one treat people like that, who were in one's house but not of it? She was still uncertain when she went downstairs to dress for Furness Brooks's afternoon call, and later on that gentleman found her detached and unapproachable, and it rather fanned the ardour of his new flame.

"Seems to me somebody's very quiet to-day," he remarked, with an attempt at joviality.

"I feel quiet," she said.

Mrs. Bayne, who was expansively present, looked at her with a certain irritation. If, as she frequently told Margaret, Holly was going to be silly about Furness, she was through. Simply through. It was the chance of a lifetime. So she might have said something sharp, but fortunately the bell rang just then and she smiled sweetly instead.

"You go, darling," she said to Holly. "I dare say Hilda is busy."

Yes, she had invented a Hilda by that time, poor lady, for Furness Brooks's benefit. The first time she said it Holly had given her a hard, straight look, but after that she had let it go. It was so characteristic, and somehow so pitiful.

So Holly went, and the total result of Hilda plus uncertainty was that Warrington, landing bag and baggage on the doorstep, met with a reception rather different from what he had been led to expect. He was received, not by Mrs. Bayne, but by a very pretty but reserved young woman who greeted him unsmilingly, and who surveyed his bags in a cold and detached manner.

"I'm afraid you'll have to carry those up yourself," she said.

"I dare say that won't permanently injure me," he replied cheerfully. But she ignored that, and by the time he had carried in his traps she had disappeared.

It annoyed him, somehow. Hang it all, he was no interloper. They'd advertised, hadn't they? Hang these decayed gentlewomen, anyhow. As for that girl——

"Probably hates it," he reflected, as he staggered up under his burden. "Hates me, too. Too good to work; waiting for some man to carry her away from here and keep her!"

He was still muttering to himself when he breathlessly reached the top. But the room was comfortable, large and airy, and if the furniture showed wear it was heavy and well polished. He put down his bags and moved to the window.

He had a new sense, after much wandering, of peace and sanctuary.

“They won’t bother me and I won’t bother them,” he reflected, of the household.

But, oddly enough, they began to bother him almost at once. For, after nearly falling down a dumb-waiter shaft that night while hunting for a bath, in his pajamas and dressing gown he stealthily opened Margaret’s door by mistake. And Margaret was standing by her window, softly weeping.

He retreated into his own room again and sat down on the edge of the bed.

“Now what the hell’s all that about?” he considered.

CHAPTER THREE

HOLLY had gone into the hall, and from beyond the closed doors came voices and the sounds of bags. Mrs. Bayne rattled the china, but it did no good, and when Holly returned she sent her out again.

"Run and bring the toast, will you, darling?" she said. And to Furness: "Really, this servant question . . ."

"It's the same everywhere," he agreed. "The Barrs—the J. L. Barrs, you know—took a butler and two footmen to Florida, and when the parlourmaid left, they struck. Absolutely struck."

Holly had said nothing when she came in, and now she went out again, still silent. For a moment he had thought she was going to say something, and he wondered if Mrs. Bayne had sent her out so she would not. Drat the woman, anyhow; she was always hanging around.

But Mrs. Bayne was speaking:

"Have you ever considered—is it one lump or two? I used always to remember, but nowadays I so seldom . . ." She sighed. "Have you ever considered, Furness, how alone we are here? Just three women, and no man in the house?"

Mr. Brooks felt a sudden cold dew on his forehead, and very nearly dropped the teacup.

"It must be lonely," he managed.

"It is worse than that; it is hardly safe. There have been nights when I have not been able to sleep."

"You might get a dog." He brightened at the thought. "I might be able to get you a dog."

She hardly heard that, so concentrated was she on her explanation.

"Well, I am happy to say that I have just changed all that. A very charming man, a broker, I believe, is to make his home with us from now on. A—a paying guest."

"Now I call that downright sensible of you," said Brooks, greatly relieved. "He's a lucky chap."

"I'm so very glad you approve," said Mrs. Bayne.

And then Holly had brought in the toast, to find Mr. Warrington an accepted fact in the drawing room, and Furness Brooks's prominent blue eyes fixed on her with a new speculation in them.

"What sort of fellow is he? Young?"

"I can hardly tell you. He's that sort. Not of our world, of course, but what does that matter? We shall hardly see him."

Brooks's opinion, however, both of Mrs. Bayne's sensibility and her powers of observation fell considerably within a day or two, when he beheld the paying guest on the doorstep. He was certainly young, and he was far from unhandsome. And the very fact that he produced a latchkey and admitted Holly's suitor gave that gentleman an attack of inferiority complex that was as unusual as it was surprising.

"Coming in?" Warrington said, holding the door open.

Mr. Brooks passed him, eying him as he did so.

"Thanks," he said. "Thanks very much."

There was a certain aggressiveness in the way he laid his hat and gloves on the hall table, and nothing particularly pleasant in his prominent pale eyes as he watched the newcomer go up the stairs.

It seems probable that up to that time he had been merely playing with the thought of Holly. His visits there satisfied his vanity, and he often had a sort of godlike feeling with the older women. Out of his largess of news and gossip he fed them, and he bridged the gulf between their lost world and themselves.

But shortly after this incident he dropped in to tea at the Willoughby-Joneses and casually mentioned the Baynes. He was, so to speak, testing the ice.

“Bayne?” said that important lady. “You don’t mean Tom Bayne’s family? Don’t tell me you’re going there!”

The ice, he saw, was very thick.

“I drop in once in a while. They’re pretty lonely.”

“Well, they should be,” Mrs. Willoughby-Jones had snapped. “If I hadn’t happened to have overdrawn my account just then I’d have lost a lot. And most people did. Where *is* the money? Have they got it?”

“If they have they’re not spending it,” said Mr. Brooks. “And the girl’s rather nice, you know.”

Mrs. Willoughby-Jones eyed him shrewdly.

“It won’t do, Furney,” she said. “You’ve got your people to consider, and your friends. You can’t raise the dead, and Annie Bayne is socially dead. Has been for ten years.”

She was curious about them, however. There was a move on, she had heard, to get Tom Bayne out of the penitentiary. “His kidneys have gone wrong, or something.” She was opposed to it herself. They had spent a lot, the Baynes, but she never had believed they had spent it all. He probably had a good bit tucked away somewhere.

“How do they live?” she asked. “I know the Parkers help them, but it isn’t much.”

“They live like ladies. Of course, the house is getting shabby, but they keep a servant.”

“And three women there! I wonder if Sam knows that.”

He saw it was no good, and for a few days he stayed away from Holly. He was not ready to pay the price for her. But it was no use; before long he was back again.

Those few days, however, were trying ones at Ninety-one Kelsey Street. Each afternoon Holly’s mother made her dress, and small cakes from Simmons, the grocer, were brought in; each afternoon the three ladies foregathered in the drawing room and drank their tea, and Margaret hemmed her eternal napkins, holding her work close to her eyes.

At six o’clock or so Mrs. Bayne would sigh and, having glanced out through the curtains, go up to her bedroom, and Holly would clear away.

She began to wonder which was worse, to have Furness come or not.

“Why don’t you send Furness a note?” Mrs. Bayne asked one day. Holly’s colour rose.

“I can’t coax him back, Mother. Why should he come, anyhow? I never have anything to say to him.”

“You have plenty to say when he’s not around.”

Holly’s quiet world seemed to have been violently upset. Even Margaret was queer; she spent more time at the store than she used to, and alternated between a sort of secret happiness and long periods of despair, both apparently causeless. The only cheerful normal person in the house was the lodger.

She seldom saw him, but he made his presence felt in the house from the first. He whistled a great deal in his room—maybe to keep his courage up, for the bond business was not particularly good—and sometimes on the stairs, until the atmosphere of terrible good breeding over the place caught him about halfway up or down, and he stopped.

Now and then through an opened door he saw the tea table in the drawing room, but he was never asked in for tea again. The three ladies would be sitting there, Mrs. Bayne erect and Aunt Margaret sewing at her “fancy work,” and the girl would be lying back in a big chair with her eyes shut.

There would be a genteel little trickle of conversation going on, but the girl did not seem to talk. If one of them saw him she would bow politely, but that was all. So far as sociability went he might as well have been cast away on an island. Better. There would have been no girl there.

As a matter of fact, he got to worrying about the girl. She was so lovely and so useless. And anybody could see with half an eye that they were just two jumps ahead of poverty, for all their airs. Why the devil didn’t she go out and get an honest job of work? She looked as if she had brains. Or marry the thin fellow who hung around?

Once indeed he took his courage in his hands and stopped at the drawing-room door. They had not heard him come in, and he saw at once that he had chosen an inopportune moment; the aunt was walking up and down the floor, looking flushed, and the girl had picked up the sewing and was being useful for once. Mrs. Bayne was rigid and upright in her chair.

Just as he got to the door the aunt was speaking:

“I’ve done the best I know how. I’ve slaved and worked to my limit. And now when I suggest a perfectly reasonable thing——”

He moved away hurriedly, but the conversation followed him up the stairs.

“I have simply said, not in my house.”

“Then where? On a park bench, I suppose!”

“Don’t be vulgar, Margaret,” said Mrs. Bayne coldly.

Later on, when peace seemed to be restored, he went down again with his belated invitation to the movies, but Mrs. Bayne declined.

“We never go,” she said. “Thank you so much.”

He felt a strong inclination to slam the front door as he went out, but he did not. He had seen Holly’s face, and perhaps for the first time he had an inkling of what her life might be.

CHAPTER FOUR

HE disapproved of them all, but the household began to interest him considerably. After all, a man cannot live in a family without establishing some sort of tangential relationship. And not only were they mysterious; he fancied they were in trouble. He began, too, to be conscious that the girl was not the idler he had thought her.

He never saw a servant about, nor did he ever see any evidence that any of them laboured, save Margaret. But before he got downstairs in the morning the hall and steps had already been cleaned for the day. Somebody rose very early, and he thought he knew who it was.

One afternoon he came home to find Brooks's car at the curb, and laughter and cheerful talk in the drawing room. The tone of the house lifted after that, and as he was no fool he connected the two, not without bitterness.

Then, an evening or so later on, he came home rather late to find Margaret in the vestibule, looking cold and exceedingly unhappy.

"I've been ringing," she said, "but I suppose they are asleep and don't hear." She remembered then that Warrington, like Mr. Brooks, was supposed to believe in a Hilda, and added something vague about servants in general. He admitted her, and she scuttled in and up the stairs before he saw her face, but he had an idea that she had been crying.

He began to feel that he was, in a small way, sitting on a volcano, and about as helpless as though he had been.

"Hang it all," he reflected as he wound his watch that night, "if it wasn't for their sickening pride a man could do something!"

Up to that time his conversation with them had been strictly of the yea, yea, and nay, nay order. So far as he had seemed to impress himself on their lives he might far better have been a stray dog they had taken in. As a matter of fact, he was almost exactly that, he reflected. It was a watchdog they had wanted.

But Holly's problem was becoming fairly clear to him. If it had not been, a conversation he overheard through Margaret's transom one night would have enlightened him. He was in his big chair by the empty hearth, reading, when Mrs. Bayne came up and into Margaret's room.

He had never seen her do that before. His room was cold, and he had left the door open; such heat as there was seemed to come up the staircase well. So he heard some things that set him to thinking.

At first Mrs. Bayne's voice was low, but it rose gradually.

"I've had disgrace enough," was the first he heard. "Any more will kill me."

"That depends on what you call disgrace. You don't think it's disgraceful to try to marry Holly to that popinjay. I do."

"I'm warning you. If you do it, I'm through, Margaret. And Holly's through too. Have you thought of that? Do you suppose Furness Brooks would stand for that?" Her voice softened. "It's her only chance, Margaret."

He closed his door then, feeling as uncomfortable as though he had been willfully listening; and after he had undressed and put out his lights, he stood by his window thinking things over. Damn the house, anyhow! All he had asked of it was peace and a roof, and all he was getting was the roof. He stood, tall and broad in his pajamas, and stretched out his arms to their full muscular length. He was ready to crush a mountain, and all he had were the molehills of quarrelsome women.

But he lay awake for a long time, wondering how Margaret proposed to disgrace the family.

Time went on. He came and went; he began to nod to Mrs. McCook, sweeping the pavement across the street; now and then he bought some apples at Simmons's grocery and carried them home in a paper bag; and sometimes he walked to the car with Mr. Williamson, the life-insurance agent in Eighty-seven. He was a part of the street more than of the house he lived in, at that time.

If he felt an increasing resentment at the sight of Furness Brooks's car as he turned the corner on his way home, he kept it to himself. There was perhaps less spring in his step those days as he walked along, but that was all.

He recognized that of the three women in the house, occupied with their mysterious troubles, Mrs. Bayne showed the least strain. Holly seemed thinner, and Margaret was almost always in her room now. When he saw her, she startled him; she was gaunt and hollow-eyed, and there was a set look of despair on her face.

One day he was shocked, passing Mrs. Bayne's door, to hear Holly say:

"But why? Why? You—you aren't omnipotent, Mother. You're not—God!"

"Oh, Holly!" Mrs. Bayne wailed. And then a loose step on the staircase had creaked, and there was a sort of stricken silence. Margaret's door had been closed when he reached the top floor.

He slept badly that night, and at two o'clock he roused with a start and sat up in bed. There was a faint odour of escaping gas in his room. He got up and went out into the hall; it was stronger there, and suddenly he thought of Margaret across the hall. Of course it was silly, but there it was.

He knocked at her door, and receiving no answer, he opened it. It was dark, and there was no odour of gas at all, so he quietly closed it and went downstairs.

As he went, the gas was stronger; it was quite thick in the lower hall, as if it came from the kitchen. To save his life he couldn't find a light switch. He had been in the house three months, but beyond his first visit, he had been politely restricted to the hall and the two flights of stairs to his room, so that he had to guess his way to the rear. Of course he didn't dare to strike a match.

He bumped into the dining-room table, found the swinging door into the pantry, and another door which should have opened into the kitchen. But it did not, for it was locked from the other side.

That scared him. He got back into the hall and tried another door there which he had just remembered, but it was locked too, and whatever he may have thought before, he knew now that sheer stark tragedy was on the other side. Somebody was locked in there—deliberately locked in.

Afterward he had no very clear memory of what happened. He ran out the front door and along the narrow side entry to the kitchen door, but it was locked too. However, there was a window, and he broke the glass. Gas came pouring out at once, but he took a long breath, opened the catch and raised it, and crawled in. He fell over something almost immediately.

All this, you see, in the dark. He hadn't an idea who it was, except that he was fairly sure it wasn't Mrs. Bayne. All the time he was opening the doors and letting the air in, he was feeling pretty sick, for a horrible fear was eating him. He thought it might be Holly.

But it wasn't Holly. It was Margaret, neatly stretched out on the worn linoleum, with all the burners of the gas range open and a cushion from "Hilda's" rocking chair under her head. She had put on her one good pair of silk stockings and her beaded slippers, and had evidently intended to die like a lady. Her left hand was tightly clenched.

However, she was not dead.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARGARET was ill for some time. Nobody explained anything to him, but now and then he met Holly on the stairs with her tray, and there was a queer, absent look in her eyes. Once he met her in the lower hall and carried the heavy tray for her; she followed docilely enough, and when he gave it to her at the top, he said:

"That's too heavy for you. Why not let Hilda carry it?"

But she only said: "Thanks very much." And added, as if it were forced out of her: "You are very kind, always."

From the night he had broken his way into the kitchen and thought it might be Holly, he had never fooled himself at all. He was in love with her, ridiculously, sickeningly. He was in love with her. He did not even approve of her, except now and then; he thought she was idle and inbred. He compared her with his mother and sisters back in Elkhart, Indiana, and he knew she was all wrong. But there it was. He thought about her at night, sitting in his chair, and got up and stamped off to bed, as if he would crush the wretched thing under his feet, only to waken up and think about her again.

"The sooner she marries Brooks, the better," he told himself. "This isn't sane. I'm not sane. I'm not getting enough exercise."

He took to going to the Y. M. C. A. gymnasium after office hours. He would come home after that, to put on a clean collar and get ready to go out for his evening meal, at the Sign of the Red Rose around the corner. But if he left his door open, he often heard Margaret and Mrs. Bayne coming up, and knew that they had left Holly alone with Furness Brooks.

One evening he accidentally knocked Mr. Brooks's hat off the table and put his foot on it, and went out somewhat cheered, but feeling slightly silly.

And on that very night he took the second step which was to involve him so hopelessly later on. The first, of course, was the day he took the room.

He went out of the house in rather an unpleasant humour, as has been indicated, and at the small brick-paved side passage that had once had a sign on it, "Tradesmen's Entrance," somebody was standing. Even in the light of the street lamp, which made a sort of polished shield on the shining pavement below it and left the regions outside of it entirely dark, he did not at first recognize Margaret.

She had a shawl over her head, and her face looked white and strained.

"Mr. Warrington," she said, in a half whisper.

He stopped, of course, and then he knew her. "You oughtn't to be out here, you know," he told her. "It's cold to-night."

She said something about only being there for a minute, and then stepped out onto the paving and looked up at Mrs. Bayne's windows. They were lighted, and she seemed relieved.

"I wonder——" she began. "I hate so to bother you, but I can't get out, and there is something I ought to do. Want to do," she corrected herself. "I was to meet somebody to-night. A man. A friend." She was breathless. She put a hand to her flat chest and, as if the very words were treasonable, looked up at the windows once more.

"And you're not able to? Is that it?"

"I'm not very strong yet, and besides——"

"Where were you to meet him?"

She told him, still in the hushed, breathless voice.

"I don't know what you'll think of me," she finished. "My sister doesn't like him—doesn't approve of him, rather. But it's all right. It's really all right."

"Why, of course it's all right. Why shouldn't you have a friend if you want one? It's your life, you know. You've got to live it."

It struck him later on that that was hardly a tactful speech, considering how nearly she had come not to living it at all. But she did not seem to mind it. She gave his arm a furtive touch, and a moment later she had disappeared into the passage again.

He went on, pondering the situation. So Margaret had a lover, after all! Queer! You never could tell whom the thing would strike. Looking at her, he'd have said——

So that was why he had found her in the kitchen, almost lifeless! Her one chance, perhaps, and her sister would not let her take it. Well, he was for her; for her and the Mr. Cox who was to meet her outside the Palace picture house that night. Not a young man, she had described him; he was to have iron-gray hair and probably a soft gray hat, but maybe a cap. Sometimes he wore a cap; it was less trouble in the movies. And he would be walking about, waiting.

He thought a great deal about the affair as he ate his dinner. He did not know a great deal about love, but somehow he had always thought of it as concerning only the young. Apparently he had been wrong. It went on and on. One might have the damnable pain at any age. There was no immunity. Maybe you fought your way out of one torture only to meet up with another later on.

He felt very low in his mind, and even reflecting on Furness Brooks's hat no longer comforted him.

He found Mr. Cox without any trouble. He was a commonplace-looking little man, and the commonplaceness was not decreased by the fact that that night he wore the cap. As the vessel of a romantic and clandestine passion he was disappointing, but there was a sort of belligerent honesty about his face that Warrington approved of.

"Your name Cox?" he asked.

Mr. Cox wheeled. "Yes. I guess you've got the advantage of me."

"You don't know me. I have a message for you. Let's get out of this crowd."

Outside on the pavement Mr. Cox fell into step beside him. He strode along, stretching himself to keep up with Warrington's longer strides, for never, under ordinary circumstances, would he allow another man to outstep him. That was written all over him.

Outside of a jeweller's window down the street they paused, and Warrington conveyed his message.

"She's been sick?" said Mr. Cox anxiously. "Why didn't she send me word before this?"

"I rather gathered that it isn't easy to get word to you."

“Easy! I’ll tell the world it isn’t easy. How is she now?”

“She’s better. She says next week will be all right. Look here, Mr. Cox, why don’t you get her out of there?”

“Get her out? Don’t you suppose I would if I could? Haven’t I tried for over a year?”

“Then get her,” said Warrington briefly.

Mr. Cox peered up at him, anxiety written clearly on his face. “Why do you say that?” he demanded. “Not that it’s any of your damned business, but if you know anything, you’d better tell me.”

His manner was truculent, his voice raised.

Warrington told him. He had all the average man’s objection to interfering in the affairs of other people, but the picture of Aunt Margaret on the kitchen floor rose in his mind and cut off all other thoughts. She wasn’t going to try that again, not if he could help it.

But he had not counted on Mr. Cox. Mr. Cox went berserk; he strode up and down the pavement, angrily talking and finally fairly shouting. Passers-by looked at him wonderingly; some dodged past, and others moved slowly, smiling. He was temporarily quite mad.

Warrington felt ridiculous—ridiculous and angry. He tried leading Mr. Cox away by the arm, but he would not be led. And finally a policeman wandered up, listened a moment, and then touched Mr. Cox on the arm.

“Better go around the corner and talk about your troubles,” he said.

It is doubtful if Mr. Cox even heard what he said. He came to himself, saw the hand on his arm, and stiffened.

“Take your hand off me,” he yelled.

The policeman’s smile died. He held on.

“Then behave yourself,” he said.

Suddenly Mr. Cox hauled off and hit him, and was promptly placed under arrest!

At the station house later they only reprimanded him and let him go, a crushed and terribly humiliated little man; but his name was on the blotter, and so was Warrington’s, for that matter. He walked out into the street, no longer attempting to keep pace with the taller man, not even talking.

He stopped at the corner, however, and made a sort of apology.

"First time in my life *that's* happened to me," he said. "Sorry I got you into it. I guess I was excited." He hesitated. "I'll be thankful if you don't tell Margaret. She'd feel responsible, seeing that it was——" His voice trailed off. He stood for a second uncertainly. "I'm going to get her out of that hell hole," he said thickly, and turned abruptly, disappearing down a side street.

So Warrington was not as surprised as he might have been to come home a few days later and find an expressman taking out a trunk, and in the lower hall Aunt Margaret, gloved and hatted, and with a spot of colour in her thin cheeks. Holly was with her, but Mrs. Bayne was not in sight.

"Not leaving us, are you?" Warrington asked.

"I'll be coming back again," she said. "At least I hope——"

Suddenly her chin quivered; she gave a quick glance at the staircase, which remained obstinately empty; then she wrung his hand, coughed, and went out onto the doorstep, to turn there to Holly.

"Tell your mother I said good-bye."

"I will. And remember, just be happy, Aunt Margaret."

"I'd be a good bit happier if you——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Holly hastily. "You'd better hurry."

Margaret walked away, and the expressman drove off. Holly stood on the doorstep with a queer breathless look on her face; then she turned and went quietly into the house.

Warrington thought about that a great deal. The old house was quieter and more depressing than ever; indeed, for a week or so there was no tea table laid in the drawing room, and Mrs. Bayne had her meals in her bedroom. Holly was carrying trays once more.

"Nothing seriously wrong, I hope?" he asked her one day, finding her stopped halfway for breath. He had time to look at the tray. It contained a sizable meal.

"No," she said briefly. "Nothing serious." She refused his offer of assistance, but it is rather a pity that he did not look back as he went on up. She was staring after him, at his broad shoulders, his air of solid dependability, with something of the same look with which she had followed Aunt Margaret that last day. But he went on.

Later he heard the doorbell, and Furness Brooks's high, slightly affected voice in the lower hall. A slightly possessive voice, too, it seemed to him.

When he went out to his dinner, the drawing-room door was closed, and there was a low murmur of voices beyond it.

CHAPTER SIX

ONE has to remember, in order to understand what followed, Howard Warrington's total ignorance of the household. He had never heard of Tom Bayne, defaulting cashier of the Harrison Bank. He had no background whatever for Mrs. Bayne, or Margaret, or for Holly.

His occasional glimpses into their lives were those of the individual who, confronted with a series of peepshows at a fair, looks in each for a second and then passes on.

There was, for him, no such understanding as Mrs. McCook's across the street, a few days after Mrs. Bayne was up and about again.

"There's a taxicab at Ninety-one, Clara!" she called. "It must be about time—yes, it is! Mrs. Bayne's getting into it. That big fellow who's got the third-floor front is helping her. I haven't seen that duvetyne before."

No, it meant nothing to him. Not the taxicab, nor Mrs. Bayne's grim set face, nor Holly's depressed one. Odd to think it, too, considering how vitally that visit of Mrs. Bayne's to the penitentiary was to affect him. Odder still to know that he never noticed the change in her on her return. He looked in and saw her in her customary seat in the drawing room, her hat still on her head, quite alone and gazing at nothing with singular intensity.

She had never even heard Warrington come in.

He did not know of the invisible bands that were closing around Holly, and how Margaret's desertion and this visit of Mrs. Bayne's were acting on her. Nor did he overhear, who seemed always to be overhearing things, the conversation between Holly and her mother which took place after he went upstairs.

“Here’s your tea, Mother. You mustn’t look like that. I’m sure that he’ll get better.”

Mrs. Bayne did not turn her head. She merely moved her eyes until they rested on the girl.

“Better!” she said. “Of course he’ll get better. They’re letting him out.”

“When?”

Mrs. Bayne said nothing. She took off her hat, still with that fixed and dreadful look, and picked up her cup before she spoke.

“And all my plans for you—gone.”

“Don’t worry about me just now, Mother. When is he coming?”

“In a month, maybe. I don’t know. I don’t care.”

Then suddenly Mrs. Bayne broke down. She sobbed out all her troubles, her thwarted hopes for Holly, Margaret’s marriage, their poverty, the old disgrace, and now this new trouble. All of life had let her down, everybody, everything. She wanted to die. She couldn’t go on any longer.

It was not new to Holly. She had heard it all before. But now there was a difference; there was an underlying current of reproach for her. She could help if she would; at least she could save herself out of the wreckage. She knew well enough that such salvage was to save her mother as well, to reinstate her, but she shut her mind to that.

By the time Mrs. Bayne ceased and wiped her eyes, she had made up her mind. After all, what did it matter? What were dreams against this stark reality?

“If you think marrying Furness would help,” she said slowly, “I will do it.” She hesitated. “It doesn’t seem entirely fair to him, but if he understands that I don’t care very much, one way or the other——”

“You wouldn’t dare to tell him that!” protested Mrs. Bayne.

“Don’t you think I ought to? I can’t pretend. I never could.”

And to do her credit, Holly did tell Furness. Not precisely in those words, but he understood her well enough.

“I don’t feel the way you—seem to feel about it,” she said honestly. “I don’t know many people, and of course I—” she smiled faintly—“I don’t know anything at all about love. Only I thought it would be different.”

He was not a bad sort, and that touched him.

“Give me a little time,” he said. “Let me teach you a bit. Naturally you don’t know about love, dearest. How could you, shut away like this?”

It was speedily evident, however, that time was the last thing in Mrs. Bayne’s mind. The essence of the contract, to her, was haste; to get it settled and announced before Tom Bayne came back, to commit Brooks beyond withdrawal. And Furness Brooks, not without his own trepidations, played her game for her.

Howard Warrington came home one day to find a limousine at the door, with two men in livery, and a Pekingese looking out through its plate-glass windows, and in the drawing room Mrs. Bayne was entertaining a caller.

Holly, in a new frock, was listlessly sitting near by, but there was nothing listless about Mrs. Bayne.

“Personally,” she was saying, “I prefer a church. I was married in St. Andrews, and it would be only right for Holly. Holly darling, you run out and bring in the toast. Hilda is so frightfully slow.”

Mrs. Willoughby-Jones was not listening, however. She was gazing at the large young man absorbedly picking up his mail in the hall. She watched him drop a letter, ignore it, and dazedly gather up his evening papers and disappear. But she had seen his face in the mirror, and he had certainly looked very odd.

She wanted to ask Mrs. Bayne who he was, but to Mrs. Bayne there had been no young man in the hall. So far as Mrs. Willoughby-Jones was concerned, it was clearly Mrs. Bayne’s attitude that the front door had not closed and that nobody had passed by.

But he had passed by. What is more, he knew his way about now, and he did not go up the stairs. He went straight back to the kitchen, closing the door carefully, and faced Holly, who was making toast with a sort of grim expertness in an otherwise empty kitchen.

She looked up at him and went a little pale.

“So!” he said violently. “Hilda’s slow making the toast. Hilda! Hilda! You know darned well that there isn’t any Hilda.”

“That’s my affair, Mr. Warrington,” said Holly.

“Not by a damned sight,” he said loudly. “I don’t get it. It makes me sick. It’s hypocrisy. It’s worse than that, even. It’s——”

His own fury shocked him. She was staring at him in bewilderment, and he got out a handkerchief and mopped his face.

"Sorry!" he said rather hoarsely. "I suppose I'm excited. I was in the hall, and I heard your mother——"

"Yes?"

"Look here, do you care for that Brooks fellow?"

"I am going to marry him."

"That's not what I asked you," he said loudly again. He pulled himself together once more, however, and went on more quietly. "What I mean is this: is it more of the 'Hilda' stuff, or isn't it?"

She examined the toast and turned it before she answered. Then her reply was rather as if she spoke to herself.

"We can't all let her down," she said.

"Let who down?"

"Mother. First Father did, and then Aunt Margaret. It's killing her."

"What's Aunt Margaret done?"

"She's married a clerk in the store where she—a clerk in a store."

He stared at her incredulously.

"Oh!" he said at last. "Oh, that's what she's done! My God, and you call that letting her down! Why, your Aunt Margaret's got more guts in a minute than you'll have all your life. Wake up, girl. You're living in a real world, not a world of ladies and gentlemen." His voice rose; his collar felt too tight for him. He ran a finger inside it.

"Marry your popinjay!" he said. "Go on mincing through life. Drink your tea and hold your little finger out! I'm through."

Suddenly he saw the engagement ring on her left hand, and he lifted it and looked at it. From the ring he looked at her hand; it was small and shapely, but it bore the scars of "Hilda's" work, of much living service. Involuntarily she tried to close it, like Margaret, and the sight made him wince.

"You poor little fool," he said gently, and kissed it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AFTER that Warrington did not see her very much. When he did, he fancied that she was thinner; there were hollows in her cheeks he had not seen before. And once downtown he saw her on a street corner, talking to Margaret, who was looking younger by years and with her left hand no longer clenched. It gave him an actual pain at the heart to see that Margaret was growing younger and Holly older.

They did not see him, and he passed by.

But if Holly was looking worn and wretched, Mrs. Bayne was expanding daily. Cars came and people called. Old friends, who had apparently forgotten her, drove up in limousines and drank her tea and munched Holly's toast. And when they were about to go, she would touch the bell and summon Hilda to let them out.

As Hilda never came, they would let themselves out, but the proper gesture had been made. Inefficient servants they could understand; no servants they could not.

But no young people came. The rallying was of the older generation. The young ones did not know Holly.

And Holly was puzzled about her mother. There was a strange excitement about her quite foreign to her. From the day of the engagement she had been like some one who carries, warm and safe, a wonderful secret. She would sit and plan, not talking much, but with a half smile on her lips. Out of these pleasant reveries she would rouse, to speak of the wedding. Always it was the wedding.

"You really should have bridesmaids," she would say.

"I don't know any girls, Mother."

"Furness could get them. He is extremely popular."

Or it would be the trousseau and the wedding gown.

"I have that old point lace," she would say. "It's in a trunk in the attic. And your Aunt Margaret is really clever with her needle. Perhaps I'd better go to see her. After all, nobody knows about her. I do wish you would take some interest, Holly."

It was during one of those talks that Holly looked up with a curiously direct glance.

"How are we going to do any of these things, Mother, without any money?"

And again Mrs. Bayne smiled her faint contented smile.

"My dear child," she said, "I have a little. You can leave that to me."

"You're not borrowing it?"

"Certainly not! I have a little laid away," said Mrs. Bayne evasively. "For heaven's sake, Holly, don't look at me like that! It isn't very much. But it will start you like a lady, if we are careful."

Holly gave her mother a long careful glance, but Mrs. Bayne was pouring herself a second cup of tea. She was of an old school, and so as she drank it, she held her little finger out and delicately curved. A slight colour came into the girl's face as she noticed it.

They had set the wedding for two months ahead. Warrington knew that from the newspapers, for they did not tell him. In a way he had lost ground recently rather than gained it; he had never again been so close to them as just after Margaret's attempt at suicide.

If he laid Holly's aloofness to resentment, nobody could blame him. If there was a fear of her own weakness in quiet dignity toward him, who was to tell him that? How could he know that since that day in the kitchen he had occupied most of her thoughts? Poor Holly, wearing her engagement ring and his kiss on the same hand!

There were a good many times when he decided to pack up and clear out, and as many others when he decided to stay and see it through. He would sit in his chair or walk about the room, arguing pro and con, and sometimes he would simply sit and brood.

Once or twice, sitting thus, he heard stealthy footsteps in the attic overhead. The first time he heard them he got up and went out into the hall,

only to meet Mrs. Bayne there with some old lace over her arm and a candle in her hand. She had showed it to him with pride.

"It was on my wedding gown," she said, "and now it is for Holly. It is really lovely."

After that the sounds in the attic were like bugle calls to battle for his bitter thoughts.

On one such evening, however, following the sounds Warrington heard a light knock on his door. Mrs. Bayne was outside, and as he opened the door she held her finger to her lips. She slipped into the room and closed the door.

"I am so sorry to trouble you," she said cautiously, "but I wonder if you will do me a favour?"

"Anything I can," he said politely, and eyed her. He did not see her, really; all he saw was a ruthlessly genteel person who was not to be let down at any cost. But he did see her hands. They were soft and white and unsullied by any labour.

"I so seldom go out," she said, in a breathless sort of voice. "I dare say I should. I often think I will go for a walk, but somehow I don't. And I have a bond here. Rather a large one, and I should have it sold. I know so little about business, but I—it is for a thousand dollars."

She opened it out. He saw that her hands were shaking, but he laid it to the stairs.

"I have not told my daughter that I am selling it," she went on. "She might worry. But just now, with so many fresh expenses! And you sell bonds, don't you?"

"When I get the chance," he said, gravely smiling down at her. "If you care to trust this to me I'll see what I can do. Of course," he added, to put her more at ease, "I may vanish with it! One never knows."

She hastened to reassure him, her childish blue eyes turned up to his, her relaxed white throat quivering. She was oddly emotional; he had never thought of her as emotional. For the first time he understood why Holly felt she could not let her down; why, she was like a child; her airs and poses were those of a little girl playing at being a lady. In spite of himself his heart warmed toward her.

"If it just isn't too much trouble," she said. "And, of course, any commission——"

“It’s absolutely no trouble,” he told her, “and there’s no question of any commission between friends.”

He gave her again his grave smile, and she went out.

It was only when she had gone, stealing down the stairs as carefully as she had come up, that he stood for some time looking at the bond in his hand. It was almost farcical, his having it. And to-morrow he would bring it back in neat tens and twenties, and it would go to buy the clothes and the little intimate things with which Holly would go to her husband.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WARRINGTON sold the bond next day and brought the money back. It was a coupon bond, and it went out with an odd lot from the office. Save for a sense of responsibility as to the safe carriage of the currency in his pocket—Mrs. Bayne had asked for currency—the transaction was ended, so far as he was concerned.

He took the money back that night, buttoned inside his coat against pickpockets, and he walked part of the way. He had found that walking until he was dog tired was the only way he could sleep, just then.

Furness Brooks's car was at the curb as usual, and so Warrington passed the open drawing-room door without a glance. He had a dread of seeing Holly and her lover together, of having their new intimacy thrust at him by some glance or gesture. But as a matter of fact, there was hardly a chance of that. It was, by and large, a strange wooing. . . .

"Come over and sit by me, Holly, won't you?"

"I can talk better here."

If Furness insisted, she would go reluctantly, and the hand he held was often cold as ice. But she was gentleness and acquiescence itself to him, as if she would make up in this way for her failure in the other.

Fortunately Furness liked to talk. He was already planning for the wedding, seeing in it that one moment when he would hold the centre of the stage and not be "filling in." He and Holly. He was determined that the wedding should be correct in every detail.

"It's a pity Sam Parker's thinking of going abroad. He's the logical person to give you away."

There were times, of course, when his passion got the better of his common sense, when his wooing became instead a sort of fierce gesture of possession. Once, carried away by it, he went too far with her, and she struck him with her closed fist and slammed out of the room. But he knew he had been wrong, and he left her no loophole of escape. He apologized by note that night and flowers the next morning, and she had to come back to him, a trifle wary, perhaps, but still his. . . .

Warrington, of course, had no idea of this. He was still seeing the household through an occasional peephole: tramping up the stairs past Mrs. Bayne's room, where, if her door was open, he could see her busy now with endless memoranda, past Holly's little chamber, with its tidy virginal white bed and its blue curtains—he always tried very hard not to glance into that room—and so on to his own lonely quarters, where a pair of military brushes on the dresser and the books on a table were all that marked it his.

So that night he went up the stairs, and Mrs. Bayne, hearing the creak of the loose step outside, followed him up.

He gave her the money. He had an idea that it was more money than she had held in her hands for many years, but she was as calm as a May morning.

"By the way," he said, "I hope you don't keep things like that lying around the house. They're negotiable, you know."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Bonds like that are much the same as currency. They can be stolen and sold."

Afterward he was to remember that she made an odd little startled gesture, but she said nothing for a moment. Then:

"I see," she said quietly. "Thank you for telling me." She moved to the door and paused there irresolutely.

"I'll be very careful," she said, and added irrelevantly, her eyes on the package of currency in her hand: "There are certain sacrifices one must make at times like this. I dare say you know that my daughter is to be married?"

"I saw it in the paper. Yes."

"She is marrying very well," she said, still in that curious irresolute manner. "Very well indeed."

Suddenly all his resentment and anger flared up in him. He could hardly control his voice.

"That depends, of course, on how you look at it."

"I don't understand you."

"If she cares for the man and not for what he will bring her."

Their eyes met, and there was certainly no friendliness in them. Mrs. Bayne drew herself up.

"That, of course, is not a matter for discussion," she said quietly, and went out of the room.

That she bore him no lasting grudge, however, he saw the next evening. He found her when he came home, drinking her tea as usual, with her hat awry on her head and a litter of parcels and boxes in the hall. She was clearly excited, and more expansive than he had ever seen her.

"Do come in," she said. "Holly, a cup for Mr. Warrington. Don't bother to ring. By the way, darling, I stopped in at your Aunt Margaret's. She'll be delighted to do what I suggested."

But Holly was already out of the room.

Mrs. Bayne waved a hand toward the hall. "What a day I've had! But the prices of things since the war! I have done so little buying that I didn't realize."

Her eyes glittered; her hands trembled. There was almost ecstasy in her voice. He saw that she had not so much forgiven the evening before as forgotten it, and to the unaccustomed luxury of being with Holly he surrendered for a moment his own anger and bitterness.

He even had a few moments alone with her, while Mrs. Bayne went upstairs to take off her hat, a few moments which led to a rather curious result.

"I've always wanted to tell you," he said in a low voice. "I don't know what got into me the other day. I hadn't a right in the world to say what I did."

"No," she said. "Of course, you didn't really know how things were. If you had, you would have understood better."

"I wouldn't understand a loveless marriage, no matter how things were."

"How do you know it is a loveless marriage?"

“What did you mean by ‘not letting her down’ if it isn’t?”

Instead of replying she went to the door and listened. Her mother was still upstairs. When she came back to the tea table, her face was set.

“I’m going to ask you something,” she said. “Something rather awful, but I must know. Has mother borrowed any money from you?”

“Certainly not. You can’t get blood out of a stone! Anyhow, I am sure she would never think of such a thing.”

“But she’s got money somewhere.”

“Hasn’t she a little capital of her own? Maybe she has disposed of something.”

“She had a small allowance. She can’t draw on it in advance.”

“She may have saved something.”

“Saved!” said Holly scornfully. “You can’t save out of nothing. Mr. Warrington, if you know anything, you must tell me. I can’t tell you how important it is.”

“But if she asked me not to?”

“What does that matter, if she’s sold something that she shouldn’t have sold? Oh, don’t you see, if she has, she’s done it for me, and I just can’t bear it.”

“I’m quite sure you are wrong. I’ll tell you, since it’s worrying you. She gave me a bond to sell. I got her a good price. And that’s all.”

“A bond!” she said. “She gave you a bond? My poor mother!”

Her face was stricken; she seemed to be holding to the tea table for support. And then Mrs. Bayne came back.

CHAPTER NINE

EVEN then Warrington had no idea of the gravity of the situation. He helped them carry Mrs. Bayne's parcels up to her bedroom, and later on he could hear her opening them and talking, still in her new excited voice. She was still gloating happily as he went out again to his dinner, where the cashier at the Red Rose told him he looked glum, and hinted that the movies would cheer them both up a bit.

"There's a good show at the Grand," she said. "A laugh a minute."

"I wouldn't dare," he told her, smiling down at her. "I've got a cracked lip."

He ate his dinner morosely and thoughtfully, and then went back to the house. So Mrs. Bayne had had no business to sell the bond! And in doing so she had added to Holly's worries, as if she had not enough already.

Worries! The word was too weak. *Sacrifices* was a better one; that was what she was doing, sacrificing herself, selling herself; and for what? To restore a little elderly gentlewoman to a world she had somehow lost! A silly world, full of vain imaginings and false values.

He succeeded finally in working himself to a very fair passion, so that sleep later on was out of the question. He got up, and in his dressing gown and slippers sat in the chair by the hearth, a cigarette in his hand—and was wakened not long after by the odour of burning carpet.

He looked remorsefully at the charred spot on the floor, rubbed it with his fingers but failed to erase it, and was about to try bed once more when he heard a faint sound overhead.

He stepped out into the upper hall and listened. There was a door to the attic staircase, a door which was always religiously kept closed. But now it

was open, and a thin light trickled down, outlining the doorway in the surrounding darkness. A recollection of another night when he had stood there came to him, a night when Margaret had given up the battle between family pride and happiness, and had laid herself down to rest on the cold linoleum in the kitchen.

It made his heart faint within him. There had been a sort of quiet despair in Holly's face that afternoon, as if at last she too had reached the end of the road.

He ran up the stairs and into the attic room.

There was a candle on the floor, and Holly was sitting beside it. She had drawn out an old trunk and lifted pieces of two of the ancient floor boards, which had been beneath it, and over them she was staring at him with the strangest look he had ever seen on her face.

"Please go back," she said. "I'm quite all right."

"You don't look all right," he told her roughly. "And this place is cold. Do you want pneumonia?"

"I've asked you to go. If you don't, I'll have to, and I've got to stay."

"Don't be silly. If you're in some sort of trouble——"

"I'm in trouble enough, without you to make it worse. Please go. I've got to work this out alone."

"But if I only want to help? I give you my word of honour, that's all."

She sat looking up at him for a perceptible time before she made a despairing gesture of acquiescence.

"You'll find out anyhow," she said. "Look here."

But when he looked, he was in no way the wiser. He had, as has been said before, no background for Holly or the family, and he had never heard of Tom Bayne. All he saw was that beneath the lifted floor boards a small suitcase was lying.

"I see. What about it?"

"The bond," she said. "It must have come from here. *She* had no bonds. It was when she came up to get the point lace. She must have moved the trunk."

He was still struggling to understand.

“You mean it didn’t belong to her?”

“It belonged to the Harrison Bank,” she said, and sat still, waiting for the heavens to fall.

When presently she realized that nothing fell but a silence, she looked up at him again.

“From the bank, don’t you understand?”

But he still looked blank.

He had never heard of their trouble! It seemed incredible to her, who had thought all the world knew of it. But the mere telling of the facts seemed to ease her. And when he had finally gathered the essential facts, a difficult matter because she whispered them, as if to do so somehow minimized their import, he was more at a loss than he had ever been in his self-confident still young life. He saw that she was laying her burden on him with childlike faith, as if by sheer virtue of being a man he would know what to do.

He did the only thing he could think of. He picked up the candle and held out his hand.

“What are you going to do?”

“Get out of here, for one thing.”

“And leave that?”

“Why not? It’s been here for years.”

“But suppose she comes up again? Suppose she——”

“She’s not likely to, before morning, is she? And she’ll have to know sooner or later that it’s been found.”

“It isn’t that.” She swallowed, as if to moisten her dry throat. “She’s taken one bond already, and you see—she needs it so dreadfully.”

It was at that moment that he felt a cold chill travel slowly up his spine and settle in his brain. The part he himself had already played in the situation began to dawn on him. He had sold a stolen bond, one of the carefully listed missing securities of a looted bank! Sooner or later——

He pulled himself together and smiled down at her gravely.

“What’s your own idea?” he asked.

“They have to go back to the bank, of course. Only, Mother’s got to be kept out of it. There must be some way.”

“Of course there’s a way,” he told her.

But he was not so sure of it. One of the bonds had already been sold. It might escape identification indefinitely; on the other hand, it might already have been recognized, his residence in the Bayne house noted, and a fatal connection established. In that case——

“See here,” he said. “Suppose I take the suitcase down to my room overnight? Then in the morning I can see the bank people and arrange for everything to be done quietly.”

“Without dragging Mother in?”

“I’ve promised to keep her out, haven’t I?”

She swayed a little as he helped her up. Still holding the candle, he lifted the suitcase; dust had penetrated the old floor boards and covered it, and he shook that off. Then he replaced the boards and took a last look around him.

“Better go ahead,” he told her. “I’ll follow after you’re safely down.”

But she stood still, looking up at him.

“Why should you help us?” she said. “We are nothing to you.”

“You are everything in the world to me,” he said quietly, and watched her down the stairs.

CHAPTER TEN

MARGARET COX was very happy. She had even gained in flesh; every now and then James, her husband, put a penny in the slot of some weighing machine and stood by, eying the result proudly.

"A woman's the better for a little meat on her bones," he would tell her. "It shows somebody's looking after her."

And she no longer clenched her left hand for fear somebody would see her scarred forefinger. "Open it out," said lordly James. "It's only lazy hands that people have a right to be ashamed of. Only——" and here his voice would soften—"only, I wish the blisters were on mine and not on yours, my girl."

He always called her his girl, and in his eyes Margaret really was a girl; he had never quite got over his astonishment at the depths of her ignorance in some matters.

"Well, I'm darned," he would say. "Didn't they ever tell you anything at all?"

"They" in his mind were Margaret's family, and less immediately that *terra incognita* of aristocracy and repressions from which he had abducted her. "Certainly put one over on them," was his manner of referring to that abduction.

"There were a good many things we were taught not to discuss," she would say, colouring faintly. "It wasn't considered ladylike."

"Well, you can't be a real honest-to-John woman and be their kind of a lady at the same time," he would retort, and chuckle a bit.

Undoubtedly he was a vulgar little man, but he was honest, good-humoured, and sturdily independent. "I stand on my own feet," was one of

his commonest expressions. Oddly enough, Margaret not only did not resent his vulgarity; she seemed indeed rather to like it. It was perhaps her idea of a gesture toward truth after a lifetime of polite evasions.

And probably it was. James's honesty was his outstanding quality; he had a tremendous pride in it.

"You can tell them," he had said during the strange days of their courtship, "that I'm no great shakes as to money or position, but you can tell 'em too for me that, by God, I'm honest. And that's more than they can say."

Which was, by the way, the only reference he had ever made to Margaret concerning the presence of her brother-in-law in the penitentiary.

They lived very simply. They had three rooms, a bath, and a kitchenette, and Margaret never got over the sensation of extravagance when she let the tub fill with hot water; taking a bath "at home," as she still called the Bayne house, had required deliberation and preparation. The furniture had come from "the store," at a discount, and in the evenings, after her bath, Margaret would put on a bright pink kimono and sit in front of her shiny dressing table and brush the long heavy hair which was her only beauty.

James would be reading the paper in the living room, and the odour of his cigar would come in through the doorway. It still seemed to her incredible that a man—her man—was in the next room, with the door open between.

Sometimes he would call in. He had taken to reading the society columns.

"I see your cousins the Sam Parkers are going abroad."

"Really? They're leaving the children with the governess, I dare say."

Or:

"Mrs. Willoughby-Jones is giving a luncheon, Margaret. Ask you?"

"No. Why on earth should she?"

"Well, why shouldn't she?" he would grumble. "I guess you're as good as anybody she'll have there."

And Margaret would smile at his belligerent tone.

On the day Holly's engagement was announced in the papers, James took one with him to the store and showed it around proudly.

“Seen this, Smith?” he would say. “My wife’s niece. She’s marrying young Brooks; father was Schuyler Brooks, you know.”

To which the department responded in kind. Smith, or Jones, would call James and show him a tablecloth.

“See this tablecloth, Cox?” he would say. “Just sold it to young Mrs. Maginnis; mother was a Flaherty, you know.”

And James took his ragging cheerfully.

He adored Margaret. Beyond his wife, his home, and his department in the store he had no life and wished none. He liked his world to be within the reach of his arms.

It was to this humble terrain, then, that the battle of the Bayne pride was to shift, and that right speedily. They had come in from the movies, and Margaret was in front of her toilet table. She looked up, and James was in the doorway with the newspaper in his hand.

“See here,” he said, “did you know that there was a move on to get Tom Bayne out of the pen?”

“My goodness, no!”

“Well, there is. Or was.”

“They’re not going to let him out?”

“The pardon’s granted. Kidneys gone wrong or something. Say he’s a dying man.”

“Oh, James!” she wailed. “What will they do? And Holly’s wedding next month!”

“I thought you didn’t want that wedding.”

“Well, they want it. At least——”

“At least the old lady does, eh? Well, that’s neither here nor there. I just want to say this, Margaret: He’s not to come here bothering you, or me either. I’m not trafficking with crooks.”

She did not resent it. She knew his frightful honesty, and she liked his masterfulness.

“I don’t think he’ll bother us, James. But what they’re to live on I don’t know.”

“Let him get out and work. Dig ditches or run a street car. That may hurt his pride, but it’s honest.”

“If he’s sick——”

“Oh, fiddledeedee!” he grunted. “Sick, nothing. That’s the old dodge to get him out. Everything goes but flat feet.”

But later on he felt that perhaps he had been a trifle violent, and after they were in bed he put a hand over and caught hers. He felt carefully for her worn forefinger and stroked it gently.

“Maybe I said too much,” he whispered, “but he left you to slave for them there. I hate his very insides.”

He went to sleep soon after, but Margaret lay awake, wide-eyed and anxious. The satin had come for Holly’s wedding dress, and already she had cut it out. It was very wonderful satin, but she wondered now if it would ever be used. If only she hadn’t cut it!

She was not the only one who lay awake. Indeed, save Mrs. Bayne and James, none of the characters in the approaching drama got much sleep at all.

Holly’s world had suddenly crashed beneath her feet, and the very figure of stability, her mother, had destroyed it. Holly might have been whirling through space, with her father and her mother and Furness, and the children at school who used to howl after her, all whirling about her. When she dropped to sleep, it was to have the sensation of falling, and to waken damp with the sweat of terror. Once she roused thus and sat up in bed to see two shining eyes fixed on her from across the room.

It was some time before she realized that they were the paste buckles on a pair of slippers on her dressing table, a part of her mother’s purchases that day.

Through it all, however, there was one figure that did not move or whirl. It was as steady as one of the fixed stars. When her tired brain refused the hundred crowding chaotic thoughts, it seized on this for rest and peace: Warrington, solid and gravely dependable, and saying: “You are everything in the world to me.”

Toward morning she fell into heavy sleep, from which she was roused by the ringing of the doorbell. Her mother was stirring across the hall, and Holly opened her door and spoke to her.

“I’ll go down,” she said. “Go back to bed, Mother.”

“Don’t let anyone in until you know who it is,” said Mrs. Bayne. There was a curious catch in her voice, and even in the haste of getting down and opening the front door, Holly noticed it.

As if it had been lying in the back of her mind all the time the thought sprang out at her: “Suppose there was something more in selling that bond than just taking what didn’t belong to one? Suppose there was—risk?”

“Who’s there?” she called with her hand on the knob. “What do you want?”

“Telegram,” was the laconic answer.

She opened the door, and, after signing the book, read the message. She knew, as she stood there, that her mother was in the hall above, listening and perhaps trembling.

“It’s just a telegram, Mother,” she called up reassuringly.

“A telegram? What about?”

“The pardon’s been granted. He’ll be coming home, Mother, as soon as he can travel.”

Suddenly and without warning Mrs. Bayne burst into tears.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WARRINGTON had carried down the suitcase and placed it in his closet. He felt no desire to examine its contents. Rather, he had an extreme repugnance to so doing. It occurred to him, grimly enough, that if the bond he had sold had been identified, the last place he should choose for the suitcase was his closet.

Outside of that, and his yearning pity for Holly, his attention was mainly directed to Mrs. Bayne and her temptation. Had Holly been right, and had she discovered the hiding place by accident? Or had she known it all along? Stranger things than that had happened, he knew; but the idea of Mrs. Bayne as *particeps criminis* was hardly tenable.

No. He preferred Holly's theory. It was more like her. He could even see her moving the trunk into a better light, and perhaps a board lifting, a giving under her feet. Then the discovery, and the temptation; sitting there, perhaps, on the trunk itself, staring at the papers in her hand; putting on her gold *pince-nez* and carefully reading; understanding, finally, and her soft relaxed chin working.

He could even follow the reasoning of her worldly yet childlike mind. It was all over so long ago, and Bayne had paid the penalty. So had she. So had Holly. They had paid once; were they to pay again? And the bank had not suffered permanently. It was more prosperous now than ever.

But she had been canny, too. She had not tried to sell the bond herself. She had given it to him to sell. For all her ignorance she had known enough for that. Lying there sleepless, he began quite definitely to put the burden of responsibility on Mrs. Bayne. Probably, in that long ago, she had lived beyond their means and so precipitated the catastrophe. And now she had not only yielded to temptation; she had not scrupled to use him.

Holly had got hold of the wrong end of the stick. It was Mrs. Bayne who had let the lot down: her husband, her sister, her child, and now himself.

He bathed and dressed absently the next morning, absorbed in his problem. It struck him rather humorously that the mere matter of carrying the securities was a delicate one. Suppose the bond had been recognized and traced to him? Wasn't there a charge of receiving stolen goods? But even without that, suppose he met Mrs. Bayne on the stairs. What would he do, or say? Or she?

After he was dressed he got out the suitcase and laid it on his bed. It had some old foreign labels on it, and he regarded them with mixed feelings.

"So you've travelled, have you?" he reflected. "But of course you would. That was a part of the game, the whole damned snobbish game."

He wandered to the window and looked down into the quiet street. And a large but lightly stepping gentleman who had been eying the house from the opposite pavement leisurely lighted a cigarette and moved on. Warrington did not notice him.

Still at a loss, he left the suitcase and went down the stairs, to find Holly patiently waiting for him in the lower hall. The strong morning light streamed in through the glass of the front door and brought out painfully her thinness and the tired lines about her eyes.

"I couldn't go up to your room," she said. "She's awake, and not very well."

"You still want me to get it out of the house?"

"Yes. That's all I can think of. You see, my father is coming back. He's been ill, and so they're letting him out. Or maybe he hasn't been ill; maybe he's just pretending. I don't know." She smiled up at him painfully. "You see what it's done to me. I don't believe much in anything just now."

"You can believe in me," he said sturdily. "You have to have one anchor, and I'm it."

"I do believe in you."

But she did not look up.

Her idea was that he take the suitcase to Margaret's and leave it there until he had seen the bank officials.

"You can't do anything else with it," she said. "I've thought and thought. You see, the lock's broken, and anybody might open it."

“All right,” he consented. “I’ll put some heavy twine around it, and then you can give me the address and the thing’s done. And now you’re to stop worrying! It’s all fixed and everybody’s happy. I’ll get a taxi and clear out.”

“If she heard a taxi, she’d get up and look out. She might think it was—Father.”

“All right,” he agreed, indomitably cheerful for her benefit. “Then I won’t get a taxi! Much as I dislike the plebeian street car . . .”

As he went up the stairs, he confronted Mrs. Bayne.

“I thought I heard voices,” she said plaintively. “Is Holly down there?—I want my tray, Holly.”

“Yes, Mother.”

He had to wait above until Mrs. Bayne had retired and closed her door. Then he went down, suitcase in hand. The Coxes’ address was on a slip of paper on the table, and he took it and went out.

Had he been less absorbed in his errand, he would have noticed that the large but lightly stepping gentleman followed him onto the car.

Margaret was at home. Before he rang the bell of the little apartment he could hear her singing inside. Coming down, he had not given much thought to Margaret save as to what he should tell her, but the singing gave him a surprise. He had never heard her sing before. He had somehow never thought of her as singing.

He had an instant picture of her on that kitchen floor months ago, of her silk stockings and beaded slippers, of the neatness of the organdie collar around her almost pulseless neck. And now she was singing.

Life was queer. It was darned queer.

She opened the door herself, a strange Margaret, lighted with happiness like a torch; a fulfilled Margaret, calm and unashamed.

“Why, upon my word!” she said. “Come in. I was just sweeping.”

He went in and deposited his suitcase on the floor, while Margaret eyed it curiously.

“I’m playing errand boy this morning,” he told her. “I’m to leave this here, and Holly will be in later to explain.”

Neither he nor Margaret noticed this use of Holly’s given name.

“Is it the lace? If that’s *all* lace——”

“Oh!” he said, grinning cheerfully at her. “I forgot one thing. You’re not to open it. You are to promise. Cross your heart you’ll put it in a closet and leave it there until further instructions.”

Margaret smiled in return.

“But what *is* it?”

“I’ll tell you,” he said, lowering his voice. “It’s a bomb, a clockwork bomb. Since you married Mr. Cox, I have been consumed by a burning jealousy, and now I propose to do away with Mr. Cox.”

She laughed outright then, and her laughter was as strange and surprising as her singing.

“Then I shall put it in his closet,” she said. “And it will destroy his rows and rows of shoes. That will be your revenge, for he is frightfully vain about his feet. Of course, he has to be on them all day, and to change his shoes rests him.”

She took him around to see the flat, leading him first into the bedroom, where she placed the suitcase in James’s closet and showed him the tidy line-up of shoes. And after the shoes she showed him the further extravagances of James’s neckties.

“Look!” she said. “Did you ever see so many ties?”

“Looks like the wealth of Ormus and of Ind to me.”

But after he had seen it all, the imitation ivory toilet set which had been a recent gift, the shining kitchen, and had even opened a tap to show how hot the water ran, she turned to him with a different note in her voice—as if the Margaret who had married James Cox had retired, and the Margaret of the old house was back again.

“Do you know they are letting Tom Bayne out?”

“I learned it this morning.”

“But it’s dreadful. What will they do? And what will Furness Brooks think about it?”

A hot wave of anger flushed him.

“What the deuce would he think? He’s known about it all along, hasn’t he?”

“I know. But people had forgotten it, and now it’s all brought up again. And a church wedding! Her father can’t give her away.”

He controlled his voice with an effort.

“If he thinks about that at all, then he doesn’t deserve her. And if he doesn’t deserve her, I hope to God he doesn’t get her.”

His sudden anger surprised him. He had thought he had schooled himself better, and Margaret’s eyes were wide.

“What I mean is,” he said more quietly, “you and I can’t help that, can we? We’ll have to let it work itself out.”

Just inside the entrance door stood Margaret’s work basket, and a piece of heavy ivory-white satin lay on the top of it. As he was taking his leave, his eyes fell on it, and when he stopped outside at the elevator to light a cigarette, his hands were shaking.

“I’m in fine shape,” he told himself grimly. “Shot to pieces, by heck! I’ll have to stop smoking.”

And comforted by that masculine panacea for all ills, went down and out into the street. As with most such resolutions, however, he forgot it almost at once, and a short time after lighted another cigarette for the mere pleasure of observing that his hands were all right again!

By the time he reached the bank he had managed to concentrate on his business there. But the concentration did him very little good. That distinguished citizen and president of the reorganized Harrison Bank, Mr. Samuel Parker, had just sailed for Europe. This from the door man. And inside the bank an absent-looking youth raised his eyes from figures of incredible size to tell him that the vice president was down with influenza.

“What’s the cashier’s name?” he asked, irritably resorting to somewhat smaller fry.

“Gilbert. He’s on jury duty just now.”

“Then who the hell’s running this bank?” he demanded. But the absent youth went back to his figures, and Warrington retreated to the street, uneasy and at a loss. How about going to the district attorney? But that meant the law, and probably publicity; he had a cynical belief that district attorneys thrived on publicity. No, that wouldn’t do. He’d have to wait till he could manage to think things out.

It was in this frame of mind that he bumped into a passer-by and angrily told him to look out what he was doing. And the passer-by snapped back: “Look out yourself, you darned fool!”

It was Furness Brooks.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FURNESS had been in a state of rage since the announcement in the papers the evening before of Bayne's approaching release.

By direct appeal he had managed to engineer a few callers to the Bayne house, but as time went on, it became more and more clear to him that he could not force them back into society. And for all his lack-lustre eyes, he was shrewd enough. He knew that his present semi-popularity was due largely to the demand for unattached men at dinners, and the bits of gossip he could carry from one tea table to another.

With the failure of his campaign, therefore, it was plain to him that his popularity would cease with his marriage. Some men held on, he knew, but that was because they had married girls who could hold up their own end in the frivolous give and take of smart groups. With the same clear view he took of himself, he knew that Holly would never do that.

"Why don't you smoke?" he asked her once. "Everybody does, you know."

"I have tried. I hate it."

He brought her a long shell cigarette holder one day, and as dutifully as she did everything those days, she tried it.

"You hold it like a fountain pen, honey!"

"Well, how on earth should one hold the thing?" she demanded. And then, sorry for her tone: "You can't make me over, you know, Furness."

She had managed part of a cigarette, and then put it down.

Nor did he try to fool himself as to Holly's attitude to him. He had made no real headway with her. He could still feel the recoil as he put his arms around her, and her unconscious effort to get away.

“Don’t you like me to hold you?”

“But I feel so silly!”

“It isn’t silly to be in my arms.”

In the light-hearted but seriously pleasure-hunting group he knew best, girls gave their kisses so easily that they lost value. A caress had no more significance to them than a handclasp, hardly as much. Holly’s withdrawals therefore had the effect of stimulating his passion for her, and his vanity refused to admit the reason for them.

And the trap closed down. He brought her presents, sent her flowers. Mostly he saw her in the afternoons, as he was hurrying home to dress for a dinner somewhere afterward: holding desperately to his place in the sun, trying to have his cake and eat it too.

He had a fair income. His apartment was of the studio type, and now and then he sent out cards, and his Filipino servant Miguel brought in an assistant or two and he gave a party. Somebody sang, or he had a pianist and they danced, and the pantry became an extemporized bar. They were gay but sufficiently decorous, and they had had a certain vogue.

He had intended to give one for Holly after the engagement was announced, but the failure of his other campaign killed that idea. “Afterward, if they want me, they will have to take her too,” he reflected. But he was not as certain as he pretended to himself that “they” would want him. Like James, he used the word “they” rather often.

On the same evening, then, that James saw the announcement that Tom Bayne had been pardoned, Furness saw it, read it carefully, and flung down the paper angrily.

A dead scandal was one thing; a resurrected scandal in a morning coat, still with the prison pallor on its face, walking up the aisle at St. Andrews, was another. Of course it wouldn’t be; the Baynes had too much sense for that. It simply meant no wedding. It meant going to the City Hall or wherever one did go, and going through a formula more or less clandestinely. It meant—oh, *hell*!

He got into his dinner clothes morosely. At the Willoughby-Joneses’, where he was dining, he thought a small silence followed the announcement of his name, but conversation started again almost at once. He moved from group to group, watching with his pale blue eyes for any reservation, any indication of the social ticker that his stock had gone down. But there was

none; society has its weaknesses, but it is well bred. It ignores what it cannot cover.

It was after dinner, when the men moved in a body from the library to rejoin the women that he had his first words with his hostess.

"I suppose you've seen it, Furney?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"What is there to do? Of course, the church wedding's off."

"But you're going through with it?"

"I'd hardly call it that," he said, showing a certain resentment. "The marriage will go on, naturally. It will be quiet, that's all."

"And you'll be quiet afterward," said Mrs. Willoughby-Jones. "I'm being brutal for your own good, Furney. How many evenings do you dine at home now? How are you going to get along without all this?" She gestured toward the crowded, noisy room with her fan. "How long will it last?"

"As long as I can make it last," he said doggedly. But he was not so sure.

He won quite a little money that night at bridge, and somebody said to him:

"Does your—does Miss Bayne play?"

"No. She doesn't," he admitted.

There was a silence after that, and he went on playing his hand. But it came to him that all these people, all his world, disapproved of his marriage and expected it to fail. It roused something obstinate in him.

"I'll show them," he told himself. "They're not marrying her; I am."

And he felt a warm and voluptuous glow. It persisted until the small hours, when he finally pocketed his winnings and started home, and it drove him out of his way in his car to pass the Bayne house on Kelsey Street.

The house, as he had expected, was dark, but out of a small dormer window on the top floor came a faint glow of light.

He concluded that "Hilda" was keeping late hours!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WITH the suitcase out of the house Holly felt that she could breathe again. She carried up her mother's tray and coaxed her to eat some breakfast, but Mrs. Bayne was querulous and depressed.

"If they had only kept him another month!" she said. "Take this thing away; I can't eat with this hanging over my head."

"Still, if he is really ill——"

"They have doctors there, and a hospital. A good hospital. I've seen it. Anyhow, I don't believe he's so ill. He's only been doing clerical work there; he's had it easy enough."

"You don't really feel that way, Mother."

"Certainly I do. Another month or so wouldn't have hurt him after all these years. And he *knows* about the wedding. I sent him the announcements from the papers."

"Let's not think about the wedding just now. We'll have to make some plans. I can move up to Aunt Margaret's room, and he can have mine. I'll fix the bed now and get ready."

"You can't go to Margaret's room. I'm not going to have you on the same floor with that wretched man. I've seen the way he looks at you. I'm not blind."

Holly's pale face flushed.

"Father can't climb all those stairs. And—" she hesitated—"I don't suppose you want him in here?"

"You can put up the cot in the nursery." It was still the nursery, after all these years.

"Very well," said Holly quietly. "That's what I'll do. But I'll go there myself, Mother. It's quite comfortable."

She went out, taking the tray with her. She was hardly capable of consecutive thought, but there was room in her mind for a great thankfulness. The suitcase and all it contained was gone, and downtown that portion of her trouble at least was being straightened out. True, she dreaded the moment when Mrs. Bayne would go to the attic again and find out what had happened. Not that there would be a scene. The very facts precluded that. But there would be a shock.

She tried to think of some way to avoid that shock, but without success.

The morning wore on. She worked hard; but then, she was accustomed to that. Now and then the relation of the new situation to her marriage obtruded itself, but she drove it away. Time for that when they came to it. But in the back of her mind she was puzzling over it. How could she go away and leave those two there together? A sick man and an ailing, helpless woman?

For Mrs. Bayne was not well. Holly could not leave her, even to go to Margaret's. At half-past eleven, there being no telephone in the house, she went to Simmons's grocery store and called her up, but the Cox apartment did not answer, and she went back again, vaguely uneasy.

At noon she carried up another tray. Mrs. Bayne was up in a chair by that time; she looked really ill, but she would not have a doctor.

"Have you heard from Furness yet?"

"No. Of course he's busy, and with no telephone——"

"Just the same, he might have sent you some word. He must know we are anxious."

"I'm not anxious, Mother. If he would let a thing like this keep him away, a thing he always knew had to happen sometime, then it's better to learn it now rather than later on."

At one o'clock, however, there came a box of roses and his card. "*Always thine*," it read, in his affected manner. She carried the flowers to her mother's room and was completely routed by the relief in Mrs. Bayne's face.

"Then it's all right!" she said. "I really have been terrified, Holly. If anything goes wrong now, I really think it will finish me."

She put her handkerchief to her eyes, that soft bit of fresh linen with her initials in the corner, *A. H. B.*, which was always in her hand. Holly could not remember her mother without a handkerchief; and when, later on, one of them played its small part in her story, the mere sight of it was to bring up not only every crisis of her life, it was to bring up that life itself, day by day and hour by hour.

"Nothing will go wrong, Mother," Holly told her.

It was about two o'clock when the bell rang. Mrs. Bayne slept quietly on her couch, a lavender slumber robe drawn over her, and the scent of the roses heavy in the room. Downstairs, Holly had dusted the drawing room and laid out the tea table—if her mother wakened and came down, it would never do for her to find it unready—and was standing in front of an old photograph of her father which she had brought from the disused library across the hall, where like her father himself it had been shelved for many years.

He must not, she reasoned, ever guess that it had been hidden away.

It was out of date now. Mr. Bayne had been taken in his dress clothes, after the fashion of twenty years ago. Over a broad and high expanse of snowy white shirt bosom and collar he looked into his daughter's eyes, handsome and debonair.

"Poor Father!" said Holly, and dusting the glass, placed the photograph on a table.

She had not seen him for many years, and she had never known him well, but acting on impulse she went across the hall into the closed library, and wrote a telegram.

"*So glad you are coming. Welcome home and much love.*"

After a little hesitation, she signed both her mother's name and her own.

The library had been his room, as the drawing room had been her mother's. It was hardly ever opened now; the matter of heating it had been a factor, but Holly knew too that as definitely as her mother had shut her husband out of her life, she had closed and sheeted the room which had been his.

The anger Holly had felt the night before was lost in pity. He had stolen, and he had not only spent; he had hidden away a part of that stolen wealth in that very house. He was dying and he had made no attempt at restitution. But he was dying; he could not live long.

And then suddenly there came to her mind her mother's face, on the day she came home from the penitentiary; and later on, her suppressed excitement, the times when she had sat like someone who nursed a secret, the haste as to the wedding and the trousseau.

Suppose on that visit of hers he had told her? Suppose she had not happened on the suitcase but had known it was there? Suppose he had wanted to make restitution, to come back clean, and had told her; and out of her dire need her mother——

She sat up suddenly. The doorbell was furiously ringing.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

JAMES COX was enormously proud of his stock. He liked, when he was not busy, to run his hand down over his tidy shelves and to realize that he could tell its very quality by touch. And when he opened up the blue wrappers from his best tablecloths it was as though he gained a vicarious splendour from their quality.

"Wonderful piece of work, this," he would say. "Grace any table! Make any sort of food taste good, eh?"

He was completely out of patience with the new vogue for doilies, although he had to sell them. The nearest thing he had ever come to a quarrel with Margaret was on that very question. He came home one evening to find the table set with small bits of linen, scalloped by her own busy hands, little islands of white in a shining sea of imitation mahogany.

"What's this you've got on the table?"

"Don't you like them?"

"Oh, they're all right," he said grudgingly. He didn't like to hurt her. "But if you ask me, give me honest food on an honest linen cloth."

"Then off they go!" said Margaret, shamelessly and spinelessly loving. "I don't care for them myself. I just thought——"

Honest linen! Honest everything. That was James Cox.

On the day, then, that Warrington had carried the suitcase to Margaret, James was behind his counter. They had opened up a new shipment in the stockroom, and huge baskets were still being trundled along the aisles.

He was in a state of suppressed excitement, as he was always when new stock came in, and so he did not notice that he was being quickly observed from a near-by counter. Nor was his feeling when he was summoned to the

manager's office other than one of irritation at being interrupted. He never saw the light-stepping, rather stout man who followed him there and unceremoniously entered after him.

The office was empty. James, hearing the door close behind him, turned and confronted this gentleman.

"Your name Cox?" said the stranger.

"Yes."

"Live at Number Eleven, Aurelia Apartments?"

James suddenly stopped breathing. Something had happened to Margaret!

"I do," he stammered. "I live there. What's wrong? For God's sake, what's the matter?"

"Don't get excited, Mr. Cox. Sit down. I only want to ask you some questions."

"My wife——"

"She's all right, so far as I know. Mr. Cox, you are related to a family named Bayne, I believe, on Kelsey Street?"

Mr. Cox had recovered, and now he stiffened.

"Only by marriage. My wife is Mrs. Bayne's sister."

"But you are on pretty friendly terms with the family?"

"Never been in the house," said Mr. Cox, unflaggingly honest. "They don't like me, and I don't like them. The girl's all right," he added conscientiously.

"Do you know a young man named Warrington who has a room there?"

"Never saw him but once," said James. But he looked self-conscious, as well he might, recalling that amazing evening; and the detective saw it.

"But your wife knows him? Rather well?"

"Look here," said Mr. Cox, "I don't know what it's all about, and I don't give a damn. But I want my wife's name left out of this, see?"

The detective knew men, and so he realized the belligerent honesty of James's attitude. It put him at a disadvantage, in a way; you can trap a scoundrel, but there is no trap for the straightforward. However, he tried it.

“What’s the use, Mr. Cox? We’ve got the stuff!”

“What stuff?” roared Mr. Cox. “If you’re accusing me of having bootleg stuff in my place, it’s a lie. That bottle of brandy was given me ten years ago, and I can prove it.”

“We’ve got the suitcase.”

James stared at him, and the detective stared back.

“What suitcase? What about a suitcase?” James demanded, a bit warily. He did not like the look in the other man’s face; it was too complacent.

“The one your wife received this morning from the Bayne house, and hid away in your closet.”

Mr. Cox was suddenly thinking hard. A suitcase from the Bayne house! Now what on earth—— A suitcase from the Bayne house. Trust that woman to make trouble if she could. A suitcase from the——

“I don’t know anything about any suitcase,” he said, surly now. “As for my wife hiding anything, she’s got nothing to hide, and I’m damn well ready to tell you that. And what business is it of yours, anyhow?”

Amazingly, he was looking at a badge the officer uncovered. James’s hands began to sweat. They were cold and clammy. He got out his handkerchief and wiped them.

“I’m telling you. If you don’t know about this suitcase, then your wife does, all right.”

He considered that warily. They weren’t going to catch James Cox napping, not they. And Margaret wasn’t going to be in this, not by a darned sight.

“All right,” he said. “If there’s a suitcase there and you’re interested in it, we’ll say it’s mine and let it go at that. Now, what about it?”

“That’s right,” said the detective more affably. “No need of dragging a woman in if we can help it. You admit it’s your suitcase?”

“Wait a minute! I’ll admit that the only suitcase I know about in the flat is mine, and that’s as far as I’ll go.”

He was rather pleased with this masterpiece of strategy; they hadn’t caught him napping. No, sir. You had to go some to catch James Cox asleep on his feet. However, the detective, as Mr. Cox now knew him to be, only yawned slightly and looked at his watch.

“If you’ll get your hat,” he said, “we’ll wander over to the City Hall. District Attorney wants to talk to you.”

“I’m not free here until twelve-thirty.”

“Oh, you’re free enough,” said the detective amiably. “That’s all fixed. You just get your things and come along.”

There was an authority in that “come along” that froze Mr. Cox to the marrow of his insignificant bones. But it would never do to show it.

“You seem damned certain I’m coming,” he snapped.

“I *am* damned certain,” said the detective.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

HAVING failed in his first plan at the bank, Warrington found himself rather at a loose end. He had no idea what further steps to take. He felt that a legal opinion would help him out, but also that he had no right to take an attorney into his confidence without consulting Holly first.

His own opinion was that, although he had planted what amounted to a bomb in the Cox household, there was no reason to believe that anybody was waiting to touch off the fuse.

Nevertheless, he had sold a stolen bond, and it was with mixed feelings that he went somewhat belatedly to the office. Everything there was the same as usual, apparently. Hawkins, with a green shade over his eyes, was working at the board, and half a dozen men sat or stood watching it. The ticker rattled on, like a distant machine gun; when he had first gone into the office, it often took him back to the war; and Miss Sharp, the stenographer, would catch the far-away look in his eyes.

"Well," she said once pertly, "you must have enjoyed it, whatever it was. Been to a party?"

"You might call it a party," he told her. "Perhaps it's like a lot of things, pleasanter to remember than to go through with."

"Can you beat that!" she inquired of nobody in particular. "I'll take to remembering when I'm too old for anything else."

Like the cashier at the Red Rose, she found him attractive and strongly male. "He mayn't be much of a salesman," she said once or twice, "but believe me, he's some man."

He never flirted with her, but he knew she had a good hard brain and an amazing memory. So that morning it was to her he went for information.

“Put away your book,” he said. “I’m not going to give you any letters. I want some information. Do you remember when a man named Bayne got in trouble at the Harrison Bank?”

“Do I remember the San Francisco earthquake! Sure I do.” She hedged on that, however. “I was only a kid at the time, but I remember it, all right. Our landlord lost a lot of money, and Ma threw a celebration that night.”

However, bit by bit out of a mass of extraneous material, he dug out the story. Bayne had tried to make a get-away, but had failed; he had spent a good bit, but some of it had never been accounted for.

“Maybe he speculated,” she said, with a glance at the swinging doors and the group beyond them. “Everybody’s doing it.”

He had not left the office more than five minutes when they came after him.

“How should I know where he’s gone?” Miss Sharp said, eying the detective shrewdly. She hardly needed the sight of the badge to “put her wise,” she said later.

“But you’re expecting him back this morning?”

“Depends on how far he’s gone,” she told him. “What’s he been doing? Bootlegging, or dodging his income tax?”

“Wait until he comes back and you’ll find out.”

She was curious but unanxious.

But as luck would have it, Warrington did not go back. He went around to see a certain young man, the only attorney he knew in the city, for he needed advice, and he trusted Meyer’s discretion. Meyer, however, was arguing a case at the Courthouse, and after waiting an hour for him, he gave up and went away.

Save for a sense of inner urgency, there seemed to be no immediate danger. He decided to think the matter over, and having a prospective customer out of town, he took an interurban car and proceeded half-heartedly to the day’s work.

It is rather interesting to note that had he taken a train instead, he would have been under arrest before he knew it. As things were, however, he sat safely enough in the street car, a big, heavy-shouldered young man, much like any other big and heavy-shouldered young man, save perhaps for a slightly dogged look about his mouth and chin and a certain grave directness

in his eyes. And after a while he resolutely put the Baynes, including Holly, out of his mind and concentrated on the business before him.

He sold five bonds, which netted him the munificent sum of ten dollars. But before he did it, he had to lunch with the buyer and stop in to see his family.

"Do you good," said the customer. "You fellows who sell bonds ought to see what it's all about. I buy bonds to protect my family. So does everybody else. If I wanted to make money, I'd buy stocks."

Not important, all this, save that it made him very late getting back to the city, and that it sent him back rather thoughtful. Whether a fellow sold bonds or bought them, he ought to be working for somebody besides himself.

He drew a long breath, as he sat in the car, and then stirred impatiently. He could see Holly as she had been that morning in the lower hall, thin and wretched; and he could see Margaret Cox, at the end of her rope too, lying down on the kitchen floor to end everything in one last desperate gesture.

But Margaret hadn't. She had had the courage to pull out and to take happiness where she found it. He did not for a moment believe that Holly would.

Once in the city again, however, his mind returned to the suitcase. He looked at his watch. The banks were closed now, and the office soon would be. Hardly worth while going back. Perhaps he'd better go home and tell Holly what he had done—or rather had not done. He got out and walked across town, and a stray dog from somewhere picked him up and followed along.

It was a wretched creature, emaciated and despondent, but when he stopped and tried to turn it back, it looked up at him with eyes at once so hopeful and so hungry that he finally gave up the attempt. He stopped at a dairy and bought a bottle of milk, as the best way to break its long fast, and with this in a newspaper under his arm, and the dog at his heels, reached the end of Kelsey Street.

Later on, he was to thank this impulse for a few hours' respite—that and his pride, perhaps. For from a block away he saw Brooks's car in front of the house, and was not minded to pass the drawing-room door, and that gentleman inside it, with his present *entourage*.

He was irritated as he turned to the right along a side street, and so along an alleyway to the gate leading into the yard of the house, irritated and depressed.

“I’ll get out,” he told himself. “That’s what I’ll do. Get out from under. It’s only by chance I’m here anyhow. What the devil would they have done if I hadn’t turned up?”

He slammed the gate so violently that he set the dog to shivering, and ashamed of that, he bent down and stroked its head. He felt better after that, and more gentle, as almost all do who have touched in friendliness a friendless dog. The kitchen door was unlocked, and he got a pan there and took it outside.

“Here, old boy,” he said, and poured out the milk.

When this Barmecide feast was over and the animal swollen to the bursting point, he put it out into the alley. But it whimpered there and scratched at the gate, and at last he let it in again. He found an old piece of carpet and placed it in a sheltered spot under the back steps, and then, and only then, he went into the house.

As he opened the door to the hall, he saw Mrs. Bayne in the front hall with her back to him. She had drawn aside the curtain of the front door and was peering anxiously out, and as she peered, she talked to someone in the drawing room.

“I really don’t understand it, Furness. She hardly ever goes out. And she knew I was not well. She will certainly be back soon.”

“Don’t worry about it. I can look over the paper.”

But she had no intention of letting him look over the paper, apparently. As Warrington went quietly up the stairs, he could still hear her plaintive, rather exasperated voice.

“What I don’t understand,” she was saying, “is her not letting me know. I wakened up and she was gone. Just a note to say she would be back shortly. It’s so unlike her.”

Warrington himself was somewhat puzzled but hardly anxious. He washed, and changed his collar as usual, and once he heard the front door close and went to the window to see if Brooks had gone. But his car was still outside, and across the street a stout light-stepping gentleman had just stopped to light a cigarette.

Sometime, at some place, he had seen that same picture before. He pondered over it, gazing down thoughtfully into the street. The swift early twilight was already falling, and as he looked, the city’s nightly miracle was accomplished and the lights came on.

But for him there was no miracle. He was thinking and watching.

The man had gone on. Warrington reached behind him, and turned off his light-switch, and then took up his vigil once more. He was rewarded within five minutes by seeing the individual again. This time, however, he did not pass on. He presumed on the growing darkness and a dark space before the McCook house to take up a position there.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MARGARET had not been in the Bayne house since her marriage.

"It's like this," James had said. "If I'm not good enough for them, my wife isn't either. Let them come to you; I don't object so long as I'm not here. But you don't need them any more. The shoe's on the other foot, my girl. Let them have their pride; I've got mine too."

She had acquiesced. She loved Holly, but Annie Bayne had never more than tolerated her, and the house itself held only bitter memories.

And now, when in answer to the furious ringing of the bell Holly opened the door, Margaret was there. A strange Margaret, a wild-eyed, disheveled Margaret, her nose red with weeping, her gloves a crumpled ball in her hand. Since when had Margaret forgotten that no lady appears on the street ungloved?

Holly stood staring at her, and Margaret brushed past and into the hall with a sort of savage violence.

"Where's your mother?"

"She's asleep. She's not well."

"I don't believe it," said Margaret sharply. "She's hiding. Anyhow, I'm going up."

"No, you're not," said Holly. "You're not going up like that. I'm not going to have her startled."

Suddenly Margaret collapsed. She dropped on one of the hall chairs and burst into quiet but unrestrained weeping. She sat there, her face turned up and screwed into the hideous contortions of grief. She did not even feel for her handkerchief; there was something shameless in her abandon, like the

bared shoulders and backs Holly used to see on the staircase. It should have been discreetly covered.

Holly, sadly puzzled, watched her and then put an arm around her.

"Tell me," she said. "Come into the drawing room and tell me."

Margaret got up, but she did not wipe her eyes. Tears fell to her worn black furs and hung there like beads; her bag had fallen open as it hung from her arm, and out of it protruded a damp handkerchief with a gay pink border. Holly drew it out and thrust it into her hand, but she did not use it.

"Now," she said, after closing the door into the hall. "What has happened? Is it Mr. Cox?"

The name brought Margaret to herself like an electric shock. She stopped crying and stared with red-rimmed hostile eyes at Holly.

"You know perfectly well what it is. You must know."

"But I don't. He isn't hurt or sick, is he?"

"Then your mother knows! It was like her, just when we were so happy, and no thanks to her for that, either. When did she ever think of anybody but herself? And to help that man, after the way he's ruined her life!"

"What man?"

"Your father. Get away from that door, Holly. I don't care whether she's asleep or not. I'm not, and I'm going up."

"I'll let you up, of course, but tell me first. You haven't told me a thing."

Margaret gazed at her bitterly.

"Oh, I'll tell you, all right," she said. "My James—my honest James, who never had a wrong thought in his life—has been arrested for receiving stolen goods."

Holly felt a vague sense of relief. Somehow, nothing but murder or sudden death had seemed to justify Margaret's woe. She drew a long breath.

"But of course it's a mistake," she said gently. "He's been at the store too long for them to believe he'd do anything wrong now."

Suddenly Margaret laughed, a hysterical high-pitched laugh that ended in a wail.

"At the store!" she said. "At his own home. In that suitcase your mother sent down."

“Oh, no,” said Holly. “Oh, *no*!”

“Oh, yes,” sneered Margaret. “She was using me, as she’s always used me. I dare say your father was to call and get it and then abscond for Europe or some place. She’d do anything to get rid of him, even to—killing my husband. And it will kill him. If you could see him, sitting in the District Attorney’s office, with his poor head bowed, and not even knowing what it’s all about! And when I told them, they didn’t believe me!”

She gave a vicious jerk at her hat and moved toward the door.

“Sick or well,” she said, “she’s going to get out of bed and go down there. Let them jail *her*.”

“Let them jail me,” said Holly quietly. “You see, I sent the suitcase, Aunt Margaret. She doesn’t know anything about it.”

Margaret stopped, her hand on the knob.

“You?”

Next to James, she loved Holly. Together they had run the house and counted the pennies. It was to her, not to her mother, that the girl had gone with the small worries, the little snubs, the constant struggle between gentility and poverty which had made up their lives. She came back into the room.

“Why did you do it?”

“Because she had found it. She’d already sold one bond; I was afraid she would sell some more.”

The full import of the thing dawned on Margaret slowly.

“*She sold a bond*,” she repeated slowly. “Then—to clear James we would have to implicate her. Oh, my God, Holly! What are we going to do?”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AT six o'clock Holly came home. She dragged herself up the steps and stood there to compose herself, but Mrs. Bayne's sharp ears had heard her, and she flung the door wide.

"Well, I must say!" she said with asperity. "Didn't you know Furness was coming?"

"I couldn't make it any sooner."

"But where on earth have you been?"

"With Aunt Margaret."

She took off her hat, and in the glare of the hall chandelier she looked fairly extinguished, her eyes dull and her face colourless. The smile she managed to summon made her look appealingly childish; and Furness, coming into the hall, took advantage of her lack of resistance to put an arm around her.

"You come in here and sit down," he said authoritatively. "That's the girl. Now put your head back, and I'll get some tea."

Mrs. Bayne left them there and went up the stairs, tight-lipped and still considerably shaken. Strange thoughts had been running through her mind during that vigil at the front door, strange and terrifying thoughts. But that was all over now. Holly had been upset by the telegram and had gone to Margaret. She had always gone to Margaret when in trouble.

All over—unless Holly had got some nonsense into her head about marrying Furness. He had seemed all right. But he had not kissed her when she came in. Did that mean——

She walked the floor; her life seemed to be one anxiety after another.

In the drawing room Furness made no advances to Holly. He saw that she was in no mood for them. And she understood and liked him for it; as he moved about, expertly preparing the tea, she was perhaps fonder of him than she had ever been before. He didn't talk. If what she took for kindness was really tact, it made no difference; for after all, behind most tactfulness is consideration.

When he gave her the cup his fingers touched hers, and he reached down and took her other hand, judicially.

"You're cold," he said, and going out into the hall returned with his overcoat and tucked it about her. "Don't talk yet," he told her.

He rather fancied himself in this new and masterful rôle; it gave him a sense of power, of masculine dominance, and out of this gratification came a new magnanimity. He saw himself, chivalrous and strong, bringing peace and succour to this unhappy family, and the fact that he was to be well paid for it did not decrease his complacence.

It was not until her colour had come back that he made any approach to her whatever, and then it was an indirect one.

"Now, see here," he said, in what he would have been startled to know was James Cox's best authoritative manner, "you have got some bee in the little bonnet, and it's nonsense. Do you hear that?"

She nodded dumbly.

"I know what it is, and it isn't going to make any difference. We may have to change some things, but not—not the essential. As far as that goes"—like many fine gestures, this one was getting to be a bit more comprehensive than he had intended it to be—"I'm willing to let things stand as they are, church and all, if you want to."

But she shook her head. "It wouldn't do," she said.

She looked at him. He was kind and thoughtful; somehow she had never thought of him as either of them, particularly. She was extremely touched, and inside her breast her heart felt like a lump of ice. She didn't love him. She never would love him.

In the silence that fell between them, filled with relief on Furness's part and a hundred flashing uncompleted thoughts on hers, she could hear faint, regular movements overhead, and knew that her mother was pacing the floor of her room, anxious, terrified, waiting for the outcome of the interview.

She stirred a little and put down her cup, and as if he had been awaiting this signal, Furness came over and sat down beside her.

"You poor darling!" he said. "And did you think I might let you go?" He put his arm around her and drew her closer. "I'll never let you go," he told her. "Never!"

There was more passion in the kiss he gave her than he had ever permitted himself before. And she closed her eyes and submitted to it, meekly, helplessly. What else was there to do? How could he know that when she closed her eyes it was to see James Cox huddled in a chair in the District Attorney's office, gazing out with dull, bewildered eyes at a world which had suddenly turned unfriendly? And to see Aunt Margaret, too, her hand on James's shoulder, ugly and militant, challenging that world.

Holly could still hear his voice: "Shut up, Margaret, for God's sake! This has nothing to do with you."

"It has everything to do with me—everything!"

Holly let Furness out, and then waited for a moment at the foot of the stairs, preparing herself for the interview that was waiting above. Glancing up, she saw a light, and knew Mrs. Bayne was at her door, or in the upper hall, listening, waiting.

She picked up her gloves and slowly made her way up; and her mother, hearing her, quietly closed her door and sat down on a chair. When Holly went in she was holding a book as though she had been reading.

"Well," she said, "I dare say it's all right?"

Holly stood just inside the door. She had carried up her hat, and now she stood with it in her hands, straightening the ribbons and staring at it. "Yes," she answered after a moment. "So far as he is concerned, it's all right."

"As he is concerned?" said her mother sharply. "I don't understand you."

Holly looked up. There was appeal in her face, and a sort of desperation.

"I don't think I can go through with it, Mother. I don't really care for him. I've tried, and I just—can't."

"And you told him that?" said Mrs. Bayne slowly. "You've let things go on to this time, a month before the wedding, and now you're talking of breaking it off?"

"I haven't told him. I wanted first to know what you thought."

"What *I* think!" said Mrs. Bayne, raising her voice. "What everyone will think! I've sacrificed for it; you'll never know what I've sacrificed. And now you're talking of throwing all that away; you'll let them say Furness jilted you because your father is coming home and the whole wretched story's been brought up once more. And you'll wreck me for a whim. I've just begun to live again. God knows I haven't lived for ten years. And all because you're tired to-day, and you think you 'don't care' for him."

"I don't, Mother. I hate him to touch me."

Suddenly Mrs. Bayne was more calm. She appraised Holly with her faded, worldly eyes.

"Oh," she said. "So that's it. Don't you know every girl has a fit of panic before her wedding day? If that's all that's wrong with you——"

But the day's anxieties and this new shock had told on her. She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes.

"Get me my smelling salts," she said. "I feel as though I can't breathe."

Holly brought the salts, and for a long time Mrs. Bayne slowly inhaled them, holding the bottle delicately to her nose. Holly stood by her, helpless. She knew these attacks; Margaret had always maintained that they were temper, but she knew better now. The doctor had told her so some time ago. So she watched her with the salts, and any hope she had had of telling about James Cox and his terrible situation died within her.

She turned down the bed, filled a hot-water bottle, and later on she helped her mother to undress. There was a certain relief in these familiar homely duties; they kept her from thinking, and she knew that sooner or later she must get away somewhere and think.

It was while she was straightening her mother's dressing table, with its ladylike litter of old ivory-backed brushes and toilet waters, that she saw another telegram lying there. She picked it up and read it—read it twice, with Mrs. Bayne's eyes on her.

"You see, Mother," she said slowly, "he is really ill if he can't travel."

Mrs. Bayne was propped up in bed with a silk jacket over her shoulders. She felt easier sitting up. Beside her the reading lamp sent a soft rosy glow over her, making her look younger, almost childish.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I forgot to give you that. It gives us a chance to breathe, anyhow."

Holly turned out the other lights and raised a window. She stood there for a minute or two, inhaling the cold night air. Her mother's heartlessness where her father was concerned was nothing new to her. It was compounded of old neglects and old frictions, as well as the final culminating matter of his disgrace.

She wondered vaguely if there had ever been any love between them, in the way she herself thought of love. She tried to look back to the days when the two of them had occupied that very chamber, but the low spots of that early life had left no impression on her; only the high lights, of dinners and evening clothes, constant movement, comings and goings, cars and callers, had remained with her.

And all the time she knew her mind was evading what it must face. She had gone to the District Attorney's office with Margaret, determined to make a clean breast of the matter and throw herself on his mercy. After all, he was a human being; he would understand. And the bank was getting back what it had never expected. It could afford to be lenient.

True, one bond was missing, but she would pay that back. She could go to work and save; she would work her fingers to the bone. And she would say *she* had given the bond to Mr. Warrington to sell. That ought to fix that.

But the District Attorney had been in court, and his assistant had been arranging about James Cox's bond. People kept coming in and going out, and a little man with shrewd eyes and a kindly mouth, who turned out to be one of Mr. Cox's employers, Mr. Steinfeldt, was haranguing James as he huddled in his chair.

"We don't do this for everybody, Mr. Cox, y'understand," he said. "But when people stick by Steinfeldt and Roder, we stick by them. Only the other day I said to Mr. Roder: 'Do the square thing by our people, and they've got no comeback.' See?"

"I'm much obliged to you," said James Cox dully.

"Now, as I figure it," Mr. Steinfeldt went on, expanding, "you've been a fool. You don't mind my saying that, Mrs. Cox? This aristocratic sister-in-law of yours has put one over, see? She knew Bayne was getting out and would be wanting to get away somewhere, so she sends the loot where he can pick it up easy. And she sells one bond, see, so he can get off."

"I guess that's about it," said James Cox humbly.

And Holly had ignored Margaret's warning glance and thrown her hat into the ring.

“How do you know my mother sold the bond?” she demanded.

“You’ve been very kind, Mr. Steinfeldt, but you have no right to accuse her without knowing anything about it.”

But Mr. Steinfeldt had only smiled at her and had taken no offense.

“And I suppose you’d say *you* did it, eh?” he said shrewdly. “You’d say to me, ‘Mr. Steinfeldt, I took that bond and sold it,’ eh? Don’t say that, miss, because I wouldn’t believe it anyhow.”

And that had been all. Mr. Cox and Aunt Margaret had gone down in the elevator with her, a strange, humbled Mr. Cox, stepping apologetically out of people’s way, as if he had done something he shouldn’t: a silent, defeated Mr. Cox, his flag down and his banner trailing in the dust. . . .

When Holly turned from the window, her mother put down her smelling salts.

“Did you tell your Aunt Margaret about using the lace on the train of your dress?” she asked. “I think, if it comes from the shoulders——”

Holly looked at her, so comfortable once more, so secure; her colour was better, and her lips were no longer blue.

“I told her,” she said quietly, and went out of the room.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THERE was no doubt that the house was being watched, nor any doubt in Warrington's mind as to why.

"They'd have picked me up before this if it hadn't been for that dog," he considered grimly.

He retreated from the window and stood in the centre of the darkened room, and swaying branches by the street lamps threw ghostly shadows on the walls. He might have been a ghost himself, so still he stood.

All sorts of thoughts were hurtling through his brain. Suppose the fellow had followed him that morning and saw him leave the suitcase at the Cox apartment? That would involve them undoubtedly; and the fact of Holly's mysterious absence that afternoon began to obtrude itself. Suppose it had already involved them!

He went back to the window again and saw that the Brooks car was still there. A moment later, however, he heard the door close and watched it moving off, and he started down the stairs. He must see Holly and learn what had happened. But he did not go down.

Mrs. Bayne was on the landing below, peering down so absorbedly that she had not heard him.

"Scared!" he said to himself. "Knows something's wrong, and doesn't know what it is."

Well, let her be scared. She had got them all into a pretty mess. She and her fine-lady ways and her shallow, unscrupulous mind. Only, she wasn't going to involve Holly; he'd damn' well take care of that.

He heard Holly go into her mother's room and the door close; and leaving his own door open, he sat down in the worn chair by his empty

hearth and waited as patiently as he could. He had an idea, possibly unfounded, that to turn on his lights would be to bring a ring at the bell and perhaps a warrant for his arrest. Yet there were moments as he sat there when the whole situation seemed not only incredible but ridiculous. A dozen other things might account for the man across the street; it was because he himself felt guilty that he was so sure the espionage was for him.

Odd, how even to be suspected of wrongdoing undermined a man's morale!

Sometime during that long period of waiting he had a new thought: If they were really after him, they might be watching the rear of the house too. He made his way quietly into Margaret's empty room across the hall and stared out, but he could see nothing. Only the forlorn dog had crept out of his shelter and was growling and sniffing at the gate.

He considered it extremely probable that the gate, like the front of the house, was being watched.

"Taking no chances!" he reflected, and went back to his room.

Of course, there was this chance: They had certainly found the bond, but had they found the suitcase? If not, things were not so bad. Mrs. Bayne might claim her husband had given the bond to her years ago, and that she had been holding it for an emergency. Whether they believed her or not did not matter, once the suitcase was turned over.

But he had to know. . . .

At eight o'clock he heard Holly going down the stairs and followed her. He needed only one look at her face to know that the worst had happened. She was in the hall, and without speaking she pointed to the drawing room. He went in, and she came a moment later.

"The police found it," she told him. "Somebody must have followed you."

"What have they done?"

"They've arrested Mr. Cox."

She told him all, omitting nothing except her own resolution to say she had sold the bond: of the arrest, and Margaret's visit, and of Mr. Steinfeldt and the bond; and when she had finished—

"You poor child!" he said. "I'd have done anything in the world for you, and I've let you in for this."

“You’ve only done what I asked you to do.”

“I’ve been stupid—criminally, damnably stupid. That’s all.”

“It is we who have been both stupid and—criminal,” she said painfully. “It has nothing to do with you. You’d better not try to save us. You’d better just go away and leave us. We’re sinking, anyhow.”

“You know I can’t do that,” he said. “You know, if you know anything in the world, that what concerns you concerns me. Always. I’m not undercutting Brooks or anything of that sort. I know you are—not for me or I for you. I’m not making love to you, Holly. I just want you to know how things are with me. Then you won’t talk about my getting out.”

“You know I have to marry Furness, don’t you?” she said, in a hushed voice.

“I know that. At least—I’m accepting it. I’m only offering you an anchor to windward.”

He held out his hand, and she took it. Then she did something that fairly shook his resolution; she put the hand to her cheek and held it there a moment. “You are the best man I ever knew,” she said wistfully, and dropped it.

She had told him what she knew—little more than he had already surmised. Not for a moment did she see him actually involved in the business. James Cox was arrested, and Mr. Steinfeldt had gone on his bond; she had herself gone down to see the District Attorney, Mr. Phelps, but he had been in court and had not returned to the office afterward.

She had gone back home with Margaret and James, and things there were heartbreaking. James just sat in a chair and would not speak.

“I’ll soon fix that,” Warrington told her. “Cox isn’t in this thing at all. I’ll go down and see him to-night and tell him so.”

He wanted desperately to take her in his arms before, obedient to his order, she started up to bed. He may have been wrong, too, but he thought she might not have minded. She looked as though she needed the protecting clasp of warm and loving arms, comfort and reassurance, and a sanctuary into which to creep just for a moment.

But he had himself well in hand by that time. When she turned, at the angle of the staircase, he was looking up, reassuringly smiling.

The smile died as she passed out of sight. He was committed to go to the Cox flat that night, and he had no idea how he was to do it. He had not told her the house was being watched. There were other things he had not told her, too. Asserting Cox's innocence and proving it were very different things. Not only that; his own testimony would not help matters, seeing that he was clearly under suspicion himself.

Only Mrs. Bayne's free and open confession would help any of them, and he had no idea that she would confess.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WARRINGTON was not certain that the yard and the gate to it were being watched. He had an idea that Cox had been pretty carefully guarded, and that they hoped to catch himself on his way home, still ignorant of what had occurred.

Anyhow, he had to take that chance. His hat was on the table in the hall; he left his overcoat, as an impediment to what might turn out to be quick action, and went back to the kitchen. With his hand on the outer door, however, he remembered the dog and swore softly.

"Might as well raise an alarm and be done with it," he reflected grimly.

But out that way he would have to go if he went at all, and the dog was quiet for the time. The kitchen was dark, and he opened the door cautiously and slid through it. Almost instantly he felt the creature beside him, wriggling its thin body and rubbing against him. He leaned down and patted its head.

"Quiet, old boy," he whispered. "Down!"

He could feel it snuffing at his heels as he crossed the brick-paved yard. He did not go out by the gate into the alley, but chinning himself to the top of the fence at the side, dropped lightly into the next yard. From there he judged it would be safe to inspect the alley, and if it was clear, to get away by that route. But with his disappearance the dog began to yelp, and then to make small futile leaps at the fence.

"Damnation!" he muttered, and stood listening.

Above the dog's desperate yelps and leaps he heard the other gate into the alley quickly open and somebody run in. And the dog, like a finger pointing, was now wailing and scratching at the boards. As Warrington

reached the next fence and vaulted it, he heard the gate slam again, and knew that the chase was on.

The advantage was to the man running along the alleyway. He had only to move from gate to gate, looking in. The alley was well lighted, and the yards offered no hiding places. They were all alike, small rectangles of brick paving, on which abutted kitchen doors and windows. Warrington, to cover the same ground, had to climb a fence each time.

And he was out of training. After the fourth fence he was breathing hard, and at the fifth he came to an *impasse*. He had reached the corner house, and it was surrounded by a high brick wall, offering no finger hold whatever.

In another minute the gate would open.

There was a door, slightly ajar, at the rear of the house beside him, and he did the only thing he could think of—ran up the steps, through the door, and closed it behind him. The kitchen was empty, but someone was moving in the pantry. He had only settled his tie and taken off his hat when an elderly cook entered. He smiled at her.

"Sorry," he said. "I knocked, but nobody answered. My dog got away a few minutes ago, and I thought he came into your yard."

"Haven't seen him," said the woman, eying him.

"He's strange in this neighbourhood," he told her, listening intently. "I just got him to-day."

"Well, what do you want me to do about it?" she demanded. "I'm too busy to stop and cry."

To signify her lack of interest she went to the stove, and with her back turned Warrington managed to turn the key in the door behind him. He was just in time; heavy footsteps ran across the yard, and the next instant they began to climb the steps.

He looked about him. The house in ground plan was not unlike the Baynes's. In that case the door there should lead to the hall. He measured the distance with his eye, and as a peremptory knock came to the kitchen door, and the woman grumbling turned to answer, he opened it and slipped through.

He was in a closet.

Of the detective's questions and the woman's excited answers he heard little or nothing. The shock, plus the beating of his heart in his ears, almost

deafened him, and the unreality of his situation dazed him. If he had committed a murder, he could not have shown guilt more clearly than by this whole absurd performance.

And all that in the drawing of a breath or two.

"He was right here when you knocked," the woman was saying. "I didn't even hear him go. He locked that door, too."

"He's run through the house. Which door?" The officer's hand was actually on the knob of the closet, but the cook had opened another door and was peering through it.

"If he did, he's gone for sure."

She followed the officer as he ran forward, and Warrington, listening with strained ears, heard them in the front of the house. Very quietly he made his exit into the yard again and out the rear gate.

He doubled on his tracks, going back past the Bayne house and so out into a cross street farther down. Not until he had put a half-dozen blocks between himself and the search did he stop and take his bearings.

He had torn one trouser knee open and skinned both of his hands badly. In addition his collar and shirt were disreputable beyond words, and somewhere he had lost his hat. Afterward he was to look back on that flight of his as a sort of nightmare, as useless as a bad dream and much more disastrous. Better, far better, to have walked out the front door and given himself up.

Hatless, then, dirty and torn, he made his way toward the Cox apartment, taking back streets and avoiding policemen whenever he could. One can see him, I think, crossing lighted areas with a bit of a swagger, the wind blowing his hair about, and whistling valiantly for the benefit of possible observers; giving the impression that he had just wandered out from some near-by house to drop a letter in the box, or to buy a postage stamp at the corner drug store. And every now and then pausing, hands in pockets, to take a casual glance to the rear.

And in such fashion did he reach the Aurelia Apartments and, to a grin from the elevator boy, proceed to the third floor.

"Look as though you'd been having trouble," said that youth, eying him.

"Motorcycle turned over," said Warrington shamelessly. He considered that rather good; he had not said that *his* motorcycle had turned over. He smoothed his hair with his hands.

In spite of his morbid reflections earlier in the evening, he still could not regard either James Cox or himself as seriously involved. A straightforward story from him, and it must somehow clear up. The whole thing was absurd. It was monstrous. The bank ought to be darned glad to get the securities back and no questions asked.

With this in his mind, and the memory of Holly's face as she had looked down from the angle of the staircase, he rang the bell of the Cox apartment.

Margaret opened the door. Even before she did so he was conscious of a deathlike stillness beyond it, and with his first sight of her face, he knew that tragedy, sheer stark tragedy, had entered the little flat.

"Oh, it's you," she said tonelessly. "Come in."

James was sitting in a chair. Just sitting, with no newspaper about him, no cigar in his hand to waft its heavy masculine odour into the bedroom. He was sitting there, as he had sat almost ever since their return, staring straight ahead and not moving. . . .

"Don't you want any dinner, James?"

"No, thanks."

"I have broiled steak. You *like* that, James."

"I'm not hungry."

Finally Margaret had fixed him a tray and put it on the folding card table, extended before him; he had roused at that and had picked up the coffee cup. Then he groaned and put it down again.

"Sorry," he said thickly. "Maybe later on——"

She knew he was afraid she would see that his hand was trembling.

She could not sew; she could not do anything. Once she had picked up her work basket, and he had seen the bit of Holly's wedding dress she was working on. It was the only thing that had roused him.

"Put that down," he said. "You're through with them, my girl. Good and through."

And she had silently put it away, out of sight. . . .

Into this situation, then, Warrington stepped as he entered the door. He had not seen Cox since the night he had struck the policeman, but the crushed figure in the chair bore little resemblance to the truculent individual of that evening.

“James,” Margaret said, “you remember Mr. Warrington, don’t you? You know he was——”

But her voice trailed off. At the name a change came over James’s face. His neck seemed to swell, his voice to flatten and thicken.

“So it’s you!” he said, slowly getting up. “You, you damned——”

“James!”

“Get out of that door or I’ll kill you,” said James, still in the strange voice. “I mean it. Off with you! Get out of the way, Margaret.”

He stood, his hands clenched and head lowered, impressive, dangerous.

“You dirty swine,” he said, “stealing into an honest man’s home and hiding your filthy stuff here!”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Cox. That wasn’t the intention.”

“Oh, it wasn’t, eh? Then what in hell was the intention? Do you know what they’ve done to me? They’ve arrested me. I’m out on bond. If it hadn’t been for Steinfeldt, I’d be in jail to-night. Me, James Cox! Honest James, they call me at the store, and now I’m through. *Through!*”

He sank back into his chair again, his fists still clenched, and a vein in his forehead swollen and throbbing.

Warrington glanced at Margaret. All the life had gone out of her masklike face.

“They searched the flat after you left this morning,” she said, still in her toneless voice. “Then they went to the store and arrested him. For receiving stolen goods. Mr. Steinfeldt went on his bond.”

Suddenly James began to laugh. It was hideous laughter, the chuckle of the martyr dying from the foot-tickling torture.

“We’ve got to hand it to them,” he said, between bursts of the horrible mirth. “They’ve used us all for their own dirty ends. You too! You and Margaret and me. Smart, they are. I take my hat off to them. And I used to see that hellhound of a woman marching through the store like a duchess! Used to admire her, too. May she——”

Margaret put her hand over his mouth, and he subsided like a child.

“I won’t have that sort of talk, James,” she said. “Mr. Warrington is going to tell us about it, and we’ll all see what we can do.”

Warrington looked at her. Over James's head she was gazing at him with peculiar intentness.

"There isn't much to tell," she said. "Of course, the charge won't stand. We'll fix that up to-morrow. If anyone's guilty, I'm the one. You see, the stuff was in the suitcase, hidden under some boards in the attic. When it was found——"

"Who found it?" asked James.

The question was to Warrington, but it was Margaret who replied.

"I've told you, James. It was Holly."

"And I don't believe it. It was that sister of yours. I'll bet she's known it was there all the time, too."

"I only know what Holly says."

But she was lying, deliberately and with a purpose. Warrington read the appeal in her eyes. Holly had told her the truth, but James was not to know it. To tell him that Mrs. Bayne had found the suitcase and sold a bond from it was to put a weapon in his hands against her, and one that, in his soreness and bitter humiliation, he was sure to use. She had dragged him, honest James Cox, and his pride in the mud. Not only now: from the beginning of his courtship, when she had denied him the privilege of seeing Margaret in her house, to this crowning humiliation, he owed her a thousand slights, a thousand miseries. Small wonder Margaret was lying to him.

But James was still suspicious.

"Let him tell it," he said briefly, and sitting back, watched the two of them, his wife and Warrington, with hard, suspicious eyes.

"Well," Warrington temporized, "there isn't much to tell. I suppose they're going on the theory that we've conspired to get the stuff out of the house, probably so that Mr. Bayne could get it later on; but what actually happened is that Holly wanted to avoid just that. She found it under some boards in the attic, and I brought it here. The idea was to make an arrangement at the bank for its restitution, but when I went to the bank this morning, there was nobody there, no responsible officers, and—I couldn't very well hand it to the receiving teller!"

"And so you left it here, to ruin me. To ruin both of us."

"I'm going to the District Attorney's house, from here."

But James only shook his head.

“What’s the use?” he said. “Don’t you suppose the Bayne house was searched from top to bottom after Tom Bayne was arrested? I’m not saying you knew, but somebody knew where those securities were, and has known all along. And don’t tell me it was the girl. She couldn’t have been more than ten when it happened.”

“If you mean my sister——” Margaret flared. But James took no notice of her.

“Y’see what I mean,” he went on. “And there’s no use going to the District Attorney. I gathered to-day he’s been fighting this pardon, and he’s pretty sore. But I’m not through fighting; I haven’t begun yet. If they think I’m going to sit down under this, they can think again.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

IT was ten o'clock when Warrington left them. He had a grateful glance and a word or two from Margaret as she let him out, but he was no farther along than when he had arrived. Left alone, free to tell all the truth, he would have been less confused, but he had the naturally honest man's helplessness at having to connive at a lie.

He went down and out into the street. There was a roundsman standing on the pavement, and to save his life he could not avoid a self-conscious movement away from him.

"I'm afraid!" he muttered. "Afraid of a policeman!"

Margaret had roughly drawn the knee of his torn trousers together, and he had borrowed James's cap. Strange to think that even so small an incident as that, of borrowing a cap, was to have its influence on his situation. How long ago it seemed since Margaret, on the pavement at Kelsey Street with a shawl over her head, had said:

"Sometimes he wears a cap. It is less trouble when we go to the movies."

He plodded along the street.

Phelps, the District Attorney, lived out of town. Warrington took a street car, but it was eleven o'clock when he reached the house, and that hard-working gentleman had already retired. Persistent ringing of the doorbell finally brought a sulky maid in a kimono, who told him the family was in bed and not to be disturbed.

"Tell Mr. Phelps I've killed a man and want to surrender myself," he said with a touch of his old humour.

"There's a police station next to the carbarn," she told him, and closed the door in his face.

"Well," he reflected as he trudged down the drive, "like the Irishman on Friday, the Lord knows I've *asked* for fish."

At the all-night stand near the carbarn he bought a newspaper and looked it over, but there was nothing but a brief notice that Thomas Bayne, imprisoned for embezzling funds from the Harrison Bank, was ill in the penitentiary hospital and, although pardoned, was not yet able to leave.

"Keeping it under their hats," he considered.

He still felt that a straightforward story ought to clear everything up, at least so far as he himself was concerned. For one thing, the door man at the bank might remember him. That would prove his good faith. But, on the other hand, how was he to show that he had not sold the bond for his own benefit, since both Holly and Margaret Cox were determined to keep Mrs. Bayne out of it? But he knew what would happen if that question came up. Holly would claim that she herself had given it to him to sell.

He fairly ground his teeth with fury at the thought. Better to see the District Attorney early in the morning, before they bound him to any more evasions, and clear the thing up. Tell it all; that was the way. He had heard that Phelps was a decent sort. He would understand.

But he was going to play his own hand. He had no intention of being arrested; that weakened a man's case before he had a chance at it.

He would surrender himself in the morning, and they would let him out later on his own recognizance, probably. But the immediate problem of the night presented itself. He could not go back to Kelsey Street.

In the end he found a small and shabby sanctuary in a third-rate hotel downtown, and after locking the door took stock of himself in the mirror.

"Gad!" he said. "It's just as well I didn't see Phelps! He'd have run me in on general principles."

Later on he rang the bell. "Anybody around here to mend and press a suit of clothes?" he asked the boy who came.

"Nope. Send them out for you in the morning."

"How long will it take?"

"How big's a lump of coal?" said the boy, grinning. "Get them back early in the morning, maybe. Maybe not."

By offer of a bribe, however, he got a promise of prompt action, and in his undergarments began a long and fruitless pacing of the room. Long after

midnight he was still moving about, a ridiculous and highly anxious figure. The more he thought about the matter, the more certain he became that Holly would sacrifice herself to save her mother. And from something Margaret had told him outside the flat as he left, he knew that this sacrifice was not the absurdity it seemed on the surface.

"We must keep my sister out of this," she had said. "She has a bad heart. It might kill her."

He made, finally, a rather infuriated resolve: darn it all, if somebody had to be the goat, he would be. They weren't going to stand Holly up and question her. But all his tenderness was for Holly; for Mrs. Bayne he had only anger and increasing resentment. To save that soft-handed, gently unscrupulous aristocrat, he might have to drag an unknown but honourable name in the dirt. And why? Because her heart was weak, or she thought it was! Well, why not let her take her shock? Other people had to. Suppose poor Cox's heart had been weak? Or Holly's?

A wave of resentment and anger fairly shook him. He saw Mrs. Bayne at the door, watching spiderlike for Holly, lest the fly in the drawing room escape. Again, he himself was looking down the stair well, and she was below, listening furtively and hindering his own progress down the stairs.

He counted his scores against her: Margaret lying unconscious on the kitchen floor; the night she had brought him the bond to sell, and the play she had made on his sympathy; Holly in the attic, staring with tragic eyes at something in the candlelight; the Cox apartment, and James, broken and yet savage, in his chair.

And he tried to hate her; and then he thought of her weak relaxed throat and her childish blue eyes as she gave him the bond, and he somehow could not. After all, she had probably known about the suitcase for a long time, and yet she had suffered and pinched, denying herself everything that would have made life worth while to her. And when she had finally succumbed, it had not been for herself. He doubted if one penny of the money had been spent on herself.

Sometime toward morning he got heavily into bed in his undergarments, and dropped asleep almost at once.

At eight o'clock he wakened and rang for his clothes, but the boy who had taken them out had gone off duty and was not in the hotel, and nobody else knew anything about them. At nine o'clock he began a frenzied effort to locate them, tramping his floor in a state of mental agony and cursing

himself for having let them go. Grinning bellboys came and went, and housemaids smiled outside in the passage, but the absurdity of his situation was obliterated by his anxiety. He was as nearly insane as a healthy, able-bodied man of twenty-eight may be and yet retain fragments of reason.

And at ten o'clock he did the last thing he should have done under the circumstances. He telephoned to Baylie, at the office, to go up to Kelsey Street and get him a suit of clothes.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THERE is a certain interest in comparisons, and sometimes not a little humour. Take, for example, that morning, with Warrington half-crazed in a shabby and not too clean room at the Hotel Stockton, and then consider Mr. Furness Brooks, emerging from his shower to find the buttons in his shirt and his clothing pressed and ready to his hand. No frenzied search for *his* garments; a calm shave, and an equally calm and fastidious dressing; the studio room freshly in order, the ash trays emptied, the fire going, and before it a small table with coffee bubbling in an electric arrangement, and Miguel at hand with bacon and eggs and the morning paper.

Rather a painful comparison, too, when one thinks about it, with neat stacks of wedding invitations: "*Mrs. Thomas Bayne requests the honour of your presence at the marriage of her daughter, Anne Hollister, to Mr. Furness Schuyler Brooks* . . ." and so forth. The names and addresses on them had been carefully selected from the Social Register. And not only the environments, but the states of mind of the two men concerned, present ample ground for contrast. Humorous, too, with Warrington's head outside his door, watching the passageway with haggard eyes, and Brooks calmly surveying his domain and fitting a new mistress into it.

"Soon have to lay two places, Miguel," he said cheerfully to the servant.

"Yes, sir," said Miguel, and smiled at some private Oriental joke of his own.

Brooks sat down, but before he did so he got a notebook and made one or two additions to his list of names—careful additions: new people, but coming on and willing to pay their ways as they came.

The entire responsibility of the list was his. Asked about her own, Holly had only raised her eyebrows.

"But I don't know anybody," she said. "Of course Mother's people—but I haven't seen any of them for years."

And Mrs. Bayne's list had been of little use to him. Times had changed, even in ten years, and people who used to be important had died or ceased to count. New families had come up, not all of them bearing the closest inspection, but smart and accepted. He ignored her fretful protest that she had never heard of them, and put them all in.

So it happened that he did not glance at the morning paper for some time. Then, true to his type, he read the headlines and turned to the society news, and thus it was not until later that he saw, halfway down the first page, a headline which caught his eye and, having done so, held it.

BANK LOOT FOUND
Securities from Harrison Bank
Recovered

was what he read.

The article itself was not long. Given only the initial fact, of the recovery of a suitcase containing certain missing negotiable bonds from the Harrison Bank, and the additional news that they had been found in the apartment of one James Cox, brother-in-law of Bayne, it went on to deal with Bayne's record and his recent pardon. Evidently only the barest statement had been given out by the District Attorney's office.

He read it again. With the first reading he had felt only anger and furious annoyance. By the Lord Harry, wouldn't the damned story ever die? And to have it come up again just now—was there ever such rotten luck? Already he knew that the breakfast tables and boudoirs of his world were buzzing with it, and that by afternoon the society editors would have handed in their bit, and his approaching marriage to Tom Bayne's daughter would be duly noted in the published accounts.

It was only with the second reading that the true inwardness of the situation occurred to him. He threw down the paper and leaped to his feet, overturning his chair.

"Cox!" he thought. "Cox! That's the counter jumper. The new uncle. He couldn't have known Bayne. Then how the devil did *he* get the stuff?"

There was only one conclusion:

They had had the securities all this time, had them and hidden them. They were as criminal as Bayne himself; Cox had been no more than a cat's paw in their ladylike, unscrupulous hands. It was Margaret and Mrs. Bayne who were guilty.

He remembered Margaret. He could see her now, casually opening the front door.

"Oh, did you ring? I *thought* I heard the bell," and with a sort of timid archness, taking him into the drawing room.

"I'm afraid it's cold in here. The furnace man is too careless about coal."

He knew by this time that there was no furnace man, and that the drawing room was always cold. He knew there was no Hilda. All their small hypocrisies and snobberies had long before been uncovered before his discerning, prominent blue eyes.

But why the poverty if they had had this hoard to draw upon? He considered that shrewdly, in view of his knowledge of them.

"Afraid," he concluded. "Holding on until the old boy got out and told them how to dispose of it."

To be fair to him, he did not include Holly in all this. Selfish as were his pre-occupations, his mind finally drifted to her with a new and unexpected compassion. "The poor kid!" he thought, and saw her perhaps getting her first knowledge through the morning paper. And with that wave of sympathy he felt stronger, every inch a man. If he dramatized himself a bit, it was one fine gesture, to be laid to his credit.

"I'll stand by her," he thought, and drew himself up a trifle. "I'm all she has, and I'm not letting go. The poor kid!"

He had no illusions; he knew what standing by would mean. The men would approve him for it, but the women would not. And his world was largely women. It was women who made out lists, paid calls, gave parties. It was at tea tables he was popular, not in smoking rooms after dinners. With much the same gesture with which he had disposed of the invitations, he brushed this world of women out of his way.

At the most his business was a casual one. He ordered his car brought around from the public garage where he kept it, and still warm and exalted with sacrifice, drove to the house on Kelsey Street.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

HAVING retired early, Mrs. Bayne was up before seven o'clock that morning. She got out of bed in her cold room, lowered the window, and then put a match to the fire Holly had laid ready the night before. In front of this she placed a pitcher of water to warm, and having done so, crawled back into bed again.

She felt cheerful and active. The day opened before her, full of interesting things to be done. She took her purse from under her pillow and carefully counted her money. She still had almost nine hundred dollars.

She pulled the blankets up around her and fell to work on a shopping list, but first carefully she put down a few items, considering them at length. Twenty-five dollars for the organist at St. Andrews, ten dollars for the sexton, and a hundred dollars to the florist, for rented palms and a few white chrysanthemums. That was a hundred and thirty-five; from eight hundred and ninety, it left seven hundred and fifty-five dollars.

She thought she could manage. . . .

She dropped her list and fell into deep thought. Somebody would have to give Holly away; she couldn't go up the aisle alone. But the Parkers had gone to Europe, and anyhow, she had an idea that Sam Parker wouldn't have been keen about doing it. Sam had lost a good bit in the bank trouble; he had been a director then.

For the first time she considered Margaret's husband. He wasn't impressive, but at least he was available. And whether one liked it or not, he was a part of the family. One couldn't ask an outsider to do that sort of thing, and although in this new state of society widowed mothers occasionally gave their daughters away, she did not approve of it. Nor, as she reflected bitterly, was she widowed.

She heard the paper boy on the steps below, and putting on her slippers, went down through the cold hall and retrieved the morning paper from the vestibule. On her way back, she wakened Holly, and then crawled into her bed once more, shivering. She did not, however, look at the news pages at all. Paper and pencil in hand, she went over the advertisements, marking bargains here and there, and special sales.

She was contented, quite happy.

Later on she took her bath from the warm water out of the pitcher, and dressed carefully to go out. When, hatted and coated, she reached the chilly dining room, the odour of coffee and bacon welcomed her.

A little worried frown appeared on Mrs. Bayne's face as she surveyed Holly when she brought in the food.

"I hated waking you," she said, "but we have such a lot to do to-day. You don't look as if you have had any sleep."

"I slept all right, Mother."

"I wish you'd put on some weight," said her mother discontentedly. "Really, for a bride to look as wretched as you do is no compliment to her husband."

At this, however, she caught Holly's eyes fixed on her so oddly that she sheered off from the subject abruptly.

"I wish you'd come downtown with me this morning."

"I've promised Aunt Margaret to go there."

"For a fitting? I shouldn't think, with clothes as straight as they are now, you'd need much fitting." But her mind, preternaturally active these days, veered to another matter instantly, and she put down her coffee cup. "I do wish you'd wear rubber gloves, Holly," she said. "Your hands——"

"I can't work in them. I've tried."

"Then you can't work," said Mrs. Bayne. "We'll have to have Mrs. Carter in sooner or later. We'd better get her now."

"At three dollars a day? And food?"

"Only for the next month or so. People will be calling and presents coming, and all that. We simply can't manage by ourselves."

She went on, cheerfully planning. Holly felt that ten minutes more of this cheerful babbling and she would rise up from her chair and scream.

What did it matter whether they had Mrs. Carter in or not? What did it matter that her hands were red, and her mother recommending glycerine and rose water at night to whiten them? What did anything matter but James Cox and the trouble they had brought to him?

Only one ray of comfort she had. She had missed the paper from the vestibule and knew her mother had taken it. But she had evidently not seen the news item.

Her mother was going. She got up and drew on her shabby gloves, gloves without which no gentlewoman ever passed her front door, examined her purse for the lists, and so went out.

Holly accompanied her to the door and kissed her good-bye, much as she would have kissed an irresponsible child. During the long watches of the night, when a strange dog howled from somewhere apparently close under her windows and she had listened vainly for that creak on the stair which would signify Warrington's return from James Cox's, she had made one determination: whatever came, her mother was to have this one day more.

It was not that she so loved her mother. There were times when she guiltily wondered if she loved her at all. But passionately she believed that life had been cruel to her, and that she had suffered long and unfairly. Although she did not put it so to herself, much of her service was a sort of vicarious atonement. Once, indeed, she had told her feeling about this to Margaret, but it was after she had been forbidden to see James, and Margaret had been bitter.

"Nonsense!" she had said sharply. "She's had it easy all her life. She's got it easy now."

Holly was not thinking beyond the day.

She closed the front door and then went up to her mother's room. There she burned the newspaper and turned down the bed to air. By the small travelling clock, it was time for Warrington to be up and moving about, but she could hear nothing. She was quite certain he was in, however; there had been a strange dog closed in the yard when she went down that morning, and a half-used bottle of milk on the kitchen table. That would have been his work, she knew. She had brought the dog in and given him a warm place by the stove.

But when she finally went up to the third floor and knocked at Warrington's door, there was no reply, nor did any cheery splashing come from the bathroom. She opened the door and looked in.

She was frightened. His bed had not been used. She stood in the doorway, staring around. Could he have stayed at Aunt Margaret's? Maybe something had happened to James. Maybe he had felt he could not stand it and had tried——

She had, like Warrington, a swift vision of Aunt Margaret, and the way she had tried to escape when there had seemed to be no other way. She covered her eyes to shut it out.

The other possible significance of his absence did not occur to her then. She drove away the thought of James and went in. Since Margaret had gone, Mrs. Bayne had taken charge of the room, and it gave Holly an odd little thrill to be there, to sniff the faint odour of tobacco smoke which clung about the place, to see his clothing hanging in the closet, his slippers by the bed.

On the bureau were laid out his military brushes and a collar box. Those, and a few books, were all the mark he had put on the room. Five minutes, or ten, and he could be gone—as if he had never been there!

She moved to the bureau and stood fingering his brushes. She could remember her mother's bureau in her father's time. When he went away, his brushes went also, and for a long time there had been an empty space left where they had used to lie.

Suddenly she sat down in the chair by the empty hearth and began to cry, slow, rather dreadful tears; she cried for her father, for James and Margaret, for her mother, and even for herself, as she saw ahead of her long, joyless years, if not worse. She and her mother, and perhaps her father too, shut up in that dreary house, with little love and no happiness. Time going on, and she herself drying up and getting sour, like Aunt Margaret. A succession of roomers, too; and maybe she would be arch with them, like Aunt Margaret.

But mostly her grief was for Warrington, that he cared for her and nothing could ever come of it, and that she had involved him in a trouble which was not his. To the one she was resigned; to the other, never.

She forgot the empty house and its morning disorder, forgot that she wore only her working clothes, forgot Aunt Margaret, James, Mr. Steinfeldt, all that motley gathering which had cluttered up her mind—flung them away, rather. She threw on hat and coat, picked up her purse, and reached the front door just as Furness Brooks rang the bell.

Furness, filled with high resolve and magnanimity, stepped inside the door and held out his arms.

“You poor kid!” he said. “Did you think I was going to let you down?”

She had not thought of him at all; certainly she was not thinking of him then. She stared at him blankly.

“Please don’t keep me,” she told him. “I’m busy now. I have to go out.”

“But, listen!” he said, blocking the door. “What’s the matter with you? Here I am to tell you that everything’s all right. With me, anyhow. And you try to run off!”

“Get out of the way, Furness. I’ll see you some other time. I tell you I’m in a hurry.”

“Hurry, hell!” he stormed, suddenly angry. “If you think for a minute ____”

“Oh, go away,” she told him wearily. “I’m not thinking at all. Not about you, anyhow.”

She dodged around him and out through the front door, leaving him speechless and stunned in the hallway. He recovered enough, however, to go out onto the steps and to call to her.

“Holly! Come back! Just for a minute.”

But she either did not hear him or paid no attention.

Angry and humiliated, his fine gesture repudiated, he went back into the house. He wanted somebody to talk to, some explanation; he even wandered as far back as the kitchen, but there was no one about—nothing but a starveling dog which snarled at him from beneath the kitchen range.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

PHELPS, the district attorney, leaned back in his chair. He was moderately young and not unkindly. True, it was his business to administer justice rather than mercy, and this had hardened him a trifle, as strict justice often does. A just man is often a hard man.

But now he was puzzled. The night before he had been very sure of himself. Bayne, on his emergence from prison, was to collect the stolen securities, realize what he could on them, and decamp. He never had believed Tom Bayne was a sick man. And there had been too much of that sort of thing; men went crooked, hid the profits, took a sentence and came out again to enjoy them.

"You can figure it this way," he had told his assistant the day before. "Bayne laid away six hundred thousand dollars. What he's really been doing is to stay ten years in the pen, doing easy clerical work at sixty thousand a year."

"He wouldn't get as much as that, the way he'd have to dispose of them."

"Perhaps not. But he'd get a tidy sum."

Now, however, he was not so sure. First had come the word from the penitentiary that Bayne was really ill, possibly a dying man, and this from sources he trusted. And now here was this girl, tragically meek, telling him he had been wrong; there had been no conspiracy. It was far simpler than that. She had found the suitcase and had needed money, so she had sold a bond.

He leaned back and put his hands in his pockets.

“You needed money?” he said. “Why? I mean, you imply a special reason.”

“I was going to be married, and we’ve had very little. I had to have—clothes.”

“It had nothing to do with your father’s return home from—with his return home?”

“It was taken before we knew that.”

He surveyed her. “This Cox, now. You say he didn’t know the securities were in your possession?”

“How could he know? I had only just found them. And he has never been in the house in his life.”

He leaned forward alertly. “What do you mean by that?” he asked. “He’s your aunt’s husband. Do you mean there has been trouble?”

“Not trouble, no. My mother didn’t approve of him. That is, she felt ____”

“Oh!” He considered that rather grimly. He knew Mrs. Bayne. Not well, but once long ago she had snubbed his wife, and he had never forgotten it. The picture of James Cox, sitting huddled in his chair the day before, arose in his mind. Poor devil! So that was the way of it. He wasn’t good enough for the family, but he was good enough for them to use.

“Well, now, let’s get this straight: You gave this roomer, this fellow Warrington, the bond to sell? And he did this, and gave you the money?”

“Yes.”

“But you say he didn’t know how you’d got the bond?”

“No.”

“Have you seen Warrington since he carried the suitcase for you to the Cox flat?”

“For a few minutes last night.”

“Where?” he asked sharply.

“At the house.”

“He was there last night?” he said, sitting up in his chair. “How the—how did he get in?”

“I don’t know,” she told him honestly. “I was out, probably, when he came back. He came downstairs later on, and I told him what had happened; then he went out again, to my aunt’s, to see what he could do.”

Phelps tapped the desk irritably with his fingers; they had had him last night, then, in that house on Kelsey Street, and he had given them the slip! He’d see about that; he’d——

“So he went out and didn’t come back?” he asked, controlling his voice.

“No. I thought he had stayed at my aunt’s apartment, but he didn’t. I’ve been there this morning.”

So she had been anxious. There was more to this, certainly, than met the eye.

“A little while ago you spoke of your marriage,” he said. “Are you engaged to this Warrington?”

“No,” she said, and coloured. “He is only—a roomer in the house.”

“How well did Warrington know your uncle, Mr. Cox?”

“Not at all. I don’t think he had ever even seen him.”

“You are sure of that, are you?”

“Quite sure.”

“Suppose I tell you that they were acquainted as long ago as October? That at that time a small incident happened which concerned Mr. Cox, and that Warrington was with him at the time?”

“I would think there must be a mistake. But I don’t see how it would matter, really.”

“Now, let’s go back a little. You found this suitcase, and after you had taken one bond, you were sorry, eh? You wanted it out of the house so you wouldn’t be tempted again? Is that it?”

“I wanted it back where it belonged. In the bank.”

“And until Warrington surprised you in the attic, he had not known it was there?”

“How could he? It was under the floor.”

“How long is it since any member of the family has seen your father?”

“My mother was there about four weeks ago.”

“Ah! Now, suppose we just go into this from a different angle, for a minute. Suppose, just to see how it works, we say this: Your mother learned at the prison that the suitcase was in the house. Being an honourable person, she did not touch it, but she told her sister. Do you see what I mean? Now, then, your aunt is newly married and she has no secrets from her husband, so she passes the news to Cox. And Cox *knows* Warrington. Whatever you may think, we can prove that.”

“But it isn’t true. I’ve told you the truth.”

“Then where is this Warrington?” he demanded sternly. “What is he hiding from? Why did he leave the stuff at the Cox house instead of taking it to the bank? My dear Miss Bayne,” he said, leaning forward, “I don’t believe you took that bond. I believe you are protecting—well, we will say somebody else. And it’s no good. Go home and think it over; you have no business being mixed up in this.”

He rang the bell and there was a movement among those waiting in the anteroom. She got up, feeling dizzy and slightly dazed.

“My mother,” she said, “I don’t want my mother to know about this. She has heart trouble, and it would kill her.”

“I see. We’ll be as easy as we can.”

But he was not easy a half-hour or so later, with two detectives lined up unhappily before him.

“I don’t want any more excuses,” he said angrily. “I *want* this fellow Warrington, and no more slips. What the devil do you fellows think you’re doing with him? Playing peek-a-boo?”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

FOR some reason Baylie, at the office, had chosen to regard Warrington's desperate message as highly humorous. He roared with laughter over the telephone, and Warrington, as he hung up, felt he had done a reckless thing.

Had he been able to see into the office, he would have been certain of it. Baylie, red-headed and cheerfully sophisticated, wandered over to Miss Sharp's desk and passed on the glad tidings.

"Can you beat it?" he inquired jovially. "What sort of a boss have you got, anyhow, hanging around a disreputable hotel without his clothes?"

"Quit stringing me, Mr. Baylie."

"It's a fact, and I don't mean maybe. He's at the Stockton."

"Never heard of it."

"Well, you'll hear of it again, and he's going to hear of it, if I live to tell the tale. Says he sent his clothes out to be pressed and can't get them back!"

They laughed together, not maliciously.

After Baylie had got his hat and started out, Miss Sharp remembered something and went into the outer office, and the detective standing there, surveying the board, turned at her approach.

"Mr. Warrington will be in before long," she told him. "He's just telephoned. He's at the Hotel Stockton just now. But you'd better wait here. He'll be around soon."

There was amusement in her face, and he looked at her shrewdly.

"What's funny, sister? Tell me. I like to laugh."

"Ask Mr. Warrington when he comes in," she said, smiling.

“Tell me now. I can’t wait,” he coaxed her.

He was her own sort. She had never seen him before, but in her world, acquaintance and familiarity were not far apart. She looked around, saw they were unobserved, and passed the tale on to him. But he did not laugh. All at once his comradeship disappeared, and he pushed her aside with a movement more forcible than polite.

“How long ago did this Baylie start?” he demanded.

“You asked for that. Now you’ve got it and——”

“How long ago? Five minutes? Ten minutes?”

“He’s just gone,” she said sulkily, and followed him with resentful eyes as he bolted out the door.

“Well, can you beat that?” she muttered, and sullenly went back to her desk.

To the detective, the fact that Warrington was trying to get another suit of clothing meant only one thing: a bolt. He was relieved, therefore, to find that his man was still in the hotel, and, curiously enough, registered under his own name. He sent a bell-hop up to watch the door and used the telephone on the desk, lowering his voice carefully.

“Got him,” he said. “He’s sent out for some different clothes, but I’ve got him, all right. I’ll bring him right around.”

It was about that time that Warrington’s suit, neatly pressed and repaired, was passed through his door, and the detective caught him as he was leaving his room.

He took the arrest very quietly.

“I was on my way, anyhow,” was all he said.

They went down together in the elevator, and out on the pavement another man took up a position on his other side. He walked between them, a free man to all appearances, a free man in a neatly pressed suit, with James’s old cap on his head and his linen exceedingly dirty. But he was not a free man; he was on his way to jail.

However, they did not commit him at once. They took him first to the City Hall, and to the District Attorney’s office. But before that, he had to wait for some time in the outer room, where one of the detectives chewed tobacco morosely, spitting into a large brass cuspidor, and the other cleaned his nails with his penknife.

At last one of the men took him in. He had no idea of what he was expected to do or say, and so he stood still and waited. The detective had taken off his hat, so he did the same. The District Attorney was looking at him.

"Come over and sit down, Warrington," he said. "I want to talk to you. Wait out there, will you, Lyell?"

The detective went out. Warrington sat down near the desk. There was a silence, and then the District Attorney cleared his throat.

"I suppose you know why you're here?"

"I suppose I do. Yes."

There was another silence. He could feel the District Attorney's eyes moving over him, studying, watching.

"How did you get mixed up with this thing, Warrington? I understand your record's been clean, so far?"

"That depends on how far you think I *am* mixed up in it."

"Don't spar for time," said the District Attorney, rather more sharply. "We know you had those bonds. We know you sold one of them. That was a fool thing to do, in the first place. Why? Were you trying out the market?"

"I didn't know it was stolen when I offered it."

"When the Bayne girl asked you to sell it, you didn't suspect that it was a part of the Harrison Bank loot?"

"She never gave it to me. She never saw it."

"She says she did."

"Then she's lying."

The District Attorney bent forward.

"Now, see here, Warrington," he said. "You're in a pretty bad way, and you know it. We know that you came into possession of those securities, that you knew they were from the Harrison Bank and that you hid them in the house of one James Cox, with or without his consent."

"Without it. I hardly knew the man."

"You knew him well enough to be with him on the 17th of October when he was arrested for attacking a police officer."

"That's the only time I ever saw him until last night. And I wasn't hiding them in your sense of the word."

"Oh! So you saw Cox last night! What did you see him about?"

"I'd got him into trouble. I wanted to see what I could do. He didn't even know the stuff was in the house yesterday until they picked him up at the store. I'd only left it there until I could arrange to deliver it at the bank."

"But you didn't arrange to deliver it at the bank."

"I went there, but I couldn't find anybody responsible enough to take it. It was a delicate matter. We didn't want any publicity."

"Who were 'we'?"

"Miss Bayne and myself. You see, Bayne was coming home. She didn't want him to find the securities there. As God's my witness, her sole idea was to get the stuff out of the house and back to the bank before anything more happened to it."

"Anything more? What do you mean?"

He saw he had slipped there. The District Attorney leaned back in his chair and, his legs thrust out before him, sat surveying him with his head lowered.

"It won't wash, Warrington," he said. "Either you or this girl took that bond. It sold, all right, but you began to get cold feet on the proposition. Somebody might check it up; sooner or later it would be checked up, almost certainly. If that happened before you'd disposed of the rest, there would be a search of the house, so you tried to get rid of the rest. This story about taking them back to the bank is all poppycock. There's another point you've overlooked, Warrington, and this is it: this inquiry might have taken a different form if you'd acted like an honest man. You haven't. You escaped last night and hid yourself at an obscure hotel; this morning you sent for another suit of clothes. You wear a hat usually, don't you? What are you doing with that cap? If we hadn't landed you, where would you be now? Making a get-away!"

Suddenly Warrington laughed. There was a bit of hysteria in the laughter, but he could not help himself. He got out a not overclean handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"Making a get-away!" he said. "Oh, my Lord, that's funny! Listen, Mr. District Attorney, if that's who you are—I didn't catch the name when we were introduced. What do you do when you tear your trousers? I tore mine

getting away from some friends of yours last night. Tore them on a fence. You can send around and find that out from the tailor who mended them—if you can locate him. I couldn't, all morning."

In spite of himself the District Attorney smiled. The little break had relieved the tension, and his voice was not so hard when he began again.

"Why don't you come clean on this, Warrington?" he said. "The bank people don't want to prosecute; they're sitting very pretty. Let's have the whole story and see what can be done about it."

"I'll tell you everything I know, except how I got the bond I sold."

"I know all the rest. You know as well as I do that the situation hinges on that. And I'll tell you this: if I can prove that Tom Bayne's family has known that stuff was in the house for the past ten years, I'll go after them. And I'll prove it if I can."

"They didn't know it. I'll swear to that."

"And you won't tell about the bond?"

"No."

"Think a minute. If this case ever gets to a jury, there are two angles to it: either the Bayne family is involved, as I've told you, or you are—you and Cox. You knew Cox, and Cox married Mrs. Bayne's sister. Suppose the sister talks, and Cox tells you what he knows? You go there, take a room, and look about, and finally you locate it. It doesn't look so good, does it?"

"It looks pretty rotten."

"Well, come clean. Get out if you can."

"It will take some thinking over. I don't care about myself, but I—I didn't sleep much last night, and I haven't had any breakfast. I need food, I guess, and a chance to think."

"I imagine we can provide both of those," said the District Attorney cheerfully, and rang a bell.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

MRS. BAYNE had had a wonderful morning. Nothing was too fine for her; she wanted only the best.

"Haven't you a better quality?" she would demand, in quite her old-time manner, and out would come boxes and wrappings; and out of those, again, wonderful things: stockings and handkerchiefs, underwear and linen.

But she did not buy Holly's household linens at Steinfeldt and Roder's. Not since Margaret's marriage had she been in that store.

By noon she was very tired. She went up to the restaurant and ordered herself a frugal luncheon, and while waiting for it, she listed her expenditures so far. She had done extremely well, she reflected. True, Holly would not have so many of each sort of thing—she herself had had two dozen of everything when she had married—but what Holly had was very good.

Mrs. Bayne was in high good humour, and when the head waiter remembered her and came to speak to her, it was like old times indeed.

"Glad to see you here again, Mrs. Bayne. You don't honour us any more."

And she acknowledged this tribute with a gracious condescension.

"I seldom lunch downtown any more," she said. "But I always find it pleasant here."

She had ordered a New England boiled dinner, because it was ready and cheap. The cabbage she knew gave her indigestion; but she was above indigestion that day. She was hungry; she ate heartily, and after luncheon she made some more purchases, looking wistfully at a gray gown with a chinchilla collar for herself for the wedding, and then passing it by. There

may have been a moment when she thought of those other bonds, lying where they had lain for years and doing nobody any good, but she put the temptation away from her. And what she called Holly's money was not to be spent for herself. Not one cent.

But the indigestion began to bother her. She went to the soda fountain and got some baking soda, and then took a taxi home. The floor was piled with her packages; a boy had to carry them out for her. But she could not wait for their delivery. She wanted to get home, and spread them out on her bed and gloat over them, like old times.

Like old times.

She took out the money for her taxi fare, and then carefully closed her bag. After a time she dozed off comfortably.

At the house Holly had mechanically finished her belated morning work and was anxiously watching for her mother.

Holly had worked hard, for she did not want to think—not just yet, anyhow. She had told her story, and they had not believed her. She was free as air. But Howard Warrington was under suspicion. She was free, and they were after him, who had done nothing, known nothing.

Beyond that, her mind at first refused to travel. She felt helpless and resentful, and that was all.

It was noon before she sat down and began really to think; and then her thinking got her nowhere. Some memory of Furness that morning came back, and she wondered if she had driven him away for good. The thought left her entirely indifferent, save for her inner knowledge that, for the first time since she had known him, she had been absolutely honest with him then.

"Honest for once!" she thought. "All along I've been acting and lying. It's been wrong. It's been immoral."

But wasn't there a fundamental immorality in the whole situation? Not only the bond. That had been an accident, a temptation in a weak moment. But all the rest of it, their pretense at gentility, their snobberies and hypocrisies; how about them?

She was through with them. If, after it all came out, she told Furness how she felt about him and he still wanted to marry her, she would. But she would tell him first.

And it was out of that conclusion, slowly and painfully reached, that she came to another. She would marry him, but first her mother would have to clear things up. She would have to tell the police about the bond.

It would not be so terrible, after all. They would not arrest her mother any more than they had arrested her. One could go to the District Attorney and tell him the truth, and so long as there was no conspiracy, and the money was returned, there would be no punishment. She knew that now.

She made a bargain with herself: if her mother would clear Howard, she would pay the price. She would marry Furness if he still wanted her.

She went down the stairs when she heard the front door open, and found Mrs. Bayne in the lower hall, her arms filled with bundles and her face radiant.

"Oh, my dear," she said. "Such a morning! I'm so tired I could drop."

She dropped her parcels on the hall table and sat down, a trifle breathlessly.

"As soon as I can walk, we'll go up and open these things," she went on. "I bought a new rug for the vestibule. The old one was dreadful."

"Have you had anything to eat?" There was a new gentleness in the girl's voice. To see all this happiness and to know one was going to kill it—it was cruel.

"I lunched downtown, and I ate cabbage. Stupid of me, but I like it, and one can't cook it in the house. It smells so. I think I'll take a little more baking soda."

She felt around in her lap, preparatory to rising, then, still sitting, she glanced about her on the floor.

"What is it you are looking for, Mother?" Holly asked.

"My purse," replied Mrs. Bayne. "It's here somewhere. I've dropped it."

But it was not there. Nor was it in the hall, nor in the vestibule, nor on the street. Afterward Holly was always to remember her mother, the agonized look on her face and the stiffness of her lips as she talked on.

"I had it in the taxicab. I took out a dollar for the man; see, I still have the change." She held out her hand. "And then I closed it again. I must have dropped it there."

"How much was in it?"

“Six hundred and ten dollars.”

Mrs. Bayne turned slowly and stared at herself in the mirror. Then, without any warning, she sank on her knees and fell over in a dead faint.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

JAMES still sat in the living room. The events of the day and Warrington's visit that evening had left him benumbed. The very futility of anger left him weaponless. He was ready to shake his fist at the world, but the world was callous to the shaking of fists. It recognized only effective action—and he could not act.

For the first time since his marriage he did not go to bed when Margaret did. He was not sensual, but for a long time he had been very lonely. The sense of her bodily nearness in the double bed had been happiness; the longing of his solitary soul for companionship was partially eased by the contact with her not beautiful but warm and alive human body.

Something of this he must have felt in advance, when they were buying their furniture.

"No twin beds for me, Al," he said to the salesman. "I'm old-fashioned. My father and mother used the same bed for thirty years—and settled many a squabble in it, like as not. Anyhow, that's what we're going to have."

And Margaret had blushed and agreed.

But that night he was alone, marooned by misery, cut off from her by despair and suspicion.

"Won't you come to bed, James? You need to sleep and forget things for a while."

"Not now," he said, and looked at her with eyes at once hard and hurt.

"I could warm some milk. If you have something in your stomach, it will make you sleepy."

He shook his head obstinately. "I don't want to sleep," he protested vehemently. "I've got to think. I've got to think this thing out."

He could not get into the same bed with her, with that suspicion between them. And he distrusted himself. He felt that, if he did, he would somehow weaken. He would not be able to think clearly. He would even be sorry for her.

She was suffering; he knew that. All her new vitality had been drained from her. She might have been the Margaret of six months ago. He was afraid to look at her hands, so sure he was that she had clenched the left one.

"You go to bed," he told her roughly. "I'll come in later."

He heard her moving about, undressing, the slow sound of the brush over her hair, the two small knocks of her bedroom slippers on the floor, and the soft rustle as she got into the bed. He wanted to go in, to kneel beside her and put his head down and be comforted.

But how could he?

She was keeping something from him, something that she and Warrington both knew.

At two o'clock in the morning he took off his shoes and tiptoed into the bedroom. Margaret was wide awake and stirred as he entered, but he only took an extra quilt from the top of the closet and went out again. When, toward daylight, she crept to the living-room door, he was asleep on the davenport, fully dressed but for his shoes and coat.

Things were no better between them in the morning. He shaved while she got the breakfast, but before he ate, he went down and bought a morning paper, and she found him in the living room with the paper on the floor, and what was left of his world in ruins.

"Your breakfast's ready, James," said Margaret quietly.

"I don't want any breakfast."

Her look was piteous, but he did not see it.

"You can't work all day without food."

Then he turned on her.

"Work!" he said. "Do you suppose I can go to the store after that?" He pointed to the paper, then picked it up and thrust it at her savagely.

"Read it," he said. "Look what you've done to me. Read it and smile!"

"I! You know better than that."

“Oh, I do, do I? You knew what was in that bag. You arranged to have it brought here. I’m no fool. You lied last night. Look here, have you and your precious family been living off that stuff all this time? That’s what I want to know, and, by God, I’m going to know it.”

“If you can think that,” said Margaret, “you can think anything.” And she left the room.

She heard him go out soon after, not slamming the door, but going quietly, as though ashamed of his recent violence. She moved about, automatically doing her usual morning work, but inwardly in a turmoil. It couldn’t go on. It must not go on. As between James and Annie, it must be James.

She would have to tell him, and let him make such use of it as he would.

The decision gave her courage. She took off her morning dress and put on her street clothes. While she dressed, she listened, but there was no sound of his latchkey in the lock, none of that preliminary clearing of the throat which always preceded his entrance. Waiting for him, with the habit of years she picked up her sewing basket; but when she saw the fragment of Holly’s wedding gown, she put it down again.

For the first time she saw all the destruction that would follow her confession to James—that it involved Holly’s future too.

Unlike Holly, her experience of the day before had left her in terror of the law. Out of her ignorance she drew a picture of her sister in prison. It would kill her; she would never live through the trial.

Her imagination leaped on. She saw Mrs. Bayne gone, and Holly’s engagement broken. She saw the shabby old house, and only Tom Bayne and Holly in it. Time going on, and Tom Bayne creeping about, a sick man, a friendless man—and Holly’s youth going, gone, like her own. “I can’t do it,” she told herself. But she knew she would do it.

By noon she had worked herself into a state of frenzy, and then the telephone rang. She was so certain it was James that her heart leaped; but the call was from Simmons’s grocery store on Kelsey Street.

“We have a message for you, Mrs. Cox,” said Simmons himself. “Your sister ain’t so well, and Miss Holly would like you to come right up.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

MRS. BAYNE lay in her bed. There were purplish shadows under her eyes, and she was lying quite flat, by the doctor's orders.

She was very comfortable. Now and then she reached out a white hand to the glass of water beside her and took a sip, and always at such times somebody came and helped her to raise her head; sometimes it was Holly, sometimes Margaret. Now and then she dozed a little, but mostly she lay still.

There was a fire on the hearth, and she could hear it crackling.

Once she said, conscious that she was not alone: "It is nice to be waited on. Like old times." And Holly from the hearth answered her cheerfully enough: "Why shouldn't you be waited on? It's a poor house that can't have one lady!"

Her hearing was preternaturally acute, and the front door seemed to be opening and closing rather often.

"Who's downstairs?" she asked once. "Someone keeps going out and coming in."

"It's Aunt Margaret. She's been telephoning the taxi company again."

"It hasn't been found?"

"Not yet, but the men don't report until six o'clock. Even if they don't find it, what do we care?" She came to the side of the bed and touched her mother's forehead. "We've still got each other," she said shakily.

"Has Furness been in?"

"No. I didn't expect him to-day. Now close your eyes and see if you can't sleep again."

Toward evening she really fell asleep. The firelight flickered in the darkened room, making it soothingly warm and restful; her pillows in their fresh slips were smooth and soft. Tragedy, grim and heartbreaking, was reigning downstairs, but in her sheltered bed, her firelit room, Mrs. Bayne went peacefully to sleep.

Holly went down the stairs.

Margaret was in the drawing room. There was no fire there, and under the hard top light of the chandelier her face looked drawn and old. Each time she had gone to the grocery store she had called up the flat, only to be told that her number did not answer, and unreasoning terror began to possess her.

"I'm afraid," she told Holly. "Unless you knew him, you couldn't understand. He might do anything. *Anything.*"

Holly tried to comfort her. The dog had adopted the house as his permanent home and now lay beside her on the old sofa, and as she talked, she stroked him. She felt almost as though she and the dog were alone in the room. This Margaret sitting across from her, detached and frozen, her mind on the husband Holly hardly knew, was scarcely more than conscious of her.

"Of course he's worried, but he's sure to go back. Probably he is just walking around."

"He didn't even take his overcoat."

Once Holly asked her if she knew whether Mr. Cox and Howard Warrington had met, and Margaret at first said no. Later on, however, she said they had; she had sent a message to James by Warrington one night. But Holly did not tell her the District Attorney's theory. She was troubled enough without that.

It was after one of the painful silences that Margaret suddenly announced her decision.

"I'm going to tell him, Holly. I've got to."

"I think you must," said Holly quietly. "Only, he'd better know what the doctor said to-day. She can't stand a shock."

Margaret said nothing.

At six o'clock Holly boiled some eggs and made toast, and they ate, the two of them, in the kitchen, because it was warm. While she was preparing the meal, Margaret went out once more to telephone, but Holly had no need to ask the result.

Margaret sat stiff and silent at the kitchen table, busy with her own thoughts, and Holly said very little. Once she asked Margaret a question, but the answer to it was vague and faintly hostile.

"Do you think Father told her the day she went to see him?"

"I haven't an idea. He might. He put it there."

Holly sat with her chin in her hands and gazed at her.

"Still, I would like to think he did," she persisted. "That he told her, so she could send it back. Wouldn't you?"

"Don't fool yourself. If he told her at all, it wasn't for that."

Holly made an impatient gesture.

"There are still some decent motives in the world, you know, and some honest people."

"There are," said Margaret, rising. "There is my James. And look what it's brought him to!"

She put down her cup and went upstairs, and soon afterward she came down with her wraps on.

"I'm going now," she said heavily. "She's still sleeping, and her colour is good. But I don't quite like leaving you alone with her."

"I'll be all right. And I'll not be alone in the house. Mr. Warrington will be here."

Had Margaret been less absorbed in her own troubles, she would have seen Holly's sensitive colour rise.

Holly saw her to the door and kissed her good-bye, but Margaret was still frozen. There was a sag to her shoulders that had been absent now for months. It was as though she was afraid to go home. Holly closed the door and went in, shivering.

She and the dog were alone. She got a coat from the hall closet and spread it over the two of them on the sofa. She knew Warrington had brought the dog. It was his dog. She pulled it closer to her and tucked the coat in around it.

She was waiting for Warrington. Now and then she looked at the clock. She knew he was all right. When she had reached the house that morning, a dapper-looking young man had been waiting on the doorstep, and had told her with a twinkle in his eyes that he had called for a suit of clothes.

He explained, not much, but that Warrington had torn something and needed other clothes.

"But he is all right?" she had asked. The young man had laughed cheerfully, with the air of one who has a secret and merry joke.

"Sure, he's all right," he said, "except for a little wear and tear." And he had gone up the stairs chuckling.

So now Holly was waiting. Soon he would come and tell her what to do, and she would do it. An anchor, he had said; but he was to be more than that: he was to be steersman, quiet and strong and resourceful, to pilot her out of these troubled waters.

The clock moved on. Nine, ten, eleven, and still he did not come. At midnight she put the dog to bed and went up the stairs. Her mother was still sleeping. She sat down by the fire; and confused with thinking, the warmth wrapping her like a blanket, she too finally slept.

At half-past one that morning Mrs. Bayne awakened. She felt completely rested and refreshed. She sat up in bed and took another sip of water, and then made out Holly's quiet figure in the chair by the dying fire. She got out of bed, and taking one of her blankets, put it carefully around the girl's body. Holly stirred but did not waken.

Mrs. Bayne moved about the room. She knew that, if her purse had been returned, they would have left it out for her to see; so she examined the bureau and the bedside table, but it was not there. She felt no particular shock at the discovery; she had had very little hope of its return. But her mind, rested from her long sleep, turned at once to the practical problem of the loss.

Sitting on the side of her bed, in her slippers and dressing gown, she surveyed the situation. She could see, in the corner between the mantel and her high mahogany wardrobe, the white boxes which contained her purchases. She knew what was in each one of them; no miser ever hoarded and counted gold as she had hoarded and counted their contents.

At least they had those, and they were paid for.

Her mind travelled to the big young man she thought asleep in the room above. He had been very obliging about the bond; he would be sorry to know she had lost most of what he had got for it. Really, they had been most fortunate. He was a gentleman, and then to have him know about bonds and such things, that had been fortunate too.

She was not consciously evading temptation as she had that morning. Rather, in her new ease of mind, she was subconsciously savouring it. This morning it had been weakness, but whatever she might do now was out of dire necessity. But she was in no hurry. Why hurry, when she knew that she had above her this treasure trove of security, this wall between her and privation, lying snug and tight beneath the attic floor?

For just a minute her mind turned to her husband. He had made her promise to send it to the Harrison Bank. Well, so she would, but there was no hurry about that, either. They would get it all except the one bond, or maybe two; surely that was little enough, considering what she and Tom had paid for it.

Out of her new peace and odd lightness of mind she pitied him. He had paid, over and over, and now he was sick. He had always loathed being sick; it had made him as sulky as a bad child. It seemed strange now to think that once he had lived in this very room, shared this very bed.

It would be even stranger, too, to have him back again. A little bit of coquetry revived in her; she wondered if she had changed very much. Her former fastidious distaste of having him back was softened. They would have to be kind to him, she and Holly. But Holly would not be there; she was going to be married.

She rose after a while and got her nail file and a clean handkerchief from her dresser. She had a dislike of soiling her fingers. Then from the mantelpiece she cautiously took down a candle, and, lighting it, went into the passage. Holly had not moved.

As Mrs. Bayne mounted the stairs, she felt dizzy and weak; her knees shook, and the candle wavered, but she went on and up, with a faint smile on her face. Up and up. Past Mr. Warrington's door, carefully, carefully; the attic steps now, and a strong draught from some open window, almost blowing out the candle. And then the top of the stairs and the end of all worry. And treasure trove.

She placed the candle on the top of a packing box and set to work. The trunk had to be moved, and it would not do to drag it along the floor; she inched it over, lifting it first at one end and then at the other; a dozen, two dozen efforts, each of which made her dizzy and more shaken. But at last the boards were uncovered. Oh, sweet boards, oh, beautiful burden-lifting boards! She sat down and ran her delicate hands across them.

Then she lifted them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE ceremonies which had preceded Howard Warrington's incarceration were of the simplest. He was taken before the desk of the police sergeant in the basement of the City Hall, booked as a suspicious character, and, after a superficial search, was placed in a detention cell, one of a dozen or so along a small cement-floored corridor—an interior cell, lighted only indirectly from the windows by the Sergeant's desk outside.

As a place of detention it was admirable; as a sanctuary for rest and thought it was beyond words. There was a constant movement along the cement floor of the corridor outside, and in the cubicle next to him a little Italian, brought in with a demijohn of wine, alternately wailed and chattered to himself.

Police of various ranks came and went, their heavy voices echoing and reëchoing. Men mopped the floor, rattled brass cuspidors and dragged chairs about. Over all was the thick odour of unwashed human bodies, poor sanitary arrangements, carbolic acid, and dead cigar ends.

He sat down on his bench bed and lighted a cigarette, and almost immediately men all about him began to beg for tobacco. He tossed a half-dozen or so across the passage, but one of them fell short, and there ensued a struggle between two Negroes to reach it. There was no humour in their efforts, but grim and desperate resolution; they stretched and panted, grunted and cursed, and on this strange contest a dozen other men gazed, their faces pressed against the bars.

Toward night he began to suffer from claustrophobia; in the dim light the cell seemed to be closing in on him, and the air to be heavy and unbreathable; he was covered with cold sweat. But he knew the claustrophobia was only a reflex of his own mental condition, his inner conviction that he was trapped and done for. Men did not suffer this

ignominy to have it forgotten. They went on through life, marked men, shamed men. Guilt was news; but exoneration was buried in the back pages.

And who was there to exonerate him? Mrs. Bayne. Suppose he broke his promise to Holly and told them that? How could he prove it? And what would Holly do? He knew quite well what she would do. She would simply repeat that she had taken the bond herself and given it to him to sell.

Round and round. Round and round. The Italian wailed and babbled. Drunks came in, were shoved along the corridor and locked away. Then there was a scuffle going on outside, and a voice that seemed to echo out of some troubled dream. He sat up and listened to it. It was truculent, drunken, and familiar.

"You leggo me," it was saying. "I'm all right. Wha' the hell you doin' anyhow? Leggo, I tell you."

It was James Cox. Honest James Cox.

They dragged him past the cell and on to an empty one farther along. Warrington heard the metallic crash as they closed and locked him in, heard James stumble to his bed and drop on it, still thickly muttering, and later on heard his heavy breathing as he slept.

Early in the morning the cells were evacuated, and a shuffling line of men moved out along the corridor, for hearings, sentences, and fines. James Cox was among them, his head bent, his gait unsteady. As he passed, Warrington saw the bewilderment in his face.

At nine o'clock they took Warrington back to the District Attorney's office. He had not shaved for two days, and he felt less a man for the dark stubble on his face. His linen, bad enough the morning before, was in deplorable condition, and opposed to him the District Attorney, newly shaven, rested and carefully dressed, had an advantage he was quick to feel.

"All right, Warrington. Come in." And when he had sat down: "Well, you've had time to think. How about it?"

"I've had time to think, but that's about all."

"We don't claim to run a first-class hotel," said Phelps comfortably. "Still, you must have come to some sort of a conclusion."

"I have, to this extent I've got a right to an attorney, and before I make any statement I want advice."

"That's up to you. If you're innocent you've got every chance, here and now, to come clean on the story. If you're guilty, you'd better get an attorney, because you're going to need one."

"I'll have the attorney," he said doggedly.

The District Attorney sat back in his chair and eyed him keenly.

"Would it make any difference in your attitude," he said, "if I told you Mrs. Bayne died last night?"

Warrington leaped to his feet.

"Dead!" he cried. "Dead! Good God!" He swayed as he held to the back of his chair. "Well, that's that," he said unsteadily.

"So it does make a difference?"

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know. I guess it ends it; that's all."

"Ends what?"

He made no reply. Hope was dead in him; there would be no confession now from Mrs. Bayne, no anything. If he claimed now that it was the dead woman who had given him the bond, they would laugh at him. Even Holly could not swear to that; she had only his word for it.

Holly! He steadied himself.

"I suppose I couldn't go up there?" he asked, after what seemed a long time. "You see, I've been like part of the family, in a way. I wouldn't like her—like them—to think I'm not—interested."

"And incidentally to find out where you are, eh? Maybe to see Cox ____"

"Oh, damn Cox!" he shouted suddenly. "What do I care about Cox? I don't care if I never see him again. I've got a right to go, haven't I? Look at me! I haven't seen a razor for two days. I need linen. I don't suppose you'll lock me up indefinitely without any clothes, will you?"

He looked disreputable, tortured. His absurd anticlimax was an appeal, shouted in furious tones.

"We don't want any more tricks, Warrington."

"You let me go up there. After that you can boil me in oil, if you like."

They let him go. Watching him, Phelps was certain that the death of Mrs. Bayne marked some sort of crisis in the affair, but what that crisis might be,

he had no idea.

“You talk it over with the daughter,” he said. “If she’s ready to swear on her oath that she gave you that bond to sell, and the suitcase later on, she can clear you. If she can’t or won’t do those things——”

“She never saw the bond. I’ve told you that.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

TIMES, like the structure of society, change; and neighbourhoods alter also. Holly could still remember her mother's horror when Simmons's grocery was established at the corner, and also that day, a year ago now, when the McCook family moved in at Ninety, across the street from the Bayne house, and at once advertised for boarders.

Mrs. Bayne from that time on had behaved precisely as though Number Ninety had been eliminated from Kelsey Street. She still recognized Eighty-eight and Ninety-two, but there was, according to her view, no Ninety at all.

But Ninety, after the manner of such affairs, was extremely cognizant of Ninety-one.

"Stuck up things!" said Mrs. McCook. "Believe me, Clara, I'm sorry for them. They're that poor and dirty proud. Putting on all those airs, and like as not nothing to eat in the house."

But although she might pity and scorn them, her interest in them grew rather than abated. Especially was this the case after she had learned their story at the grocery store. The first visit or so of Furness Brooks she observed carefully, and one day she confided to Clara that:

"The girl over at Ninety-one has a fellow. Not much to look at, either."

"He's got a car," said Clara, as though that answered the objection.

At seven-thirty in the morning it was Mrs. McCook's custom to take a broom and, stepping out of her front door, from there to survey her world. Not that it varied from day to day. At such and such a time Mr. Williamson would leave Number Eighty-seven, the morning paper tucked in his overcoat pocket, and start out on his campaign to see that widows and orphans were not left penniless, but were adequately protected by life

insurance. At such and such a time would the Moriarity boy run to Simmons's grocery for the bread his shiftless mother had forgotten the day before. Bright and early, too, her basket on her arm, Mrs. Kahn, at Ninety-five, would start for the Kosher butcher shop in the next block; and the front door of the Bayne house would open, and Holly, looking neither here nor there, would brush off the front steps.

But on one never-to-be-forgotten morning Holly looked across the street and smilingly nodded to her. If a queen in a gilded coach had leaned out and bowed to her, she could not have felt more thrilled. It was only a day or so after that that she heard Mrs. Bayne was ill, and that Holly had telephoned from the grocery for the doctor. That afternoon she baked a cup custard, and putting it on her best plate, carried it across the street.

When Mrs. Bayne herself opened the door, she almost dropped it.

"I heard you were sick," she said. "I just thought—it's custard. It's kind of light and nourishing."

"That was very thoughtful of you. But I'm quite well now," said Mrs. Bayne.

"You might as well take it. *I* haven't got any use for it," said Mrs. McCook, holding out the plate.

And Mrs. Bayne had taken it, very graciously.

"That terrible woman!" she said later to Holly. "She just wouldn't let me refuse it."

"Why on earth should you, Mother? You wouldn't resent a card of sympathy, or flowers."

"But food! I won't have her running in and out."

"I don't think it would ever occur to her," said Holly, with slightly heightened colour, and let it go at that.

On the same night, then, that James Cox had tried to drown his misery in bad bootleg liquor, at about two o'clock, the McCook doorbell rang and Mrs. McCook sat up in bed and prodded her husband.

"There's the telegram, Joe," she said.

Her sister was expecting her first confinement, and Mrs. McCook had been on pins and needles, as she said to Clara, for the last week.

But Joe was heavily asleep, and at last she herself got out of bed and in her nightgown went down the stairs. At first when she opened the door she saw nobody; then, looking down, she discovered a figure crouching on the doorstep.

"For mercy's sake!" she said, peering down, "Who is it?"

The figure stirred and rose.

"It's Holly Bayne," it said in a lifeless voice. "Have you a telephone? The grocery's closed."

"What's the matter? Who's sick?"

"It's my mother. I think—I think she's dead."

"Most likely she's just fainted," said Mrs. McCook reassuringly. "You wait a minute, and I'll come right over."

She did not go back upstairs. She picked up an overcoat from the hall and threw it over her nightdress, and thrust her bare feet into a pair of overshoes.

"Nobody'll see me," she said. "And a bad faint ain't to be fooled with. Did you lay her flat?"

"She was flat," said Holly in her strange crushed voice.

"Believe me or not," Mrs. McCook told Clara the next morning. "I knew the minute I went in that door, that it wasn't a faint. I'm queer that way. I could *smell* death."

And death it was.

Mrs. Bayne lay in the attic almost as she had fallen; the candle had burned low, and in its small and dying blaze her figure looked larger, more majestic than in life. It seemed to fill the attic room.

She lay almost as she had fallen, but not quite. Holly had turned her over —so that now her quiet face was toward the light—and had thrown a blanket over her. And she had replaced the boards! Mrs. McCook, kneeling beside the body, was directly over them.

Mrs. McCook touched the forehead; then she got up.

"You'd better come downstairs, honey," Mrs. McCook said gently. "I'll get Joe over, and you leave the rest to me."

"Is she——"

"I'm afraid so, honey."

Holly sat once more in the chair by the dying fire. It did not matter to her that heavy footsteps passed the door, that in that hour strangers were moving about the house and she herself was alone. Nothing mattered but the incredible fact that her mother was dead, and that she herself had killed her.

It was the shock that had done it—the discovery that the suitcase was gone. A little care, and she need never have had that shock. Some other way, any other way than the one she had taken, and she might have saved her.

The heavy footsteps were coming down the attic stairs again. They stopped on the third floor, and she knew they were laying her in Margaret's room. After a time the door opened and Mrs. McCook came in. She turned on the lights and mended the fire, and then smoothed back the bed.

"You better come and crawl right in here, honey," she said. "Joe's attending to things. We're not going home."

"Not *there*," said Holly, and shuddered. "I'll get dressed."

Later on she insisted on going upstairs. The lights were on full in Margaret's room, and her mother lay on the bed. Holly had hardly ever seen her in Margaret's room before. It was as though she did not belong there. She made it look shabby.

"She looks nice and peaceful," said Mrs. McCook.

Holly went quietly out again and stood, with Mrs. McCook at her elbow, outside of Howard Warrington's room, gazing in. A faint odour of tobacco still hung in the air. But she did not go in. He had left her, abandoned her. She was all alone.

In the early morning somebody got word to Margaret, and she came. She showed very little grief, very little anything. She kissed Holly, and then stood erect and took off her hat.

"I guess I'm back to stay," she said. "James has left me."

After that, time had gone on. There was stealthy movement in the house; someone—Clara, perhaps—came in and drew down the window shades to give the house the proper air of decorous mourning. Margaret, red-eyed and speechless, brought in a tape measure and said something about a black dress. Holly stood up to be measured obediently, and even remote Margaret had been somehow touched.

"I wouldn't grieve so," she told her. "She didn't suffer."

Holly let it go at that. How could she say it was remorse and not grief?

Some time that morning the door opened and Mrs. McCook slipped in.

"Your young man's outside," she told her, with the air of one bringing glad tidings; and a moment later Furness was inside the door looking at her.

"I've just heard," he said. "Can I do anything, Holly?"

"I think everything's being done."

He was still wary and a little afraid of her. He came over to the hearth and stood looking down at her.

"I'm sorry. You know that, don't you?"

She nodded.

"Would you like me to stay with you?"

"I think I'm better alone," she said, "if you don't mind, Furness. I just can't talk."

"You'd rather I'd go, then?"

She nodded once more.

But he did not go at once. He took a turn or two around the room in growing irritation.

"I'm damned if I understand you," he said. "I don't want to make a fuss, just now, anyhow. But if the moment you get into trouble you want to get rid of me, what on earth are you going to do when you're married to me?"

The unconscious humour of that escaped them both.

"What?"

"I don't think," she said painfully, "that I'm going to marry you, Furness."

"What?"

"I don't think I can. I've tried. I can't go through with it."

"Look here," he said. "You're hysterical. You don't know what you're saying. Let's wait for a day or two, until all this is over."

"I know perfectly well what I'm saying. I hate it, but I must."

"But—the thing's announced! It's—it's as good as done."

“Oh, no, it isn’t. I don’t like to do it, Furness. *She* wanted it, and—I would like to do it for her. But there’s somebody else.”

He was stupefied, hit in his weakest part—his vanity.

“Somebody else! That’s not true, and you know it. Why, you don’t *know* anybody else.”

But her eyes met his honestly and fearlessly. “I’ve told you,” she said. “There is somebody else.”

He went closer to her and looked down at her, with hostile eyes that showed a sudden comprehension.

“It’s not that fellow upstairs!” he said. “The roomer, or whatever he is?”

She nodded, and suddenly he threw back his head and laughed. The sound echoed through the room and out into the quiet house.

“The roomer!” he said. “Oh, my God!” And flung out of the room and out of the house.

She would have felt sorry had she been capable of feeling anything. As it was, his going left her with nothing but a sense of relief. After a long time she saw his ring still on her finger, and she got up and laid it on her mother’s bureau; the sight of the small familiar objects, the toilet waters, the old ivory brushes, the smelling salts, brought the first tears she had shed.

Margaret found her weeping and coaxed her into her own blue-and-white bedroom and into bed. She fell asleep there finally, and Margaret drew the shades and closed the door.

She was asleep when Warrington and the detective arrived.

CHAPTER THIRTY

IT was a portion of the decorum of death, to Mrs. McCook, like drawn windows and a closed piano, that doorbells must not be rung. Attired in her best black, therefore, she lurked in the lower hall, and any arrivals found the door mysteriously and slowly opening before them, while she herself remained behind it out of sight.

In this manner she admitted Warrington and the detective; but once inside, she recognized the former and condescended to mournful speech.

"Terrible, isn't it?" she said. "I guess Miss Bayne will be glad to see you. It's a pity you weren't here last night."

"Was she alone?"

"Yes. The mother had been sick all day, and about two in the morning, while the poor girl was asleep, she took a notion to go up to the attic. Of all places! And Miss Bayne found her there, dead."

"In the attic!" Warrington repeated after her. He was hardly conscious that he had spoken; his mind was busy with the picture the words conjured up. She had gone to the attic and found the suitcase gone, and so she had died. It was horrible.

He glanced at the detective, but that gentleman had apparently not been listening. He had moved to the drawing-room door and was surveying it, noiselessly whistling between his teeth.

"Who is with Miss Bayne?"

"Mrs. Cox is up there somewhere. I'll get her if you like."

"Never mind; I'll go up," he said.

The officer made no objection. He moved to the foot of the staircase and watched him out of sight, and after that he went back, rather to Mrs. McCook's astonishment, and examined the rear of the house. He located the servants' staircase, and leaving a door open, took up a position which commanded it. Only then, did he speak.

"So she was found in the attic?" he said. "What do you suppose took her up there at that hour of the night?"

Margaret was sewing in the front room, with the door open. She had the black material for Holly's frock in her lap, and the face she raised as Warrington stopped in the doorway was colourless and set. Involuntarily she dropped her work and clenched her left hand.

"Don't make a noise," she said. "Holly's asleep."

"Asleep!" he said blankly. "But I came to see her. I only have a little time."

"I'm not going to waken her. She's had more than any human being ought to bear."

"Yes," he agreed; "yes, I suppose so. I had hoped—how is she?"

"As well as could be expected," said Margaret briefly, and picked up her work again. He stood inside the door, saying nothing, merely facing this new disappointment. "If she wakens before I go, will you tell her I'm here?" he said.

"Oh! So you're going again!" said Margaret bitterly. "Well, maybe it's better. I must say you haven't brought us any luck. Any of us. If you'd used some common sense——"

Her resentment against him rose. She put down her work and got up, two bright spots of colour in her sallow cheeks.

"I've lost my husband," she told him, "and he's lost the thing he cared for most in the world. More than he cared for me. His good name. I suppose you didn't mean any harm, but God protect us from the blundering fools who wreck us and didn't mean to."

She went out of the room, leaving him there, and he heard her go along the back passage. There followed the opening and closing of the door, and he knew that she had locked herself away from him.

He squared his shoulders and went out into the hall. The detective was at the foot of the stairs, and with a gesture Warrington signalled that he was

going on up. As he climbed, he heard the officer's heavy deliberate tread behind him. It irritated nerves already strained to the utmost, and the search he made of Warrington's room for a possible concealed weapon drove him almost to frenzy.

"Oh, get the hell out of here and let me clean up!" he said. "I don't own a gun, and I'm not going to jump out of a window."

Nevertheless, the detective stood by until he had seen him go into the bathroom and turn on the shower. Then he very deliberately locked him in, put the key in his pocket and started on certain investigations.

He found the attic staircase without difficulty and climbed it with a certain caution; and once up, he stood in the semi-obscurity of the garret room and gave it a general survey. At first, however, it told him nothing. A blanket, lying carelessly on the floor, spoke of the last night's tragedy, and a candlestick on a cedar chest, the candle burned to the socket. But there was nothing else.

The detective resumed his noiseless whistling through his teeth. The usual litter of such places surrounded him, a broken chair or two, boxes and trunks. Nothing, apparently, to bring Mrs. Bayne up here at two in the morning from a sick-bed.

Yet she had come. She had come up with a candle and set the candle on the chest there. Had she brought up the blanket also, or had they thrown it over her later? The place was cold. Damned cold.

He picked up the blanket, and a small shining object fell to the floor and lay there in the dust. It was a silver nail file. He picked it up, and stood speculatively surveying it. So she'd brought up a nail file, too. That was queer. A nail file, at two in the morning!

So far, from the time the stolen bond had made its appearance, the attention of the police had been directed solely toward locating the securities, and later on to locating Warrington. Holly's story to the District Attorney had been strictly between the two of them. But naturally there had been considerable discussion as to where the securities had been hidden for the last ten years, to leap from obscurity into such glittering prominence.

In the Kelsey Street house, undoubtedly, but where in the house?

So now, with the file in his hand, his keen eyes began to search the room. Near the candle, probably. Something that had to be opened near the candle. There was a trunk there, but it was unlocked. He threw the lid back,

and saw folded away in it old silk and satin gowns, and a bit of brocade. A heavy odour of camphor rose from it, and he closed the lid.

"Wrong!" he said out loud. No nail file was needed to open that.

He moved on, and a board slipped under his foot. Like a cat he was down on his knees, lighting a match. This was more like it. A file, of course, to lift the end of a board! And now again, a file to lift the end of a board. It came up in his hand. He lighted another match and, leaning over, proceeded carefully to examine the cavity beneath.

He was still noiselessly whistling. . . .

Later on, he took his prisoner down the stairs again. The house was very quiet. Holly still slept the sleep of exhaustion in her blue-and-white room, and Margaret was not visible.

Warrington stopped on the second-floor landing, with a queer look on his face; then he drew himself up and went on down. In the lower hall the dog knew him and leaped at him joyfully. It was at once his hail and farewell.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

JAMES COX sat in the District Attorney's outer office. He had sat there, more or less, all day. Every now and then he paid a visit to the ice-water cooler in the hall, but he did not go out for food. He could not remember when he had eaten, and he did not care.

The ignominy of his arrest for drunkenness and his reprimand that morning before a magistrate had hardly affected him. He had brushed it aside, already forgotten it. Since the morning of his arrest in the store, his single-tracked mind had been concentrated on one problem; the world that moved about him was one of shadowy figures, which went about on trivial matters, ate, drank, walked, ran, loved and perhaps grieved, but unimportantly.

Thus it happened that he had brushed aside the minor incident of the night before. An event which would normally have stupefied him hardly entered the realm of his consciousness. He remembered, indeed, only vaguely any of the incidents leading up to it. He knew he must have walked most of the day, for his feet felt blistered; and he had a fairly clear recollection of making a decision to go back to Margaret, to seek comfort with her, even if she had lied to him.

But when he had gone back, at six o'clock, the apartment was dark. There was no Margaret, no table laid with good honest linen, no odour of broiling chops and coffee, no anything.

He had not even switched on the lights. He had simply turned and gone on out again.

Sometime later—he had lost all count of time—he had been standing on one of the bridges. He didn't remember which bridge. He was standing there thinking and looking over, and a policeman, after watching him awhile, told

him to move on. Yes, he remembered that, for it must have been then that that fellow from the china department came along and took him by the arm.

"You come with me, Cox," he said. "You're too much a man for that sort of thing. Come on, and we'll have a drink."

They had gone somewhere. It was bright and warm, and he hadn't eaten anything for a long time. He guessed he'd taken a lot of whisky, but he felt all right when he left. It hadn't really hit him hard until he was almost home. Then it had got him in the legs.

Well, maybe that could happen to anybody; he didn't know, and he didn't much care. He was going to see the District Attorney if he had to sit in that chair for a month.

At four o'clock he was admitted to the inner office. Phelps had spent most of the day in court, and now he too was tired. He wanted to go home, and bathe and shave, and maybe after dinner listen to the radio and doze in his chair. His tone was impatient when he looked up and saw James.

"All right, Cox," he said. "Get to it quickly. I've had a hard day."

James remained standing. Now that his moment had come, he found difficulty in rising to it.

"I'm a salaried man, Mr. District Attorney," he said, thinking out his words. "Or I was. I suppose if I were what you'd call a gentleman, maybe I wouldn't be doing what I am about to do, sir. It goes against the grain even with me."

The District Attorney smiled.

"I'm a salaried man myself," he said. "Let's let that go just now. What is it you are about to do?"

"I'm about to accuse a woman," said James. "That's a thing I've never done before in my life, and I hope to God I'll never have to again. I accuse my wife's sister, Tom Bayne's wife, of knowing about that stuff in the house, and of taking a bond from it and selling it."

"And you also know she is dead and can't defend herself," said Phelps, with sudden sharpness. "Come, Cox! That won't do unless you have proof."

But James was staring at him with shocked, incredulous eyes.

"*Dead!*" he said thickly. "Since when?"

"Since last night."

James slowly lowered himself into a chair, and Phelps watched him.

"See here," he asked him, "haven't you been home? Didn't you know this?"

"I haven't been home," said James with difficulty. "I walked the streets all yesterday, and last night I drank too much whisky and the police picked me up. And I came here from the hearing this morning. I've been here all day."

He got up and picked up his hat, now dirty and battered.

"Well," he said, "I guess I've gone the limit. I can't accuse a dead woman. I didn't like her, but she can rest in peace for all of me."

"I have an idea what you've come to say won't disturb her," said Phelps dryly. "You've made a statement. How do you propose to support it?"

"I'm telling you. She took it. I knew it all along. My wife lied to me when she said it was the girl."

"How do you know that?"

"How does any man know when his wife is lying to him? They thought I didn't notice it, but I did. It was night before last, when the fellow who rooms there came in to see what all the trouble was about. My wife told me it was the girl who had found the suitcase and sold the bond, and he didn't like that. He knew better. I saw him look at her."

"Why did your wife tell you that?"

"I figure she knew, if it was the mother, I'd use that information."

"So you claim they were all protecting Mrs. Bayne?"

"That's about the size of it."

"But why has Warrington kept his mouth shut, if that's the case?"

James looked up, candidly.

"I suppose because he's a gentleman. That's what I meant before."

"Where do you get that idea?" Phelps asked shrewdly. "From your wife?" And when James made no reply: "How long have you known this Warrington?"

"Never saw him but once before. He brought me a message from my wife. She wasn't my wife then."

"Do you remember that date?"

"I do," said James sturdily. "If I'm wrong, you'll find it on record at the station house in Number Three precinct. I hit a policeman that night."

The District Attorney sat at his desk for some time after James had gone out. Then he got his hat and coat, and on his way out he stopped in to see the chief of detectives.

"I've got something I'd like done to-night, if possible," he told him. "Tom Bayne is dying, and I'd like somebody to go to the pen and get a deposition from him. I want to know when his wife visited him last, and if he told her about the suitcase."

The chief smiled.

"Sure," he said. "I'll send Lyell. But he told her, all right; I can tell you that now."

He opened the desk drawer and carefully brought out two small objects which he laid on the blotter.

"Exhibits A and B," he said genially. "Lyell took Warrington up this morning and learned Mrs. Bayne died in the attic. So he locked the fellow off somewhere and took a look around. He found the nail file on the floor; she'd lifted the boards with it. And under the boards, where she'd dropped it, the handkerchief."

"That doesn't prove she'd used them, of course. Anybody else——"

"Who? The girl? There was no one else in the house last night. And the girl hadn't been up there for anything; she knew the suitcase was gone. She'd sent it out of the house. Everybody concerned knew that suitcase wasn't there except this woman. And why did she go? She went because she needed more money. She'd lost a pocketbook yesterday with several hundred dollars in it, and she was up against it. And if you ask me where she got several hundred dollars to lose, I'll tell you. She got it from Warrington when he sold that bond for her."

On his way out home in his car, the District Attorney thought it over. He was fairly sure now that he had been off on the wrong foot, and it annoyed him. But after a time, like poor Annie Bayne in her taxicab, he fell asleep. He had had a hard day.

That evening, while he was sitting comfortably by the radio, not so much listening to it as using it as a musical accompaniment to a book he was reading, the telephone rang, and he yawned and answered it. It was Lyell on

long distance. Tom Bayne was dead. He had passed away comfortably an hour or so ago, but before he had done so, he had made his statement.

"Looks like we've been barking up the wrong tree," was Lyell's comment.

"Yeah," said Mr. Phelps, yawning, and hung up the receiver.

He went back to his book and the radio, which was now singing, "Oh, Promise Me" in a throaty soprano. But before he settled down, he took an old envelope out of his pocket and wrote two words on it as a reminder for the next day.

"*Cox—Warrington*."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

HOWARD WARRINGTON was released the next day. There were neither apologies nor explanations. Simply the closed hand of the law opened and released him. He was free.

For all the change that the last forty-eight hours had made on the surface, they might never have been. The office greeted him with grins and cheerful badinage. Outside of that, so little had he counted there, his absence had been scarcely noted.

"I'm just reporting," he told Miss Sharp. "I can't stay. There's been a death in the family where I live."

"I thought you looked kinda shot," said that young woman. "You just go along. I'll fix it."

But as he started out she called him back. "Say, Mr. Baylie's got that suit of yours. Do you want to take it along?"

"I'll get it to-morrow," he told her, and made his escape. . . .

So it happened that Warrington and James Cox, who had suffered most through her, helped to carry Annie Bayne to her quiet grave. And later they went back together to Kelsey Street, where the heavy odour of flowers still filled the air, and the rooms had been only hastily restored to their usual order.

"I hope you'll not hold against me what I said the other night," said James.

"You weren't half as violent as I would have been under the circumstances," Warrington assured him. And that was all.

There was a family conference in the dining room that night, but Warrington was not a party to it. Only Holly could have brought him into it,

and Holly was still dazed. He was not hurt; after all, what was he to them? For a little time he had been one of them, had lived and suffered with them; but now that was all over.

By that small unconscious omission they put him where he knew he belonged, in his third-floor room again, in the household but not of it. And as time went on, and James made his genial efforts to draw him into the family circle, it was he who held off. If there was some pride in it at first, it became sheer self-defense later on.

He could not see Holly in her black frocks, looking thin and white, without wanting to take her in his arms. And he would not do that; he would not drag her once more into poverty. She had had enough of that, and of the things it sometimes led to. She was comfortable now. Let her alone.

Certainly she was comfortable. With the coming of James and Margaret to live in the old house, it began to take on a new if slightly vulgar vitality. The furnace roared under James's mighty wielding of the shovel; lights blazed; and Warrington, putting his key into the lock, would be met sometimes by the smell of frying onions, and on passing the drawing-room door would find James there, in Mrs. Bayne's old chair, his feet on what had been the tea table, and a cigar in his mouth.

"Come in, Howard!" he would call genially. "Come in and make yourself at home. Shove that dog off, there. He's too fat and lazy to move."

James secretly adored the dog.

Warrington went in sometimes. If Holly was not there, he would even stay a little, listening to James talk and even putting in a word now and then himself. But occasionally Holly would be there, very quiet and very conscious of him, and then he would take himself in hand and resolutely go upstairs. If James ever noticed this, he made no comment.

James was very happy. He was enormously proud, of his wife, of Holly, and especially of the house. He would take the dog out for walks, and using that as an excuse, stand on the pavement and survey the building complacently, feet apart and head held high.

Once Mrs. McCook found him on her side of the street, looking across.

"Guess I'll have to paint those shutters this spring," he said. "Too good a house to let go."

"It's a very handsome house," said Mrs. McCook—and won him completely.

He was constantly picking up bargains at the store and sending them home. And at last there came a truly great day, when he sent up a player-piano—twenty-five dollars a month on the installment plan. It came on Margaret's birthday, and he kept her downtown that afternoon. When she came in, she went directly upstairs, and the first she knew of it was when the strains of some popular air arose to her overhead.

"Mercy!" she said to Holly. "Who on earth ever let that hurdygurdy into the house?"

After that, James spent a great deal of his leisure time at the piano, with a cigar in his mouth and his eyes peering at the punctured roll which was unwinding before him. He pumped vigorously with his feet, and the faster the time, the better he was pleased.

"That's got some *go* to it," he would say.

But one evening when he was playing some sentimental thing or other, and had a sore foot so that he had to play it softly, he looked up to hear Warrington closing the front door and to see tears in Holly's eyes. That set him to thinking, and that night, while Margaret was brushing her hair, he spoke to her peevishly.

"What's the matter between Howard and Holly?" he demanded. "They're like a pair of shuttlecocks! When one's in, the other's out! It isn't natural. Have they quarreled about something?"

"I don't think so. Why?"

"Well, I can't make them out. If Holly isn't crazy about him, after all he did for her! And as for him, where are his eyes, anyhow? I've a good notion to up and tell him."

"You let them alone," said Margaret. "They'll work it out some way."

And for a considerable time James did let them alone. When he could stand it no longer, he devised small, innocently obvious schemes to throw them together, but without much result. For instance, he would stand down in the lower hall and bellow up to the third floor.

"Hi!—Warrington!" he would yell. "Put down that book and come on to the movies. Hurry up!"

And sometimes Warrington went. The desire to sit next to Holly in the warm darkness was too much for him. They would sit side by side, saying little or nothing, and sometimes one or the other would lean a bit to one side,

and there would be for an instant a sense of contact that warmed and thrilled them both.

And then James, sturdily holding Margaret's hand, would shift his position and glance over at them, and they would straighten self-consciously and miserably.

Once James caught Holly in the hall looking up, after Howard had disappeared above, and he put a hand on her shoulder.

"See here, sister," he said. "If you like him, why don't you let him see it? I think he's darned unhappy myself."

And she had looked at him with her direct and honest eyes.

"Why should he care for me?" she asked him. "I used him; we all used him. I don't see how he can bear to look at me."

"Well, I do," said James stoutly. "And as for the other matter, that's all water over the dam now. He's none the worse for it, is he?"

There came, however, a terrible day, when James came home to find a car in front of the house, and in the drawing room a tall young man with prominent eyes and a rather pasty skin. The door was open, and James stopped there and gave the visitor a long hard look. Then he stamped back to Margaret in the pantry.

"Who's that in the parlour with Holly?" he demanded.

Margaret was looking worried.

"It's Furness Brooks again," she said. "Really, I don't know why he came. I thought that—— Where are you going, James?"

"Don't worry about me, my girl," he said loftily. And he went up the stairs. He walked into Warrington's room without the ceremony of knocking, passed that morose and brooding young gentleman without a word, and stalked across to a window.

"Come here," he said. "Look down there. Do you know whose car that is?"

"I know it. What about it?"

"Well!" said James. "What are you going to do? Sit here belly-aching, or go down and throw him out?"

"What's the good of either, if she wants him?"

“She doesn’t want him!” James roared. “Not any more than she wants the smallpox. She’s thrown him over once. But if he hasn’t the guts to stay away, and you haven’t the guts to keep him away, I’m through.”

“I’m not asking any woman to share poverty with me.”

“Oh, you’re not, eh?” said James. “Too proud, aren’t you? Well, by and large, there’s been too much pride in this house already, and I’m about sick of it!” And he stamped out again.

It was about two days later that James imparted to Margaret an astonishing bit of news.

“I’ve asked Mr. Steinfeldt up to dinner to-morrow night,” he said.

“Mr. Steinfeldt!” said Margaret weakly, and sat down. “Why on earth, James?”

“Why shouldn’t I?” he said. “He did me a favour when I’ll tell the world I needed it. And I had a talk with him to-day. We’ll have Warrington, too.”

“You’ve got something in your mind. What is it?”

“You leave that to me, my girl,” he told her.

“He’ll never go into the store.”

“Who said he was going into the store?” James demanded. “You get out that clover-leaf design I sent up the other day and attend to your job. I’ll attend to mine.”

Mr. Steinfeldt came. He drank the cocktail James shook up for him, praised the dinner, and even noticed the tablecloth.

“One of our patterns, isn’t it?” he asked. And James glowed.

“It is,” he said. “You can’t beat us for linens, Mr. Steinfeldt. Quality *and* looks.”

Mr. Steinfeldt sat back at last, and lighting a cigar, gazed with approval at Holly.

“Well, young lady!” he said. “And the last time I saw you, you were trying to make out you wanted to go to jail! And I didn’t believe you, did I? We put in that nice young man beside you, instead!” He eyed her shrewdly. “And because he was a gentleman, he said nothing and went, eh? It was a very fine thing to do.”

“A very fine thing,” said Holly unsteadily.

“And now,” said Mr. Steinfeldt, leaning back comfortably, “if I was a young lady, and a young gentleman did a thing like that for me, a nice personable young man too, I would think: ‘I better make up to him, somehow.’ What do you think?”

“Maybe he doesn’t want me to,” said Holly, her face scarlet.

Suddenly Margaret got up. “I think,” she said, “if you are ready for your coffee——”

But nobody else moved. James sat complacently back in his chair, and Warrington faced Mr. Steinfeldt, his hand closing over Holly’s as he spoke.

“That’s not the question, Holly,” he said steadily. “If it’s a question of wanting——” He released her hand again and addressed Mr. Steinfeldt. “I hadn’t expected the thing to be brought up like this,” he said, “but since it has——”

Mr. Steinfeldt beamed.

“Since it has, we might as well go through with it. Holly here knows I—care for her. I always have, since I’ve known her. I always will. There can never be anybody else. But I’m not in a position to marry, and I don’t know when I will be. She can do better, and I think she should.”

Mr. Steinfeldt looked at Margaret, standing outraged and disapproving at the end of the table.

“Sit down, Mrs. Cox,” he said. “Why hurry and spoil a good meal? I might get indigestion and forget what I came to say.”

But he did not forget what he had come to say. Leaning over the table now, his keen face alert, ashes over the front of his coat, he put his proposition. He didn’t think much of the bond business, either way; nothing in it for the salesman, and too little for the investor. Give him good common stock, every day in the week. But he knew a good house which needed a manager for the bond department, and he could land that job for Warrington, and would, on one condition.

“And that condition?” Warrington asked, none too steadily.

“They’d kinda like a married man,” said Mr. Steinfeldt, and, leaning back again, bit off the end of a fresh cigar.

There was silence in the room. James still sat back, faintly smiling. Honest James—wily James, crafty James. Margaret’s eyes being off him, he

furtively took a bit of cake and gave it to the dog, underneath the tablecloth.

"Sounds like a nice easy condition to me," he observed.

Warrington sat very still. Then he reached over and gently took Holly's hand once more.

"I'll take your position, Mr. Steinfeldt," he said huskily, "if the young lady here will take your advice."

And then Mr. Steinfeldt proved himself to be truly a diplomat. He removed his napkin, quality *and* looks, from its anchorage in a buttonhole of his waistcoat, pushed back his chair and rose.

"It's a fine house you've got here, Cox," he said. "Maybe Mrs. Cox and you would show me around a bit. After you, Mrs. Cox."

They went out, and the door closed. Warrington watched them go, and then turned and took Holly in his arms.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Two Flights Up* by Mary Roberts Rinehart]