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THE GRAFTERS

FRANCIS LYNDE

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"DO YOU BEGIN TO SUSPECT THINGS?" SHE ASKED

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THE GRAFTERS

BY

FRANCIS LYNDE

Author of The Master of Appleby, Etc.

Illustrated by

ARTHUR I. KELLER

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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APRIL

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TO MY GOOD FRIEND

MR. EDWARD YOUNG CHAPIN

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THE GRAFTERS

I

ASHES OF EMPIRE

In point of age, Gaston the strenuous was still no more than a lusty infant among the cities of the brown plain when the boom broke and the junto was born, though its beginnings as a halt camp ran back to the days of the later Mormon migrations across the thirsty plain; to that day when the advanced guard of Zophar Smith's ox-train dug wells in the damp sands of Dry Creek and called them the Waters of Merom.

Later, one Jethro Simsby, a Mormon deserter, set up his rod and staff on the banks of the creek, homesteaded a quarter-section of the sage-brush plain, and in due time came to be known as the Dry Creek cattle king. And the cow-camp was still Simsby's when the locating engineers of the Western Pacific, searching for tank stations in a land where water was scarce and hard to

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come by, drove their stakes along the north line of the quarter-section; and having named their last station Alphonse, christened this one Gaston.

From the stake-driving of the engineers to the spike-driving of the track-layers was a full decade. For hard times overtook the Western Pacific at Midland City, eighty miles to the eastward; while the State capital, two days' bronco-jolting west of Dry Creek, had railroad outlets in plenty and no inducements to offer a new-comer.

But, with the breaking of the cloud of financial depression, the Western Pacific succeeded in placing its extension bonds, and a little later the earth began to fly on the grade of the new line to the west. Within a Sundayless month the electric lights of the night shift could be seen, and, when the wind was right, the shriek of the locomotive whistle could be heard at Dry Creek; and in this interval between dawn and daylight Jethro Simsby sold his quarter-section for the nominal sum of two thousand dollars, spot cash, to two men who buck-boarded in ahead of the track-layers.

This purchase of the "J-lazy-S" ranch by Hawk and Guilford marked the modest beginning of Gaston the marvelous. By the time the temporary sidings were down and the tank well was dug in the damp sands, it was heralded far and wide that the Western Pacific would make the city on the banks of Dry Creek—a city

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consisting as yet only of the Simsby ranch shacks—its western terminus. Thereupon followed one of the senseless rushes that populate the waste places of the earth and give the professional city-builder his reason for being. In a fortnight after the driving of the silver spike the dusty plain was dotted with the black-roofed shelters of the Argonauts; and by the following spring the plow was furrowing the cattle ranges in ever-widening circles, and Gaston had voted a bond loan of three hundred thousand dollars to pave its streets.

Then under the forced draft of skilful exploitation, three years of high pressure passed quickly; years named by the promoters the period of development. In the Year One the very heavens smiled and the rainfall broke the record of the oldest inhabitant. Thus the region round about lost the word "arid" as a qualifying adjective, and the picturesque fictions of the prospectus makers were miraculously justified. In Year Two there was less rain, but still an abundant crop; and Jethro Simsby, drifting in from some unnamed frontier of a newer cow-country, saw what he had missed, took to drink, and shot himself in the lobby of the Mid-Continent Hotel, an ornate, five-storied, brick-and-terra-cotta structure standing precisely upon the site of the "J-lazy-S" branding corral.

It was in this same Year Two, the fame of the latest of western Meccas for young men having pene-

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trated to the provincial backgrounds of New Hampshire, that David Kent came.

By virtue of his diploma, and three years of country practice in the New Hampshire county town where his father before him had read Blackstone and Chitty, he had his window on the fourth floor of the Farquhar Building lettered "Attorney and Counselor at Law"; but up to the day in the latter part of the fateful Year Three, when the overdue crash came, he was best known as a reckless plunger in real estate—this, mind you, at a moment when every third man counted his gains in "front feet", and was shouting himself hoarse at the daily brass-band lot sales.

When the bottom fell out in the autumn of Year Three, Kent fell with it, though not altogether as far or as hard as many another. One of his professional hold-fasts—it was the one that afterward became the bread-tackle in the famine time—was his position as local attorney for the railway company. By reason of this he was among the first to have a hint of the impending cataclysm. The Western Pacific, after so long a pause on the banks of Dry Creek, had floated its second mortgage bonds and would presently build on to the capital, leaving Gaston to way-station quietude. Therefore and wherefore—

Kent was not lacking in native shrewdness or energy. He foresaw, not the pitiable bubble-burst which en-

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sued, indeed, but the certain and inevitable end of the speculative era. Like every one else, he had bought chiefly with promises to pay, and his paper in the three banks aggregated a sum equal to a frugal New Hampshire competence.

"How long have I got?" was the laconic wire which he sent to Loring, the secretary of the Western Pacific Advisory Board in Boston, from whom his hint had come. And when Loring replied that the grading and track-laying contracts were already awarded, there was at least one "long" on the Gaston real estate exchange who wrought desperately night and day to "unload".

As it turned out, the race against time was both a victory and a defeat. On the morning when the *Daily Clarion* sounded the first note of public alarm, David Kent took up the last of his bank promises-to-pay, and transferred his final mortgaged holding in Gaston realty. When it was done he locked himself in his office in the Farquhar Building and balanced the account. On leaving the New Hampshire country town to try the new cast for fortune in the golden West, he had turned his small patrimony into cash—some ten thousand dollars of it. To set over against the bill of exchange for this amount, which he had brought to Gaston a year earlier, there were a clean name, a few hundred dollars in bank, six lots, bought and paid for, in one of the Gaston suburbs, and a vast deal of experience.

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Kent ran his hands through his hair, opened the check-book and hastily filled out a check payable to himself for the remaining few hundreds. When he reached the Apache National on the corner of Colorado and Texas Streets, he was the one hundred and twenty-seventh man in the queue, which extended around the corner and doubled back and forth in the cross-street to the stoppage of all traffic. The announcement in the *Clarion* had done its work, and the baleful flower of panic, which is a juggler's rose for quick-growing possibilities, was filling the very air of the street with its acrid perfume—the scent of all others that soonest drives men mad.

Major James Guilford, the president of the Apache National, was in the cage with the sweating paying tellers, and it was to him that Kent presented his check when his turn came.

"What! You, too, Kent?" said the president, reproachfully. "I thought you had more backbone."

Kent shook his head.

"Gaston has absorbed nine-tenths of the money I brought here; I'll absorb the remaining tenth myself, if it's just the same to you, Major. Thank you." And the hundred and twenty-seventh man pocketed his salvage from the wreck and fought his way out through the jam at the doors. Two hours farther along in the

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forenoon the Apache National suspended payment, and the bank examiner was wired for.

For suddenness and thoroughgoing completeness the Gaston bubble-bursting was a record-breaker. For a week and a day there was a frantic struggle for enlargement, and by the expiration of a fortnight the life was pretty well trampled out of the civic corpse and the stench began to arise.

Flight upon any terms then became the order of the day, and if the place had been suddenly plague-smitten the panicky exodus could scarcely have been more headlong. None the less, in any such disorderly up-anchoring there are stragglers perforce: some left like stranded hulks by the ebbing tide; others riding by mooring chains which may be neither slipped nor capstaned. When all was over there were deserted streets and empty suburbs in ruthless profusion; but there was also a hungry minority of the crews of the stranded and anchored hulks left behind to live or die as they might, and presently to fall into cannibalism, preying one upon another between whiles, or waiting like their prototypes of the Spanish Main for the stray spoils of any luckless argosy that might drift within grappling distance.

Kent stayed partly because a local attorney for the railroad was as necessary in Gaston the bereaved as in Gaston the strenuous; partly, also, because he was a

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student of his kind, and the broken city gave him laboratory opportunities for the study of human nature at its worst.

He marked the raising of the black flag as the Gaston castaways, getting sorrily afloat one by one, cleared their decks for action. Some Bluebeard admiral there will always be for such stressful occasions, and David Kent, standing aside and growing cynical day by day, laid even chances on Hawk, the ex-district attorney, on Major Guilford, and on one Jasper G. Bucks, sometime mayor of Gaston the iridescent.

Afterward he was to learn that he had underrated the gifts of the former mayor. For when the famine time was fully come, and there were no more argosies drifting Gastonward for the bucaneers to sack and scuttle, it was Jasper G. Bucks who called a conference of his fellow werwolves, set forth his new cast for fortune, and brought the junto, the child of sheer desperation fiercely at bay, into being.

It was in the autumn of that first cataclysmic year that Secretary Loring, traveling from Boston to the State capital on a mission for the Western Pacific, stopped over a train with Kent. After a rather dispiriting dinner in the deserted Mid-Continent café, and some plowing of the field of recollection in Kent's rooms in the Farquhar Building, they took the deserted

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street in the golden twilight to walk to the railway station.

"It was a decent thing for you to do—stopping over a train with me, Grantham," said the host, when the five squares intervening had been half measured. "I have had all kinds of a time out here in this God-forsaken desert, but never until to-day anything approaching a chummy hour with a man I know and care for."

Kent had not spoken since they had felt their way out of the dark lower hall of the Farquhar Building. Up to this point the talk had been pointedly reminiscent; of the men of their university year, of mutual friends in the far-away "God's country" to the eastward, of the Gastonian epic, of all things save only two—the exile's cast for fortune in the untamed West, and one other.

"That brings us a little nearer to the things that be—and to your prospects, David," said the guest. "How are you fixed here?"

Kent shrugged.

"Gaston is dead, as you see; too dead to bury."

"Why don't you get out of it, then?"

"I shall some day, perhaps. Up to date there has been no place to go to, and no good way to arrive. Like some thousands of others, I've made an ass of myself here, Loring."

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"By coming, you mean? Oh, I don't know about that. You have had some hard knocks, I take it, but if you are the same David Kent I used to know, they have made a bigger man of you."

"Think so?"

"I'd bet on it. We have had the Gaston epic done out for us in the newspapers. No man could live through such an experience as you must have had without growing a few inches. Hello! What's this?"

A turned corner had brought them in front of a lighted building in Texas Street with a straggling crowd gathered about the porticoed entrance. As Loring spoke, there was a rattle of snare drums followed by the *dum-dum* of the bass, and a brass band ramped out the opening measures of a campaign march.

"It is a rally," said Kent, when they had passed far enough beyond the zone of brass-throated clamorings to make the reply audible. "I told you that the Gaston wolf-pack had gone into politics. We are in the throes of a State election, and there is to be a political speech-making at the Opera House to-night, with Bucks in the title rôle. And there is a fair measure of the deadness of the town! When you see people flock together like that to hear a brass band play, it means one of two things: that the town hasn't outgrown the country village stage, or else it has passed that and all other stages and is well on its way to the cemetery."

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"That is one way of putting it," Loring rejoined. "If things are as bad as that, it's time you were moving on, don't you think?"

"I guess so," was the lack-luster response. "Only I don't know where to go, or what to do when I get there."

They were crossing the open square in front of the wide-eaved passenger station. A thunderous tremolo, dominating the distant band music, thrilled on the still air, and the extended arm of the station semaphore with its two dangling lanterns wagged twice.

"My train," said Loring, quickening his step.

"No," Kent corrected. "It is a special from the west, bringing a Bucks crowd to the political rally. Number Three isn't due for fifteen minutes yet, and she is always late."

They mounted the steps to the station platform in good time to meet the three-car special as it came clattering in over the switches, and presently found themselves in the thick of the crowd of debarking ralliers.

It was a mixed masculine multitude, fairly typical of time, place and occasion; stalwart men of the soil for the greater part, bearded and bronzed and rough-clothed, with here and there a range-rider in picturesque leathern shaps, sagging pistols and wide-flapped sombrero.

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Loring stood aside and put up his eye-glasses. It was his first sight near at hand of the untrammeled West *in puris naturalibus,* and he was finding the spectacle both instructive and diverting. Looking to Kent for fellowship he saw that his companion was holding himself stiffly aloof; also, he remarked that none of the boisterous partizans flung a word of recognition in Kent's direction.

"Don't you know any of them?" he asked.

Kent's reply was lost in the deep-chested bull-bellow of a cattleman from the Rio Blanco.

"Hold on a minute, boys, before you scatter! Line up here, and let's give three cheers and a tail-twister for next-Governor Bucks! Now, then—*everybody!* Hip, hip—"

The ripping crash of the cheer jarred Loring's eye-glasses from their hold, and he replaced them with a smile. Four times the ear-splitting shout went up, and as the echoes of the "tiger" trailed off into silence the stentorian voice was lifted again.

"Good enough! Now, then; three groans for the land syndicates, alien mortgagees, and the Western Pacific Railroad, by grabs! and to hell with 'em!"

The responsive clamor was a thing to be acutely remembered—sustained, long-drawn, vindictive; a nerve-wrenching pandemonium of groans, yelpings and cat-

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calls, in the midst of which the partizans shuffled into loose marching order and tramped away townward.

"That answers your question, doesn't it?" said Kent, smiling sourly. "If not, I can set it out for you in words. The Western Pacific is the best-hated corporation this side of the Mississippi, and I am its local attorney."

"I don't envy you," said Loring. "I had no idea the opposition crystallized itself in any such concrete ill will. You must have the whole weight of public sentiment against you in any railroad litigation."

"I do," said Kent, simply. "If every complainant against us had the right to pack his own jury, we couldn't fare worse."

"What is at the bottom of it? Is it our pricking of the Gaston bubble by building on to the capital?"

"Oh, no; it's much more personal to these shouters. As you may, or may not, know, our line—like every other western railroad with no competition—has for its motto, 'All the tariff the traffic will stand,' and it bleeds the country accordingly. But we are forgetting your train. Shall we go and see how late it is?"

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II

A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

Train Number Three, the Western Flyer, was late, as Kent had predicted—just how late the operator could not tell; and pending the chalking-up of its arriving time on the bulletin board, the two men sat on an empty baggage truck and smoked in companionable silence.

While they waited, Loring's thoughts were busy with many things, friendly solicitude for the exile serving as the point of departure. He knew what a handfast friend might know: how Kent had finished his post-graduate course in the law and had succeeded to his father's small practice in the New Hampshire county town where he was born and bred. Also, he knew how Kent's friends, college friends who knew his gifts and ability, had deprecated the burial; and he himself had been curious enough to pay Kent a visit to spy out the reason why. On their first evening together in the stuffy little law office which had been his father's, Kent

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had made a clean breast of it: there was a young woman in the case, and a promise passed before Kent had gone to college. She was a farmer's daughter, with no notion for a change of environment; wherefore she had determined Kent's career and the scene of it, laying its lines in the narrow field of her own choosing.

Later, as Loring knew, the sentimental anchor had dragged until it was hopelessly off holding-ground. The young woman had laid the blame at the door of the university, had given Kent a bad half-year of fault-finding and recrimination, and had finally made an end of the matter by bestowing her dowry of hillside acres on the son of a neighboring farmer.

Thereafter Kent had stagnated quietly, living with simple rigor the life he had marked out for himself; thankful at heart, Loring had suspected, for the timely intervention of the farmer's son, but holding himself well in hand against a repetition of the sentimental offense. All this until the opening of the summer hotel at the foot of Old Croydon, and the coming of Elinor Brentwood.

No one knew just how much Miss Brentwood had to do with the long-delayed awakening of David Kent; but in Loring's forecastings she enjoyed the full benefit of the doubt. From tramping the hills alone, or whipping the streams for brook trout, David had taken to spending his afternoons with lover-like regularity at

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the Croydon Inn; and at the end of the season had electrified the sleepy home town by declaring his intention to go West and grow up with the country.

In Loring's setting-forth of the awakening, the motive was not far to seek. Miss Brentwood was ambitious, and if her interest in Kent had been only casual she would not have been likely to point him to the wider battle-field. Again, apart from his modest patrimony, Kent had only his profession. The Brentwoods were not rich, as riches are measured in millions; but they lived in their own house in the Back Bay wilderness, moved in Boston's older substantial circle, and, in a world where success, economic or other, is in some sort the touchstone, were many social planes above a country lawyer.

Loring knew Kent's fierce poverty-pride—none better. Hence, he was at no loss to account for the exile's flight afield, or for his unhopeful present attitude. Meaning to win trophies to lay at Miss Brentwood's feet, the present stage of the rough joust with Fortune found him unhorsed, unweaponed and rolling in the dust of the lists.

Loring chewed his cigar reflectively, wishing his companion would open the way to free speech on the subject presumably nearest his heart. He had a word of comfort, negative comfort, to offer, but it might not be said until Kent should give him leave by taking the

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initiative. Kent broke silence at last, but the prompting was nothing more pertinent than the chalking-up of the delayed train's time.

"An hour and twenty minutes: that means any time after nine o'clock. I'm honestly sorry for you, Grantham—sorry for any one that has to stay in this charnel-house of a town ten minutes after he's through. What will you do with yourself?"

Loring got up, looked at his watch, and made a suggestion, hoping that Kent would fall in with it.

"I don't know. Shall we go back to your rooms and sit a while?"

The exile's eyes gloomed suddenly.

"Not unless you insist on it. We should get back among the relics and I should bore you. I'm not the man you used to know, Grantham."

"No?" said Loring. "I sha'n't be hypocritical enough to contradict you. Nevertheless, you are my host. It is for you to say what you will do with me until train time."

"We can kill an hour at the rally, if you like. You have seen the street parade and heard the band play: it is only fair that you should see the menagerie on exhibition."

Loring found his match-box and made a fresh light for his cigar.

"It's pretty evident that you and 'next-Governor'

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Bucks are on opposite sides of the political fence," he observed.

"We are. I should think a good bit less of myself than I do—and that's needless—if I trained in his company."

"Yet you will give him a chance to make a partizan of me? Well, come along. Politics are not down on my western programme, but I'm here to see all the new things."

The Gaston Opera House was a survival of the flush times, and barring a certain tawdriness from disuse and neglect, and a rather garish effect which marched evenly with the brick-and-terra-cotta fronts in Texas Street and the American-Tudor cottages of the suburbs, it was a creditable relic. The auditorium was well filled in pit, dress-circle and gallery when Kent and his guest edged their way through the standing committee in the foyer; but by dint of careful searching they succeeded in finding two seats well around to the left, with a balcony pillar to separate them from their nearest neighbors.

Since the public side of American politics varies little with the variation of latitude or longitude, the man from the East found himself at once in homely and remindful surroundings. There was the customary draping of flags under the proscenium arch and across the set-piece villa of the background. In the semicircle of chairs arched from wing to wing sat the local and visiting

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political lights; men of all trades, these, some of them a little shamefaced and ill at ease by reason of their unwonted conspicuity; all of them listening with a carefully assumed air of strained attention to the speaker of the moment.

Also, there was the characteristic ante-election audience, typical of all America—the thing most truly typical in a land where national types are sought for microscopically: wheel-horses who came at the party call; men who came in the temporary upblaze of enthusiastic patriotism, which is lighted with the opening of the campaign, and which goes out like a candle in a gust of wind the day after the election; men who came to applaud blindly, and a few who came to cavil and deride. Loring oriented himself in a leisurely eye-sweep, and so came by easy gradations to the speaker.

Measured by the standard of fitness for his office of prolocutor the man standing beside the stage-properties speaker's desk was worthy a second glance. He was dark, undersized, trimly built; with a Vandyke beard clipped closely enough to show the lines of a bull-dog jaw, and eyes that had the gift, priceless to the public speaker, of seeming to hold every onlooking eye in the audience. Unlike his backers in the awkward semi-circle, he wore a professional long coat; and the hands that marked his smoothly flowing sentences were slim and shàpely.

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"Who is he?" asked Loring, in an aside to Kent.

"Stephen Hawk, the ex-district attorney: boomer, pettifogger, promoter—a charter member of the Gaston wolf-pack. A man who would persuade you into believing in the impeccability of Satan in one breath, and knife you in the back for a ten-dollar bill in the next," was the rejoinder.

Loring nodded, and again became a listener. Hawk's speech was merely introductory, and it was nearing its peroration.

"Fellow citizens, this occasion is as auspicious as it is significant. When the people rise in their might to say to tyranny in whatsoever form it oppresses them, 'Thus far and no farther shalt thou go,' the night is far spent and the light is breaking in the east.

"Since the day when we first began to wrest with compelling hands the natural riches from the soil of this our adoptive State, political trickery in high places, backed by the puissant might of alien corporations, has ground us into the dust.

"But now the time of our deliverance is at hand. Great movements give birth to great leaders; and in this, our holy crusade against oppression and tyranny, the crisis has bred the man. Ladies and gentlemen, I have the pleasure of presenting to you the speaker of the evening: our friend and fellow citizen the Honorable Jasper G. Bucks, by the grace of

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God, and your suffrages, the next governor of the State."

In the storm of applause that burst upon the dramatic peroration of the ex-district attorney, a man rose from the center of the stage semicircle and lumbered heavily forward to the footlights. Loring's first emotion was of surprise, tempered with pity. The crisis-born leader, heralded by such a flourish of rhetorical trumpets, was a giant in size; but with his huge figure, unshapely and ill-clad, all promise of greatness seemed to pause.

His face, broad-featured, colorless, and beardless as a boy's, was either a blank or an impenetrable mask. There was no convincement in the lack-luster gaze of the small, porcine eyes; no eloquence in the harsh, nasal tones of the untrained voice, or in the ponderous and awkward wavings of the beam-like arms. None the less, before he had uttered a dozen halting sentences he was carrying the audience with him step by step; moving the great concourse of listeners with his commonplace periods as a mellifluous Hawk could never hope to move it.

Loring saw the miracle in the throes of its outworking; saw and felt it in his own proper person, and sought in vain to account for it. Was there some subtile magnetism in this great hulk of a man that made itself felt in spite of its hamperings? Or was it merely

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that the people, weary of empty rhetoric and unkept promises, were ripe to welcome and to follow any man whose apparent earnestness and sincerity atoned for all his lacks?

Explain it as he might, Loring soon assured himself that the Honorable Jasper G. Bucks was laying hold of the sentiment of the audience as though it were a thing tangible to be grasped by the huge hands. Unlike Hawk, whose speech flamed easily into denunciation when it touched on the alien corporations, he counseled moderation and lawful reprisals. Land syndicates, railroads, foreign capital in whatever employment, were prime necessities in any new and growing commonwealth. The province of the people was not to wreck the ship, but to guide it. And the remedy for all ills lay in controlling legislation, faithfully and rigidly enforced.

"My friends: I'm only a plain, hard-handed farmer, as those of you who are my fellow townsmen can testify. But I've seen what you've seen, and I've suffered what you've suffered. Year after year we send our representatives to the legislature, and what comes of it? Why, these corporations, looking only to their own interests, as they're in duty bound to do, buys 'em if they can. You can't blame 'em for that; it's business—their business. But it is our business, as citizens of this great commonwealth, to prevent it. We have good laws

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on our statute books, but we need more of 'em; laws for control, with plain, honest men at the capital, in the judiciary, in every root and branch of the executive, to enforce 'em. With such laws, and such men to see that they are executed, there wouldn't be any more extortion, any more raising of the rates of transportation on the produce of our ranches and farms merely because the eastern market for that particular product happened to jump a few cents on the dollar.

"No, my friends; plain, hard-handed farmer though I be, I can see what will follow an honest election of the people, by the people, and for the people. The State can be—it ought to be—sovereign within its own boundaries. If we rise up as one man next Tuesday and put a ticket into the ballot-box that says we are going to make it so, and keep it so, you'll see a new commodity tariff put into effect on the Western Pacific Railroad the day after."

The speaker paused, and into the little gap of silence barked a voice from the gallery.

"That's what you say. But supposin' they don't do it?"

Loring was gazing steadfastly at the blank, heavy face, so utterly devoid of the enthusiasm the man was evoking in others. For one flitting instant he thought he saw behind the mask. The immobile face, the awkward gestures, the slipshod English became suddenly

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transparent, revealing the real man; a man of titanic strength, of tremendous possibilities for good or evil. Loring put up his glasses and looked again; but the figure of the flash-light inner vision had vanished, and the speaker was answering his objector as calmly as though the house held only the single critic to be set right.

"I'm always glad to hear a man speak right out in meeting," he said, dropping still deeper into the colloquialisms. "Supposing the corporations don't see the handwriting on the wall—won't see it, you say? Then, my friend, it will become the manifest duty of the legislature and the executive to make 'em see it: always lawfully, you understand; always with a just and equitable respect for the rights of property in which our free and glorious institutions are founded, but with level-handed justice, and without fear or favor."

A thunderous uproar of applause clamored on the heels of the answer, and the Honorable Jasper mopped his face with a colored handkerchief and took a swallow of water from the glass on the desk.

"Mind you, my friends, I'm not saying we are not going to find plenty of stumps and roots and a tough sod in this furrow we are going to plow. It's only the fool or the ignoramus who underrates the strength of his opponent. It is going to be just plain, honest justice and the will of the people against the money of the

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Harrimans and the Goulds and the Vanderbilts and all the rest of 'em. But the law is mighty, and it will prevail. Give us an honest legislature to make such laws, and an executive strong enough to enforce 'em, and the sovereign State will stand out glorious and triumphant as a monument against oppression.

"When that time comes—and it's a-coming, my friends—the corporations and the syndicates will read the handwriting on the wall; don't you be afraid of that. If they should be a little grain thick-headed and sort o' blind at first, as old King Belshazzar was, it may be that the sovereign State will have to give 'em an object-lesson—lawfully, always lawfully, you understand. But when they see, through the medium of such an object-lesson or otherwise, as the case may be, that we mean business; when they see that we, the people of this great and growing commonwealth, mean to assert our rights to live and move and have our being, to have fair, even-handed justice meted out to ourselves, our wives and our little children, they'll come down and quit watering their stock with the sweat of our brows; and that hold-up motto of theirs, 'All the tariff the traffic will stand,' will be no more known in Israel!"

Again the clamor of applause rose like fine dust on the throng-heated air, and Kent looked at his watch.

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"It is time we were going," he said; adding: "I guess you have had enough of it, haven't you?"

Loring was silent for the better part of the way back to the railway station. When he spoke it was in answer to a delayed question of Kent's.

"What do I think of him? I don't know, David; and that's the plain truth. He is not the man he appears to be as he stands there haranguing that crowd. That is a pose, and an exceedingly skilful one. He is not altogether apparent to me; but he strikes me as being a man of immense possibilities—whether for good or evil, I can't say."

"You needn't draw another breath of uncertainty on that score," was the curt rejoinder. "He is a demagogue, pure and unadulterated."

Loring did not attempt to refute the charge.

"Are he and his party likely to win?" he asked.

"God knows," said Kent. "We have had so many lightning transformations in politics in the State that nothing is impossible."

"I'd like to know," was Loring's comment. "It might make some difference to me, personally."

"To you?" said Kent, inquiringly. "That reminds me: I haven't given you a chance to say ten words about yourself."

"The chance hasn't been lacking. But my business out here is—well, it isn't exactly a Star Chamber mat-

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ter, but I'm under promise in a way not to talk about it until I have had a conference with our people at the capital. I'll write you about it in a few days."

They were ascending the steps at the end of the passenger platform again, and Loring broke away from the political and personal entanglement to give Kent one more opportunity to hear his word of negative comfort.

"We dug up the field of recollection pretty thoroughly in our after-dinner séance in your rooms, David, but I noticed there was one corner of it you left undisturbed. Was there any good reason?"

Kent made no show of misunderstanding.

"There was the excellent reason which must have been apparent to you before you had been an hour in Gaston. I've made my shot, and missed."

Loring entered the breach with his shield held well to the fore. He was the last man in the world to assault a friend's confidence recklessly.

"I thought a good while ago, and I still think, that you are making a mountain out of a mole-hill, David. Elinor Brentwood is a true woman in every inch of her. She is as much above caring for false notions of caste as you ought to be."

"I know her nobility: which is all the more reason why I shouldn't take advantage of it. We may scoff at the social inequalities as much as we please, but we can't

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laugh them out of court. As between a young woman who is an heiress in her own right, and a briefless lawyer, there are differences which a decent man is bound to efface. And I haven't been able."

"Does Miss Brentwood know?"

"She knows nothing at all. I was unwilling to entangle her, even with a confidence."

"The more fool you," said Loring, bluntly. "You call yourself a lawyer, and you have not yet learned one of the first principles of common justice, which is that a woman has some rights which even a besotted lover is bound to respect. You made love to her that summer at Croydon; you needn't deny it. And at the end of things you walk off to make your fortune without committing yourself; without knowing, or apparently caring, what your stiff-necked poverty-pride may cost her in years of uncertainty. You deserve to lose her."

Kent's smile was a fair measure of his unhopeful mood.

"You can't well lose what you have never had. I'm not such an ass as to believe that she cared greatly."

"How do you know? Not by anything you ever gave her a chance to say, I'll dare swear. I've a bit of qualified good news for you, but the spirit is moving me mightily to hold my tongue."

"Tell me," said Kent, his indifference vanishing in the turning of a leaf.

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"Well, to begin with, Miss Brentwood is still unmarried, though the gossips say she doesn't lack plenty of eligible offers."

"Half of that I knew; the other half I took for granted. Go on."

"Her mother, under the advice of the chief of the clan Brentwood, has been making a lot of bad investments for herself and her two daughters: in other words, she has been making ducks and drakes of the Brentwood fortune."

Kent was as deeply moved as if the loss had been his own, and said as much, craving more of the particulars.

"I can't give them. But I may say that the blame lies at your door, David."

"At my door? How do you arrive at that?"

"By the shortest possible route. If you had done your duty by Elinor in the Croydon summer, Mrs. Brentwood would have had a bright young attorney for a son-in-law and adviser, and the bad investments would not have been made."

Kent's laugh was entirely devoid of mirth.

"Don't trample on a man when he's down. I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. But how bad is the smash? Surely you know that?"

"No, I don't. Bradford was telling me about it the day I left Boston. He gave me to understand that the

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principal family holding at present is in the stock of a certain western railway."

"Did he happen to know the name of the stock?" asked Kent, moistening his lips.

"He did. Fate flirts with you two in the usual fashion. Mrs. Brentwood's little fortune—and by consequence, Elinor's and Penelope's—is tied up in the stock of the company whose platform we are occupying at the present moment—the Western Pacific."

Kent let slip a hard word directed at ill-advisers in general, and Loring took his cue from the malediction.

"You swear pretty feelingly, David. Isn't our property as good a thing as we of the Boston end have been cracking it up to be?"

"You know better about the financial part of it than I do. But—well, you are fresh from this anarchistic conclave at the Opera House. You can imagine what the stock of the Western Pacific, or of any other foreign corporation doing business in this State, will be worth in six months after Bucks and his crowd get into the saddle."

"You speak as if the result of the election were a foregone conclusion. I hope it isn't. But we were talking more particularly of Miss Brentwood, and your personal responsibilities." The belated train was whistling for the lower yard, and Loring was determined to say all that was in his mind.

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"Yes; go on. I'm anxious to hear—more anxious than I seem to be, perhaps."

"Well, she is coming West, after a bit. She, and her sister and the mother. Mrs. Brentwood's asthma is worse, and the wise men have ordered her to the interior. I thought you'd like to know."

"Is she—are they coming this way?" asked Kent.

The train was in, and the porter had fetched Loring's hand-bag from the check-stand. The guest paused with one foot on the step of the sleeping-car.

"If I were you, David, I'd write and ask; I should, by Jove. It would be a tremendously cheeky thing to do, of course, having such a slight acquaintance with her as you have; but I'll be hanged if I shouldn't chance it. And in the mean time, if I don't go back East next week, you'll hear from me. When you do, or if you do, take a day off and run up to the capital. I shall need you. Good-by."

Kent watched the train pull out; stood looking after it until the two red eyes of the rear signals had disappeared in the dusty darkness of the illimitable plain. Then he went to his rooms, to the one which was called by courtesy his office, and without allowing himself time for a nice balancing of the pros and cons, squared himself at the desk to write a letter.

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III

THE BOSTONIANS

It was precisely on the day set for the Brentwoods' westward flitting that the postman, making his morning round, delivered David Kent's asking at the house in the Back Bay sub-district. Elinor was busy packing for the migration, but she left Penelope and the maid to cope with the problem of compressing two trunkfuls into one while she read the letter, and she was reading it a second time when Mr. Brookes Ormsby's card came up.

"You go, Penelope," she begged. "There is so much to do."

"Not I," said the younger sister, cavalierly; "he didn't come to see me." Whereupon Elinor smoothed the two small wrinkles of impatience out of her brow, tucked her letter into her bosom, and went down to meet the early morning caller.

Mr. Brookes Ormsby, club-man, gentleman of athletic leisure, and inheritor of the Ormsby millions, was

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pacing back and forth before the handful of fire in the drawing-room grate when she entered.

"You don't deserve to have a collie sheep-dog friend," he protested reproachfully. "How was I to know that you were going away?"

Another time Elinor might have felt that she owed him an explanation, but just now she was careful, and troubled about the packing.

"How was I to know you didn't know?" she retorted. "It was in the *Transcript*."

"Well!" said Ormsby. "Things have come to a pretty pass when I have to keep track of you through the society column. I didn't see the paper. Dyckman brought me word last night at Vineyard Haven, and we broke a propeller blade on the *Amphitrite* trying to get here in time."

"I am so sorry—for the *Amphitrite*," she said. "But you are here, and in good season. Shall I call mother and Nell?"

"No. I ran out to see if I'm in time to do your errands for you—take your tickets, and so on."

"Oh, we shouldn't think of troubling you. James can do all those things. And failing James, there is a very dependable young woman at the head of this household. Haven't I 'personally conducted' the family all over Europe?"

"James is a base hireling," said the caller, blandly.

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"And as for the capable young woman: do I or do I not recollect a dark night on the German frontier when she was glad enough to call on a sleepy fellow pilgrim to help her wrestle with a particularly thick-headed customs officer?"

"If you do, it is not especially kind of you to remind her of it."

He looked up quickly, and the masterful soul of the man, for which the clean-cut, square-set jaw and the athletic figure were the outward presentments, put on a mask of deference and humility.

"You are hard with me, Elinor—always flinty and adamantine, and that sort. Have you no soft side at all?"

She laughed.

"The sentimental young woman went out some time ago, didn't she? One can't be an anachronism."

"I suppose not. Yet I'm always trying to make myself believe other things about you. Don't you like to be cared for like other women?"

"I don't know; sometimes I think I should. But I have had to be the man of the house since father died."

"I know," he said. "And it is the petty anxieties that have made you put the woman to the wall. I'm here this morning to save you some of them; to take the man's part in your outsetting, or as much of it as I can.

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When are you going to give me the right to come between you and all the little worries, Elinor?"

She turned from him with a faint gesture of cold impatience.

"You are forgetting your promise," she said quite dispassionately. "We were to be friends; as good friends as we were before that evening at Bar Harbor. I told you it would be impossible, and you said you were strong enough to make it possible."

He looked at her with narrowing eyes.

"It is possible, in a way. But I'd like to know what door of your heart it is that I haven't been able to open."

She ignored the pleading and took refuge in a woman's expedient.

"If you insist on going back to the beginnings, I shall go back, also—to Abigail and the trunk-packing."

He planted himself squarely before her, the mask lifted and the masterful soul asserting itself boldly.

"It wouldn't do any good, you know. I am going with you."

"To Abigail and the trunk-room?"

"Oh, no; to the jumping-off place out West—wherever it is you are going to hibernate."

"No," she said decisively; "you must not."

"Why?"

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"My saying so ought to be sufficient reason."

"It isn't," he contended, frowning down on her good-naturedly. "Shall I tell you why you don't want me to go? It is because you are afraid."

"I am not," she denied.

"Yes, you are. You know in your own heart there is no reason why you should continue to make me unhappy, and you are afraid I might over-persuade you."

Her eyes—they were the serene eyes of cool gray that take on slate-blue tints in stressful moments—met his defiantly.

"If you think that, I withdraw my objection," she said coldly. "Mother and Penelope will be delighted, I am sure."

"And you will be bored, world without end," he laughed. "Never mind; I'll be decent about it and keep out of your way as much as you like."

Again she made the little gesture of petulant impatience.

"You are continually placing me in a false position. Can't you leave me out of it entirely?"

It is one of the prime requisites of successful mastership to know when to press the point home, and when to recede gracefully. Ormsby abruptly shut the door upon sentiment and came down to things practical.

"It is your every-day comfort that concerns me

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chiefly. I am going to take all three of you in charge, giving the dependable young person a well-earned holiday—a little journey in which she won't have to chaffer with the transit people. Have you chosen your route to the western somewhere?"

Miss Brentwood had the fair, transparent skin that tells tales, and the blue-gray eyes were apt to confirm them. David Kent's letter was hidden in the folds of her loose-waisted morning gown, and she fancied it stirred like a thing alive to remind her of its message. Ormsby was looking past her to the old-fashioned ormolu clock on the high mantel, comparing the time with his watch, but he was not oblivious of the telltale flush.

"There is nothing embarrassing about the choosing of a route, is there?" he queried.

"Oh, no; being true Americans, we don't know one route from another in our own country," she confessed. "But at the western end of it we want to go over the Western Pacific."

Ormsby knew the West by rail routes as one who travels much for time-killing purposes.

"It's a rather roundabout cow-path," he objected. "The Overland Short Line is a good bit more direct; not to mention the service, which is a lot better."

But Elinor had made her small concession to David Kent's letter, and she would not withdraw it.

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"Probably you don't own any Western Pacific stock," she suggested. "We do; and we mean to be loyal to our salt."

Ormsby laughed.

"I see Western Pacific has gone down a few points since the election of Governor Bucks. If I had any, I'd wire my broker to sell."

"We are not so easily frightened," she asserted; adding, with a touch of the austerity which was her Puritan birthright: "Nor quite so conscienceless as you men."

"Conscience," he repeated half absently; "is there any room for such an out-of-date thing in a nation of successfulists? But seriously; you ought to get rid of Western Pacific. There can be no possible question of conscience involved."

"I don't agree with you," she retorted with prompt decision. "If we were to sell now it would be because we were afraid it might prove to be a bad investment. Therefore, for the sake of a presumably ignorant buyer, we have no right to sell."

He smiled leniently.

"All of which goes to prove that you three lone women need a guardian. But I mustn't keep you any longer from Abigail and the trunks. What time shall I send the expediters after your luggage?"

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She told him, and went with him to the door.

"Please don't think me ungrateful," she said, when she had thrown the night-latch for him. "I don't mean to be."

"I don't think anything of you that I ought not to think: in that I am as conscientious as even you could wish. Good-by, until this evening. I'll meet you all at the station."

As had come to be the regular order of things, Elinor found herself under fire when she went above stairs to rejoin her mother and sister.

Mrs. Brentwood was not indifferent to the Ormsby millions; neither had she forgotten a certain sentimental summer at the foot of Old Croydon. She was a thin-lipped little person, plain-spoken to the verge of unfriendliness; a woman in whom the rugged, self-reliant, Puritan strain had become panic-acidulous. And when the Puritan stock degenerates in that direction, it is apt to lack good judgment on the business side, and also the passivity which smooths the way for incompetence in less assertive folk.

Kent had stood something in awe, not especially of her personality, but of her tongue; and had been forced to acquiesce silently in Loring's summing-up of Elinor's mother as a woman who had taken culture and the humanizing amenities of the broader life much

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as the granite of her native hills takes polish—reluctantly, and without prejudice to its inner granular structure.

"Elinor, you ought to be ashamed to keep Brookes Ormsby dangling the way you do," was her comment when Elinor came back. "You are your father's daughters, both of you: there isn't a drop of the Grimkie blood in either of you, I do believe."

Elinor was sufficiently her father's daughter to hold her peace under her mother's reproaches: also, there was enough of the Grimkie blood in her veins to stiffen her in opposition when the need arose. So she said nothing.

"Since your Uncle Ichabod made such a desperate mess of that copper business in Montana, we have all been next door to poverty, and you know it," the mother went on, irritated by Elinor's silence. "I don't care so much for myself: your father and I began with nothing, and I can go back to nothing, if necessary. But you can't, and neither can Penelope; you'd both starve. I should like to know what Brookes Ormsby has done that you can't tolerate him."

"It isn't anything he has done, or failed to do," said Elinor, wearily. "Please let's not go over it all again, mother."

Mrs. Brentwood let that gun cool while she fired another.

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"I suppose he came to say good-by: what is he going to do with himself this winter?"

The temptation to equivocate for pure perversity's sake was strong upon Elinor, and she yielded to it.

"How should I know? He has the *Amphitrite* and the Florida coast, hasn't he?"

Mrs. Brentwood groaned.

"To think of the way he squanders his money in sheer dissipation!" she exclaimed. "Of course, he will take an entire house-party with him, as usual, and the cost of that one cruise would set you up in housekeeping."

Penelope laughed with a younger daughter's license. She was a statuesque young woman with a pose, ripe lips, flashing white teeth, laughing eyes with an imp of mischief in them, and an exquisitely turned-up nose that was neither the Brentwood, which was severely classic, nor the Grimkie, which was pure Puritan renaissance.

"Which is to intimate that he won't have money enough left to do it when he comes back," she commented. "I wish there were some way of making him believe he had to give me what remains of his income after he has spent all he can on the Florida cruise. I'd wear Worth gowns and be lapped in luxury for the next ten years at the very least."

"He isn't going to Florida this winter," said Eli-

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nor, repenting her of the small quibble. "He is going West."

Mrs. Brentwood looked up sharply.

"With us?" she queried.

"Yes."

Penelope clasped her hands and tried to look soulful.

"Oh, Ellie!" she said; "have you—"

"No," Elinor retorted; "I have not."

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IV

THE FLESH-POTS OF EGYPT

The westward journey began at the appointed hour in the evening with the resourceful Ormsby in command; and when the outsetting, in which she had to sustain only the part of an obedient automaton, was a fact accomplished, Elinor settled back into the pillowed corner of her sleeping-car section to enjoy the unwonted sensation of being the one cared for instead of the caretaker.

She had traveled more or less with her mother and Penelope ever since her father's death, and was well used to taking the helm. Experience and the responsibilities had made her self-reliant, and her jesting boast that she was a dependable young woman was the simple truth. Yet to the most modern of girl bachelors there may come moments when the soul harks back to the eternal-womanly, and the desire to be petted and looked after and safe-conducted is stronger than the bachelor conventions.

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Two sections away the inevitable newly married pair posed unconsciously to point the moral for Miss Brentwood. She marked the eagerly anticipative solicitude of the boyish groom, contrasting it now and then with Ormsby's less obtrusive attentions. It was all very absurd and sentimental, she thought; and yet she was not without a curious heart-stirring of envy provoked by the self-satisfied complacency of the bride.

What had that chit of a girl done to earn her immunity from self-defendings and the petty anxieties? Nothing, Elinor decided; at least, nothing more purposeful than the swimmer does when he lets himself drift with the current. None the less, the immunity was hers, undeniably, palpably. For the first time in her life Miss Brentwood found herself looking, with a little shudder of withdrawal and dismay, down the possible vista—possible to every unmarried woman of twenty-four—milestoned by unbroken years of spinsterhood and self-helpings.

Was she strong enough to walk this hedged-up path alone?—single-hearted enough to go on holding out against her mother's urgings, against Ormsby's masterful wooing, against her own unconquerable longing for a sure anchorage in some safe haven of manful care and supervision; all this that she might continue to preserve her independence and live the life which, despite its drawbacks, was yet her own?

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There were times when she doubted her resolution; and this first night of the westward journey was one of them. She had thought at one time that she might be able to idealize David Kent, but he had gone his way to hew out his fortune, taking her upstirrings of his ambition in a purely literal and selfish sense, so far as she could determine. And now there was Brookes Ormsby. She could by no possibility idealize him. He was a fixed fact, stubbornly asserted. Yet he was a great-hearted gentleman, unspoiled by his millions, thoughtful always for her comfort, generous, self-effacing. Just now, for example, when he had done all, he had seemed to divine her wish to be alone and had betaken himself to the smoking-compartment.

"I promised not to bore you," he had said, "and I sha'n't. Send the porter after me if there is anything I have forgotten to do."

She took up the magazine he had left on the seat beside her and sought to put away the disquieting thoughts. But they refused to be dismissed; and now among them rose up another, dating back to that idealizing summer at the foot of Old Croydon, and having its genesis in a hard saying of her mother's.

She closed her eyes, recalling the words and the occasion of them. "You are merely wasting time and sentiment on this young upstart of a country lawyer, Elinor. So long as you were content to make it a sum-

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mer day's amusement, I had nothing to say; you are old enough and sensible enough to choose your own recreations. But in justice to yourself, no less than to him, you must let it end with our going home. You haven't money enough for two."

Her eyes grew hot under the closed lids when she remembered. At the time the hard saying was evoked there was money enough for two, if David Kent would have shared it. But he had held his peace and gone away, and now there was not enough for two.

Elinor faced her major weakness unflinchingly. She was not a slave to the luxuries—the luxuries of the very rich. On the contrary, she had tried to make herself believe that hardness was a part of her creed. But latterly, she had been made to see that there was a formidable array of things which she had been calling comforts: little luxuries which Brookes Ormsby's wife might reckon among the simplest necessities of the daily life, but which David Kent's wife might have to forego; nay, things which Elinor Brentwood might presently have to forego. For she compelled herself to front the fact of the diminished patrimony squarely. So long as the modest Western Pacific dividends were forthcoming, they could live comfortably and without pinching. But failing these—

"No, I'm not great enough," she confessed, with a little shiver. "I should be utterly miserable. If I could

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afford to indulge in ideals it would be different; but I can't—not when one word of mine will build a barrier so high that all the soul-killing little skimpings can never climb over it. And besides, I owe something to mother and Nell."

It was the final straw. When any weakness of the human heart can find a seeming virtue to go hand in hand with it, the battle is as good as lost; and at that moment Brookes Ormsby, placidly refilling his short pipe in the smoking-room of the Pullman, was by no means in the hopeless case he was sometimes tempted to fancy himself.

As may be surmised, a diligent suitor, old enough to plan thoughtfully, and yet young enough to simulate the youthful ardor of a lover whose hair has not begun to thin at the temples, would lose no ground in a three days' journey and the opportunities it afforded.

In Penelope's phrase, Elinor "suffered him", enjoying her freedom from care like a sleepy kitten; shutting the door on the past and keeping it shut until the night when their through sleeper was coupled to the Western Pacific Flyer at A. & T. Junction. But late that evening, when she was rummaging in her handbag for a handkerchief, she came upon David Kent's letter and read it again.

"Loring tells me you are coming West," he wrote.

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"I assume there is at least one chance in three that you will pass through Gaston. If you do, and if the hour is not altogether impossible, I should like to meet your train. One thing among the many the past two years have denied me—the only thing I have cared much about, I think—is the sight of your face. I shall be very happy if you will let me look at you—just for the minute or two the train may stop."

There was more of it; a good bit more: but it was all guarded commonplace, opening no window in the heart of the man David Kent. Yet even in the commonplace she found some faint interlinings of the change in him; not a mere metamorphosis of the outward man, as a new environment might make, but a radical change, deep and biting, like the action of a strong acid upon a fine-grained metal.

She returned the letter to its envelope, and after looking up Gaston on the time-table fell into a heart-stirring reverie, with unseeing eyes fixed on the restful blackness of the night rushing rearward past the car windows.

"He has forgotten," she said, with a little lip-curl of disappointment. "He thinks he ought to remember, and he is trying—trying because Grantham said something that made him think he ought to try. But it's no use. It was only a little summer idyl, and we have both outlived it."

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She was still gazing steadfastly upon the wall of outer darkness when the porter began to make down the berths and Penelope came over to sit in the opposite seat. A moment later the younger sister made a discovery, or thought she did.

"Why, Elinor Brentwood!" she said. "I do believe you are crying!"

Elinor's smile was serenity undisturbed.

"What a vivid imagination you have, Nell, dear," she scoffed. Then she changed the subject arbitrarily: "Is mother quite comfortable? Did you have the porter put a screen in her window?—you know she always insists she can't breathe without it."

Penelope evaded the queries and took her turn at subject-wrenching—an art in which she excelled.

"We are on our own railroad now, aren't we?" she asked, with purposeful lack-interest. "And—let me see—isn't Mr. Kent at some little town we pass through?"

"It is a city," said Elinor. "And the name is Gaston."

"I remember now," Penelope rejoined. "I wonder if we shall see him?"

"It is most unlikely. He does not know we are coming, and he wouldn't be looking for us."

Penelope's fine eyes clouded. At times Elinor's

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thought-processes were as plain as print to the younger sister; at other times they were not.

"I should think the least we could do would be to let him know," she ventured. "Does anybody know what time the train passes Gaston?"

"At seven-fifteen to-morrow evening," was the unguarded reply; and Penelope drew her own conclusions from the ready answer and the folded time-table in Elinor's lap.

"Well, why don't you send him a wire? I'm sure I should."

"Why should I?" said Elinor, warily.

"Oh, I don't know: any other young woman of his acquaintance would, I fancy. I have half a mind to do it myself. *I* like him, if you don't care for him any more."

Thus Penelope; and a little while afterward, finding herself in the library compartment with blanks and pen and ink convenient and nothing better to do, she impulsively made the threat good in a ten-word message to Kent.

"If he should happen to drop in unexpectedly it will give Ellie the shock of her life," she mused; and the telegram was smuggled into the hands of the porter to be sent as occasion offered.

Those who knew Mr. Brookes Ormsby best were wont

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to say that the world of action, a world lusting avidly for resourceful men, had lost the chance of acquiring a promising leader when he was born heir to the Ormsby millions. Be that as it may, he made the most of such opportunities for the exercising of his gift as came to one for whom the long purse leveled most barriers; had been making the most of the present leaguer of a woman's heart—a citadel whose capitulation was not to be compassed by mere money-might, he would have said.

Up to the final day of the long westward flight all things had gone well with him. True, Elinor had not thawed visibly, but she had been tolerant; Penelope had amused herself at no one's expense save her own—a boon for which Ormsby did not fail to be duly thankful; and Mrs. Brentwood had contributed her mite by keeping hands off.

But at the dining-car luncheon on the last day's run, Penelope, languishing at a table for two with an unresponsive Ormsby for a vis-à-vis, made sly mention of the possible recrudescence of one David Kent at a place called Gaston: this merely to note the effect upon an unresponsive table-mate.

In Penelope's observings there was no effect perceptible. Ormsby said "Ah?" and asked if she would have more of the salad. But later, in a contemplative

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half-hour with his pipe in the smoking-compartment, he let the scrap of information sink in and take root.

Hitherto Kent had been little more than a name to him; a name he had never heard on Elinor's lips. But if love be blind in the teens and twenties, it is more than apt to have a keen gift of insight in the thirties and beyond. Hence, by the time Ormsby had come to the second filling of his pipe, he had pieced together bits of half-forgotten gossip about the Croydon summer, curious little reticences on Elinor's part, vague hints let fall by Mrs. Brentwood; enough to enable him to chart the rock on which his love-argosy was drifting, and to name it—David Kent.

Now to a well-knit man of the world—who happens to be a heaven-born diplomatist into the bargain—to be forewarned is to be doubly armed. At the end of the half-hour of studious solitude in the smoking-room, Ormsby had pricked out his course on the chart to a boat's-length; had trimmed his sails to the minutest starting of a sheet. A glance at his watch and another at the time-table gave him the length of his respite. Six hours there were; and a dining-car dinner intervened. Those six hours, and the dinner, he decided, must win or lose the race.

Picturing for ourselves, if we may, how nine men out of ten would have given place to panic-ardor, turning a possible victory into a hopeless rout, let us

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hold aloof and mark the generalship of the tenth, who chances to be the heaven-born.

For five of the six precious hours Ormsby merely saw to it that Elinor was judiciously marooned. Then the dining-car was reopened and the evening meal was announced. Waiting until a sufficient number of passengers had gone forward to insure a crowded car, Ormsby let his party fall in with the tail of the procession, and the inevitable happened. Single seats only could be had, and Elinor was compelled to dine in solemn silence at a table with three strangers.

Dinner over, there remained but twenty minutes of the respite; but the diplomatist kept his head, going back to the sleeping-car with his charges and dropping into the seat beside Elinor with the light of calm assurance in his eye.

"You are quite comfortable?" he began. "Sha'n't I have the Presence in the buffet make you a cup of tea? That in the diner didn't deserve the name."

She was regarding him with curious anger in the gray eyes, and her reply quite ignored the kindly offer of refreshment.

"You are the pink of dragomans," she said. "Don't you want to go and smoke?"

"To be entirely consistent, I suppose I ought to," he confessed, wondering if his throw had failed. "Do you want me to go?"

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"I have been alone all the afternoon: I can endure it a little while longer, I presume."

Ormsby permitted himself a single heart-throb of exultation. He had deliberately gone about to break down her poise, her only barrier of defense, and it began to look as if he had succeeded.

"I couldn't help it, you know," he said, catching his cue swiftly. "There are times when I'm obliged to keep away from you—times when every fiber of me rebels against the restraints of the false position you have thrust me into. When I'm taken that way I don't dare play with the fire."

"I wish I could know how much you mean by that," she said musingly. Deep down in her heart she knew she was as far as ever from loving this man; but his love, or the insistent urging of it, was like a strong current drifting her whither she would not go.

"I mean all that an honest man can mean," he rejoined. "I have fought like a soldier for standing-room in the place you have assigned me; I have tried sincerely—and stupidly, you will say—to be merely your friend, just the best friend you ever had. But it's no use. Coming or going, I shall always be your lover."

"Please don't," she said, neither coldly nor warmly. "You are getting over into the domain of the very young people when you say things like that."

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It was an unpleasant thing to say, and he was not beyond wincing a little. None the less, he would not be turned aside.

"You'll overlook it in me if I've pressed the thing too hard on the side of sentiment, won't you? Apart from the fact that I feel that way, I've been going on the supposition that you'd like it, if you could only make up your mind to like me."

"I do like you," she admitted; "more than any one I have ever known, I think."

The drumming wheels and a long-drawn trumpet blast from the locomotive made a shield of sound to isolate them. The elderly banker in the opposite section was nodding over his newspaper; and the newly married ones were oblivious, each to all else but the other. Mrs. Brentwood was apparently sleeping peacefully three seats away; and Penelope was invisible.

"There was a time when I should have begged hard for something more, Elinor; but now I'm willing to take what I can get, and be thankful. Will you give me the right to make you as happy as I can on the unemotional basis?"

She felt herself slipping.

"If you could fully understand—"

"I understand that you don't love me, in the novelist's sense of the word, and I am not asking more than

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you can give. But if you can give me the little now, and more when I have won it—don't curl your lip at me, please: I'm trying to put it as mildly as I can."

She was looking at him level-eyed, and he could have sworn that she was never calmer or more self-possessed.

"I don't know why you should want my promise—or any woman's—on such conditions," she said evenly.

"But I do," he insisted.

The lights of a town suburb were flitting past the windows, and the monotonous song of the tires was drowned in the shrill crescendo of the brakes. She turned from him suddenly and laid her cheek against the grateful cool of the window-pane. But when he took her hand she did not withdraw it.

"Is it mine, Elinor?" he whispered. "You see, I'm not asking much."

"Is it worth taking—by itself?"

"You make me very happy," he said quietly; and just then the train stopped with a jerk, and a shuffling bustle of station-platform noises floated in through the open deck transoms of the car.

As if the solution of continuity had been a call to arouse her, Elinor freed her hand with a swift little wrench and sat bolt upright in her corner.

"This station—do you know the name of it?" she

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asked, fighting hard for the self-control that usually came so easily.

Ormsby consulted his watch.

"I am not quite sure. It ought to be—"

He broke off when he saw that she was no longer listening to him. There was a stir in the forward vestibule, and the porter came in with a hand-bag. At his heels was a man in a rough-weather box-coat; a youngish man, clean-shaven and wind-tanned to a healthy bronze, with an eager face and alert eyes that made an instant inventory of the car and its complement of passengers. So much Ormsby saw. Then Penelope stood up in her place to greet the new-comer.

"Why, Mr. Kent!" she exclaimed. "Are you really going on with us? How nice of you!"

Elinor turned coolly upon her seat-mate, self-possession once more firmly seated in the saddle.

"Did you know Mr. Kent was going to board the train here?" she asked abruptly.

"Do you mean the gentleman Penelope has waylaid? I haven't the pleasure of his acquaintance. Will you introduce us?"

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V

JOURNEYS END—

It had been a day of upsettings for David Kent, beginning with the late breakfast at which Neltje, the night watchman at the railway station, had brought him Penelope's telegram.

At ten he had a case in court: Shotwell *vs.* Western Pacific Co., damages for stock-killing; for the plaintiff —Hawk; for the defendant—Kent. With the thought that he was presently going to see Elinor again, Kent went gaily to the battle legal, meaning to wring victory out of a jury drawn for the most part from the plaintiff's stock-raising neighbors. By dint of great perseverance he managed to prolong the fight until the middle of the afternoon, was worsted, as usual, and so far lost his temper as to get himself called down by the judge, MacFarlane.

Whereupon he went back to the Farquhar Building and to his office and sat down at the type-writer to pound out a letter to the general counsel, resigning

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his sinecure. The Shotwell case was the third he had lost for the company in a single court term. Justice for the railroad company, under present agrarian conditions, was not to be had in the lower courts, and he was weary of fighting the losing battle. Therefore—

In the midst of the type-rattling the boy that served the few occupied offices in the Farquhar Building had brought the afternoon mail. It included a letter from Loring, and there was another reversive upheaval for the exile. Loring's business at the capital was no longer a secret. He had been tendered the resident management of the Western Pacific, with headquarters on the ground, and had accepted. His letter was a brief note, asking Kent to report at once for legal duty in the larger field.

"I am not fairly in the saddle yet, and shall not be for a week or so," wrote the newly appointed manager. "But I find I am going to need a level-headed lawyer at my elbow from the jump—one who knows the State political ropes and isn't afraid of a scrap. Come in on Number Three to-day, if you can; if not, send a wire and say when I may look for you. Or, better still, wire anyway."

David Kent struggled with his emotions until he had got his feet down to the solid earth again. Then he tore up the half-written resignation and began to smite things in order for the flight. Could he make

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Number Three? Since that was the train named in Penelope's message, nothing short of a catastrophe should prevent his making it.

He did make it, with an hour to spare; an hour which he proceeded to turn into a time of sharp trial for the patient telegraph operator at the station, with his badgerings of the man for news of Number Three. The train reported—he took it as a special miracle wrought in his behalf that the Flyer was for this once abreast of her schedule—he fell to tramping up and down the long platform, deep in anticipative prefigurings. The mills of the years grind many grists besides the trickling stream of the hours: would he find Miss Brentwood as he had left her? Could he be sure of meeting her on the frank, friendly footing of the Croydon summer? He feared not; feared all things—lover-like.

He hoped there would be no absence-reared barrier to be painfully leveled. A man among men, a leader in some sort, and in battle a soldier who could hew his way painstakingly, if not dramatically, to his end, David Kent was no carpet knight, and he knew his lack. Would Elinor make things easy for him, as she used to daily in the somewhat difficult social atmosphere of the exclusive summer hotel?

Measuring it out in all its despairing length and breadth after the fact, he was deeply grateful to Pe-

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nelope. Missing her ready help at the moment of cataclysms when he entered the sleeping-car, he might have betrayed himself. His first glance lighted on Elinor and Ormsby, and he needed no gloss on the love-text. He had delayed too long; had asked too much of the Fates, and Atropos, the scissors-bearing sister, had snipped his thread of hope.

It is one of the consequences of civilization that we are denied the privilege of unmasking at the behest of the elemental emotions; that we are constrained to bleed decorously. Making shift to lean heavily on Penelope, Kent came through without doing or saying anything unseemly. Mrs. Brentwood, who had been sleeping with one eye open, and that eye upon Elinor and Ormsby, made sure that she had now no special reason to be ungracious to David Kent. For the others, Ormsby was good-naturedly suave; Elinor was by turns unwontedly kind and curiously silent; and Penelope—but, as we say, it was to Penelope that Kent owed most.

So it came about that the outcome of the cataclysm was a thing which happens often enough in a conventionalized world. David Kent, with his tragedy fresh upon him, dropped informally into place as one of the party of five; and of all the others, Penelope alone suspected how hard he was hit. And when all was said; when the new *modus vivendi* had been fairly estab-

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lished and the hour grew late, Kent went voluntarily with Ormsby to the smoking-compartment, "to play the string out decently," as he afterward confessed to Loring.

"I see you know how to get the most comfort out of your tobacco," said the club-man, when they were companionably settled in the men's room and Kent produced his pipe and tobacco pouch. "I prefer the pipe myself, for a steady thing; but at this time of night a light Castilla fits me pretty well. Try one?" tendering his cigar-case.

Fighting shrewdly against a natural prompting to regard Ormsby as an hereditary enemy, Kent forced himself to be neighborly.

"I don't mind," he said, returning the pipe to its case. And when the Havanas were well alight, and the talk had circled down upon the political situation in the State, he was able to bear his part with a fair exterior, giving Ormsby an impressionistic outline of the late campaign and the conditions that had made the sweeping triumph of the People's Party possible.

"We have been coming to it steadily through the last administration, and a part of the preceding one," he explained. "Last year the drought cut the cereals in half, and the country was too new to stand it without borrowing. There was little local capital, and the eastern article was hungry, taking all the interest the law

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allows, and as much more as it could get. This year the crop broke all records for abundance, but the price is down and the railroads, trying to recoup for two bad years, have stiffened the freight rates. The net result is our political overturn."

"Then the railroads and the corporations are not primarily to blame?" said Ormsby.

"Oh, no. Corporations here, as elsewhere, are looking out for the present dollar, but if the country were generally prosperous, the people would pay the tax carelessly, as they do in the older sections. With us it has been a sort of Donnybrook Fair: the agricultural voter has shillalahed the head he could reach most easily."

The New Yorker nodded. His millions were solidly placed, and he took no more than a sportsman's interest in the fluctuations of the stock market.

"Of course, there have been all sorts of rumors East: 'bull' prophecies that the triumph of the new party means an era of unexampled prosperity for the State—and by consequence for western stocks; 'bear' growlings that things are sure to go to the bow-wows under the Bucks régime. What do you think of it?"

Kent blew a series of smoke rings and watched them rise to become a part of the stratified tobacco cloud overhead before replying.

"I may as well confess that I am not entirely an un-

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prejudiced observer," he admitted. "For one thing, I am in the legal department of one of the best-hated of the railroads; and for another, Governor Bucks, Meigs, the attorney-general, and Hendricks, the new secretary of State, are men whom I know as, it is safe to say, the general public doesn't know them. If I could be sure that these three men are going to be able to control their own party majority in the Assembly, I should take the first train East and make my fortune selling tips in Wall Street."

"You put it graphically. Then the Bucks idea is likely to prove a disturbing element on 'Change?"

"It is; always providing it can dominate its own majority. But this is by no means certain. The political earthquake is essentially a popular protest against hard conditions brought about, as the voters seem to believe, by the oppressions of the alien corporations and extortionate railroad rates. Yet there are plenty of steady-going, conservative men in the movement; men who have no present idea of revolutionizing things. Marston, the lieutenant-governor, is one of that kind. It all depends on whether these men will allow themselves to be whipped into line by the leaders, who, as I am very well convinced, are a set of conscienceless demagogues, fighting solely for their own hand."

Ormsby nodded again.

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"You are likely to have good hunting this winter, Mr. Kent. It hasn't begun yet, I take it?"

"Oh, no; the Assembly does not convene for a fortnight, and nobody short of an inspired prophet can foretell what legislation will be sprung. But one thing is safe to count on: the leaders are out for spoils. They mean to rob somebody, and, if my guess is worth anything, they are sharp enough to try first to get their schemes legalized by having enabling laws passed by the Assembly."

"Um," said the eastern man. Then he took the measure of his companion in a shrewd overlook. "You are the man on the ground, Mr. Kent, and I'll ask a straightforward question. If you had a friend owning stock in one of the involved railways, what would you advise?"

Kent smiled.

"We needn't make it a hypothetical case. If I had the right to advise Mrs. Brentwood and her daughters, I should counsel them to sit tight in the boat for the present."

"Would you? But Western Pacific has gone off several points already."

"I know it has; and unfortunately, Mrs. Brentwood bought in at the top of the market. That is why I counsel delay. If she sells now, she is sure to lose. If she

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holds on, there is an even chance for a spasmodic upward reaction before worse things happen."

"Perhaps: you know more about the probabilities than I pretend to. But on the other hand, she may lose more if she holds on."

Kent bit deep into his cigar.

"We must see to it that she doesn't lose, Mr. Ormsby."

The club-man laughed broadly.

"Isn't that a good bit like saying that the shallop must see to it that the wind doesn't blow too hard for it?"

"Possibly. But in the sorriest wreck there is usually some small chance for salvage. I understand Mrs. Brentwood's holding is not very large?"

"A block of some three thousand shares, held jointly by her and her two daughters, I believe."

"Exactly: not enough to excite anybody's cupidity; and yet enough to turn the scale if there should ever be a fight for a majority control."

"There is no such fight in prospect, is there?"

"No; not that I know of. But I was thinking of the possibilities. If a smash comes there will be a good deal of horse-swapping in the middle of the stream—buying up of depressed stocks by people who need the lines worse than the original owners do."

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"I see," said Ormsby. "Then you would counsel delay?"

"I should; and I'll go a step farther. I am on the inside, in a way, and any hint I can give you for Miss —for Mrs. Brentwood's benefit shall be promptly forthcoming."

"By Jove! that's decent," said Ormsby, heartily. "You are a friend worth having, Mr. Kent. But which 'inside' do you mean—the railroad or the political?"

"Oh, the railroad, of course. And while I think of it, my office will be in the Quintard Building; and you—I suppose you will put up at the Wellington?"

"For the present, we all shall. It is Mrs. Brentwood's notion to take a furnished house later on for herself and daughters, if she can find one. I'll keep in touch with you."

"Do. It may come to a bit of quick wiring when our chance arrives. You know Loring—Grantham Loring?"

"Passably well. I came across him one summer in the mountains of Peru, where he was managing a railroad. He is a mighty good sort. I had mountain fever, and he took me in and did for me."

"He is with us now," said David Kent; "the newly appointed general manager of the Western Pacific."

"Good!" said the club-man. "I think a lot of him;

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he is an all-around dependable fellow, and plenty capable. I'm glad to know he has caught on higher up."

The locomotive whistle was droning again, and a dodging procession of red-eyed switch-lights flicked past the windows. Kent stood up and flung away the stump of his cigar.

"The capital," he announced. "I'll go back with you and help out with the shawl-strap things." And in the vestibule he added: "I spoke of Loring because he will be with us in anything we have to do in Mrs. Brentwood's behalf. Look him up when you have time—fourth floor of the Quintard."

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VI

OF THE MAKING OF LAWS

The session, the shortest in the history of the State, and thus far the least eventful, was nearing its close; and the alarmists who had prophesied evil and evil only of the "Populist" victory were fast losing credit with the men of their own camp and with the country at large.

After the orthodox strife over the speakership of the House, and the equally orthodox wrangle over contested seats, the State Assembly had settled down to routine business, despatching it with such unheard-of celerity as to win columns of approval from the State press as a whole; though there were not wanting a few radical editors to raise the ante-election cry of reform, and to ask pointedly when it was to begin.

Notwithstanding the lack of alarms, however, the six weeks had been a period of unceasing vigilance on the part of the interests which were supposed to be in jeopardy. Every alien corporation owning property and

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doing business in the State had its quota of watchful defenders on the ground; men who came and went, in the lobbies of the capitol, in the visitors' galleries, at the receptions; men who said little, but who saw and heard all things down to the small talk of the corridors and the clubs, and the gossip of the hotel rotundas.

David Kent was of this silent army of observation, doing watch-dog duty for the Western Pacific; thankful enough, if the truth be told, to have a thing to do which kept him from dwelling overmuch upon the wreck of his hopes. But in the closing days of the session, when a despatchful Assembly, anxious to be quit of its task, had gone into night sittings, the anodyne drug of work began to lose its effect.

The Brentwoods had taken furnished apartments in Tejon Avenue, two squares from the capitol, and Kent had called no oftener than good breeding prescribed. Yet their accessibility, and his unconquerable desire to sear his wound in the flame that had caused it, were constant temptations, and he was battling with them for the hundredth time on the Friday night when he sat in the House gallery listening to a perfunctory debate which concerned itself with a bill touching State waterways.

"Heavens! This thing is getting to be little short of deadly!" fumed Crenshawe, his right-hand neighbor, who was also a member of the corps of observation.

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"I'm going to the club for a game of pool. Won't you come along?"

Kent nodded and left his seat with the bored one. But in the great rotunda he changed his mind.

"You'll find plenty of better players than I am at the club," he said in extenuation. "I think I'll smoke a whiff or two here and go back. They can't hold on much longer for to-night."

Five minutes later, when he had lighted a cigar and was glancing over the evening paper, two other members of the corporation committee of safety came down from the Senate gallery and stopped opposite Kent's pillar to struggle into their overcoats.

"It's precisely as I wrote our people two weeks ago—a timidity scare, pure and simple," one of them was saying. "I've a mind to start home to-morrow. There is nothing doing here, or going to be done."

"No," said the other. "If it wasn't for House Bill Twenty-nine, I'd go to-night. They will adjourn to-morrow or Monday."

"House Bill Twenty-nine is much too dead to bury," was the reassuring rejoinder. "The committee is ours, and the bill will not be heard of again at this session. If that is all you are holding on for—"

They passed out of earshot, and Kent folded his newspaper absently. House Bill Twenty-nine had been the one measure touching the sensitive "vested interests";

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the one measure for the suppression of which the corporations' lobby had felt called on to take steps. It was an omnibus bill put forth as a substitute for the existing law defining the status of foreign corporations. It had originated in the governor's office,—a fact which Kent had ferreted out within twenty-four hours of its first reading,—and for that reason he had procured a printed copy, searching it diligently for the hidden menace he was sure it embodied.

When the search proved fruitless, he had seen the bill pass the House by a safe majority, had followed it to the Senate, and in a cunningly worded amendment tacked on in the upper house had found what he was seeking. Under the existing law foreign corporations were subject to State supervision, and were dealt with as presumably unfriendly aliens. But the Senate amendment to House Bill Twenty-nine fairly swept the interstate corporations, as such, out of existence, by making it obligatory upon them to acquire the standing of local corporations. Charters were to be refiled with the secretary of State; resident directories and operating headquarters were to be established within the boundaries and jurisdiction of the State; in short, the State proposed, by the terms of the new law, to deal only with creatures of its own creation.

Kent saw, or thought he saw, the fine hand of the junto in all this. It was a still hunt in which the long-

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est way around was the shortest way home. Like all new-country codes, the organic law of the State favored local corporations, and it might be argued that a bill placing the foreign companies on a purely local footing was an unmixed blessing to the aliens. But on the other hand, an unprincipled executive might easily make the new law an engine of extortion. To go no further into the matter than the required refiling of charters: the State constitution gave the secretary of State quasi-judicial powers. It was within his province to pass upon the applications for chartered rights, and to deny them if the question *pro bono publico* were involved.

Kent put two and two together, saw the wide door of exactions which might be opened, and passed the word of warning among his associates; after which he had watched the course of the amended House Bill Twenty-nine with interest sharp-set, planning meanwhile with Hildreth, the editor of the *Daily Argus*, an exposé which should make plain the immense possibilities for corruption opened up by the proposed law; a journalistic salvo of publicity to be fired as a last resort.

The measure as amended had passed the Senate without debate, and had gone back to the House. Here, after the second reading, and in the very hour when the *Argus* editorial was getting itself cast in the linotypes, there was a hitch. The member from the Rio Blanco, favoring the measure in all its parts, and fearful only

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lest corporation gold might find a technical flaw in it, moved that it be referred to the committee on judiciary for a report on its constitutionality; and, accordingly, to the committee on judiciary it had gone.

Kent recalled the passing of the crisis, remembering how he had hastened to telephone the *Argus* editor to kill the exposé at the last moment. The incident was now a month in the past, and the committee had not yet reported; would never report, Kent imagined. He knew the personnel of the committee on judiciary; knew that at least three members of it were down on the list, made up at the beginning of the session by his colleagues in the army of observation, as "approachables". Also, he knew by inference at least, that these three men had been approached, not without success, and that House Bill Twenty-nine, with its fee-gathering amendment, was safely shelved.

"It's an ill-smelling muck-heap!" he frowned, recalling the incidents of the crisis at the suggestion let fall by the two outgoing lobbyists. "And so much of this dog-watch as isn't sickeningly demoralizing is deadly dull, as Crenshawe puts it. If I had anywhere to go, I'd cut the galleries for to-night."

He was returning the newspaper to his pocket when it occurred to him that his object in buying it had been to note the stock quotations; a daily duty which, for Elinor's sake, he had never omitted. Whereupon he re-

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opened it and ran his eye down the lists. There was a decided upward tendency in westerns. Overland Short Line had gained two points; and Western Pacific—

He held the paper under the nearest electric globe to make sure: Western Pacific, preferred, was quoted at fifty-eight and a half, which was one point and a half above the Brentwood purchase price.

One minute later an excited life-saver was shut in the box of the public telephone, gritting his teeth at the inanity of the central operator who insisted on giving him "A-1224" instead of "A-1234," the Hotel Wellington.

"No, no! Can't you understand? I want twelve-thirty-four; one, two, *three,* four; the Hotel Wellington."

There was more skirling of bells, another nerve-trying wait, and at last the clerk of the hotel answered.

"What name did you say? Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Kent? Ormsby? Mr. Brookes Ormsby? No, he isn't here; he went out about two minutes ago. What's that you say? *Damn?* Well, I'm sorry, too. No message that I can take? All right. Good-by."

This was the beginning. For the middle part Kent burst out of the telephone-box and took the nearest short-cut through the capitol grounds for the street-car corner. At a quarter of nine he was cross-questioning the clerk face to face in the lobby of the Wellington. There

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was little more to be learned about Ormsby. The clubman had left his key and gone out. He was in evening dress, and had taken a cab at the hotel entrance.

Kent dashed across to his rooms and, in a feverish race against time, made himself fit to chase a man in evening dress. There was no car in sight when he came down, and he, too, took a cab with an explosive order to the driver: "124 Tejon Avenue, and be quick about it!"

It was the housemaid that answered his ring at the door of the Brentwood apartment. She was a Swede, a recent importation; hence Kent learned nothing beyond the bare fact that the ladies had gone out. "With Mr. Ormsby?" he asked.

"Yaas; Aye tank it vill pee dat yentlemans."

The pursuer took the road again, rather unhopefully. There were a dozen places where Ormsby might have taken his charges. Among them there was the legislative reception at Portia Van Brock's. Kent flipped a figurative coin, and gave the order for Alameda Square. The reception was perhaps the least unlikely place of the dozen.

He was no more than fashionably late at the Van Brock house, and fortunately he was able to reckon himself among the chosen few for whom Miss Portia's door swung on hospitable hinges at all hours. Loring had known her in Washington, and he had stood sponsor for

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Kent in the first week of the exile's residence at the capital. Thereafter she had taken Kent up on his own account, and by now he was deep in her debt. For one thing, she had set the fashion in the matter of legislative receptions—her detractors, knowing nothing whatever about it, hinted that she had been an amateur social lobbyist in Washington, playing the game for the pure zest of it—and at these functions Kent had learned many things pertinent to his purpose as watch-dog for the railroad company and legal adviser to his chief—things not named openly on the floor of the House or of the Senate chamber.

There was a crush in the ample mansion in Alameda Square, as there always was at Miss Van Brock's "open evenings," and when Kent came down from the cloak-room he had to inch his way by littles through the crowded reception-parlors in the search for the Brentwood party. It was unsuccessful at first; but later, catching a glimpse of Elinor at the piano, and another of Penelope inducting an up-country legislator into the mysteries of social small-talk, he breathed freer. His haphazard guess had hit the mark, and the finding of Ormsby was now only a question of moments.

It was Miss Van Brock herself who told him where to look for the club-man—though not at his first asking.

"You did come, then," she said, giving him her hand

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with a frank little smile of welcome. "Some one said you were not going to be frivolous any more, and I wondered if you would take it out on me. Have you been at the night session?"

"Yes; at what you and your frivolities have left of it. A good third of the Solons seem to be sitting in permanence in Alameda Square."

"'Solons'," she repeated. "That recalls Editor Brownlo's little joke—only he didn't mean it. He wrote of them as 'Solons,' but the printer got it 'solans'. The member from Caliente read the article and the word stuck in his mind. In an unhappy hour he asked Colonel Mack's boy—Harry, the irrepressible, you know—to look it up for him. Harry did it, and of course took the most public occasion he could find to hand in his answer. 'It's geese, Mr. Hackett!' he announced triumphantly; and after we were all through laughing at him the member from the warm place turned it just as neatly as a veteran. 'Well, I'm Hackett,' he said."

David Kent laughed, as he was in duty bound, but he still had Ormsby on his mind.

"I see you have Mrs. Brentwood and her daughters here: can you tell me where I can find Mr. Brookes Ormsby?"

"I suppose I could if I should try. But you mustn't hurry me. There is a vacant corner in that davenport

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beyond the piano: please put me there and fetch me an ice. I'll wait for you."

He did as he was bidden, and when she was served he stood over her, wondering, as other men had wondered, what was the precise secret of her charm. Loring had told him Miss Van Brock's story. She was southern born, the only child of a somewhat ill-considered match between a young California lawyer, wire-pulling in the national capital in the interest of the Central Pacific Railroad, and a Virginia belle tasting the delights of her first winter in Washington.

Later, the young lawyer's state, or his employers, had sent him to Congress; and Portia, left motherless in her middle childhood, had grown up in an atmosphere of statecraft, or what passes for such, in an era of frank commercialism. Inheriting her mother's rare beauty of face and form, and uniting with it a sympathetic gift in grasp of detail, political and other, she soon became her father's confidante and loyal partizan, taking the place, as a daughter might, of the ambitious young wife and mother, who had set her heart on seeing the Van Brock name on the roll of the United States Senate.

Rensselaer Van Brock had died before the senatorial dream could be realized, but not before he had made a sufficient number of lucky investments to leave his daughter the arbitress of her own future. What that

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future should be, not even Loring could guess. Since her father's death Miss Van Brock had been a citizen of the world. With a widowed aunt for the shadowiest of chaperons, she had drifted with the tide of inclination, coming finally to rest in the western capital for no better reason, perhaps, than that some portion of her interest-bearing securities were emblazoned with the great seal of this particular western State.

Kent was thinking of Loring's recountal as he stood looking down on her. Other women were younger—and with features more conventionally beautiful; Kent could find a round dozen within easy eye-reach, to say nothing of the calm-eyed, queenly *improvisatrice* at the piano—his constant standard of all womanly charm and grace. Unconsciously he fell to comparing the two, his hostess and his love, and was brought back to things present by a sharp reminder from Portia.

"Stop looking at Miss Brentwood that way, Mr. David. She is not for you; and you are keeping me waiting."

He smiled down on her.

"It is the law of compensation. I fancy you have kept many a man waiting—and will keep many another."

There was a little tang of bitterness in her laugh.

"You remind me of the time when I went home from school—oh, years and years ago. Old Chloe—she was

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my black mammy, you know—had a grown daughter of her own, and her effort to dispose of her 'M'randy' was a standing joke in the family. In answer to my stereotyped question she stood back and folded her arms. 'Naw, honey; dat M'randy ain't ma'ied yit. She gwine be des lak you; look pretty, an' say, *Howdy! Misteh Jawnson,* an' go 'long by awn turrer side de road.'"

"A very pretty little fable," said Kent. "And the moral?"

"Is that I amuse myself with you—all of you; and in your turn you make use of me—or you think you do. Of what use can I be to Mr. David Kent this evening?"

"See how you misjudge me!" he protested. "My errand here to-night is purely charitable. Which brings me back to Ormsby: did you say you could tell me where to look for him?"

"He is in the smoking-room with five or six other tobacco misanthropes. What do you want of him?"

"I want to say two words in his ear; after which I shall vanish and make room for my betters."

Miss Van Brock was gazing steadfastly at the impassioned face lighted by the piano candles.

"Is it about Miss Brentwood?" she asked abruptly.

"In a way—yes," he confessed.

She rose and stood beside him—a bewitching figure of a woman who knew her part in the human comedy and played it well.

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"Is it wise, David?" she asked softly. "I am not denying the possibilities: you might come between them if you should try—I'm rather afraid you could. But you mustn't, you know; it's too late. You've marred her, between you; or rather that convention, which makes a woman deaf, blind and dumb until a man has fairly committed himself, has marred her. For your sake she can never be quite all she ought to be to him: for his sake she could never be quite the same to you."

He drew apart from her, frowning.

"If I should say that I don't fully understand what you mean?" he rejoined.

"I should retort by saying something extremely uncomplimentary about your lack of perspicacity," she cut in maliciously.

"I beg pardon," he said, a little stiffly. "You are laboring under an entirely wrong impression. What I have to say to Mr. Brookes Ormsby does not remotely concern the matter you touch upon. It's an affair of the Stock Exchange."

"As if I didn't know!" she countered. "You merely reminded me of the other thing. But if it is only a business secret you may as well tell me all about it at first hands. Some one is sure to tell me sooner or later."

Now David Kent was growing impatient. Down in the inner depths of him he was persuaded that Ormsby

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might have difficulty in inducing Mrs. Brentwood to sell her Western Pacific stock even at an advance; might require time, at least. And time, with a Bucks majority tinkering with corporate rights in the Assembly, might well be precious.

"Forgive me if I tell Ormsby first," he pleaded. "Afterward, if you care to know, you shall."

Miss Van Brock let him go at that, but now the way to the smoking-den on the floor above was hedged up. He did battle with the polite requirements, as a man must; shaking hands or exchanging a word with one and another of the obstructors only as he had to. None the less, when he had finally wrought his way to the smoking-room Ormsby had eluded him again.

He went back to the parlors, wondering how he had missed the club-man. In the middle room of the suite he found Portia chatting with Marston, the lieutenant-governor; and a young woman in the smartest of reception gowns had succeeded to Elinor's place at the piano.

"You found him?" queried the hostess, excusing herself to the tall, saturnine man who had shared the honors at the head of the People's Party ticket with Jasper G. Bucks.

"No," said Kent. "Have you seen him?"

"Why, yes; they all came to take leave just a few mo-

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ments after you left me. I thought of telling Mr. Ormsby you were looking for him, but you shut me off so snippily—"

"Miss Van Brock! What have you done? I must go at once."

"Really? I am complimented. But if you must, you must, I suppose. I had something to tell you—something of importance; but I can't remember what it was now. I never can remember things in the hurry of leave-takings."

As we have intimated, Kent had hitherto found Miss Portia's confidences exceedingly helpful in a business way, and he hesitated. "Tell me," he begged.

"No, I can't remember it: I doubt if I shall ever remember it unless you can remind me by telling me why you are so desperately anxious to find Mr. Ormsby."

"I wonder if you hold everybody up like this," he laughed. "But I don't mind telling you. Western Pacific preferred has gone to fifty-eight and a half."

"And Mr. Ormsby has some to sell? I wish I had. Do you know what I'd do?" She drew closer and laid a hand on his arm. "I'd sell—by wire—to-night; at least, I'd make sure that my telegram would be the first thing my broker would lay his hands on in the morning."

"On general principles, I suppose: so should I, and

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for the same reason. But have I succeeded in reminding you of that thing you were going to tell me?"

"Not wholly; only partly. You said this matter of Mr. Ormsby's concerned Miss Brentwood—in a way—didn't you?"

"You will have your pound of flesh entire, won't you? The stock is hers, and her mother's and sister's. I want Ormsby to persuade them to sell. They'll listen to him. That is all; all the all."

"Of course!" she said airily. "How simple of me not to have been able to add it up without your help. I saw the quotation in the evening paper; and I know, better, perhaps, than you do, the need for haste. Must you go now?" She had taken his arm and was edging him through the press in the parlors toward the entrance hall.

"You haven't paid me yet," he objected.

"No; I'm trying to remember. Oh, yes; I have it now. Wasn't some one telling me that you are interested in House Bill Twenty-nine?"

They had reached the dimly lighted front vestibule, and her hand was still on his arm.

"I was interested in it," he admitted, correcting the present to the past tense.

"But after it went to the House committee on judiciary you left it to more skilful, or perhaps we'd better say, to less scrupulous hands?"

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"I believe you are a witch. Is there anything you don't know?"

"Plenty of things. For example, I don't know exactly how much it cost our good friends of the 'vested interests' to have that bill mislaid in the committee room. But I do know they made a very foolish bargain."

"Beyond all doubt a most demoralizing bargain, which, to say the best of it, was only a choice between two evils. But why foolish?"

"Because—well, because mislaid things have a way of turning up unexpectedly, you know, and—"

He stopped her in a sudden gust of feverish excitement.

"Tell me what you mean in one word, Miss Van Brock. Don't those fellows intend to stay bought?"

She smiled pityingly.

"You are very young, Mr. David—or very honest. Supposing those 'fellows', as you dub the honorable members of the committee on judiciary, had a little plan of their own; a plan suggested by the readiness of certain of their opponents to rush into print with statements which might derange things?"

"I am supposing it with all my might."

"That is right; we are only supposing, you must remember. We may suppose their idea was to let the excitement about the amended bill die down; to let people

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generally, and one fiercely honest young corporation attorney in particular, have time to forget that there was such a thing as House Bill Twenty-nine. And in such a suppositional case, how much they would be surprised, and how they would laugh in their sleeves, if some one came along and paid them handsomely for doing precisely what they meant to do."

David Kent's smile was almost ferocious.

"My argument is as good now as it was in the beginning: they have yet to reckon with the man who will dare to expose them."

She turned from him and spoke to the footman at the door.

"Thomas, fetch Mr. Kent's coat and hat from the dressing-room." And then to Kent, in the tone she might have used in telling him of the latest breeziness of the member from the Rio Blanco: "I remember now what it was that I wanted to tell you. While you have been trying to find Mr. Ormsby, the committee on judiciary has been reporting the long-lost House Bill Twenty-nine. If you hurry you may be in time to see it passed —it will doubtless go through without any tiresome debate. But you will hardly have time to obstruct it by arousing public sentiment through the newspapers."

David Kent shook the light touch of her hand from his arm and set his teeth hard upon a word hot from the furnace of righteous indignation. For a moment he

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fully believed she was in league with the junto; that she had been purposely holding him in talk while the very seconds were priceless.

She saw the scornful wrath in his eyes and turned it aside with a swift denial.

"No, David; I didn't do that," she said, speaking to his inmost thought. "If there had been anything you could do—the smallest shadow of a chance for you—I should have sent you flying at the first word. But there wasn't; it was all too well arranged—"

But he had snatched coat and hat from the waiting Thomas and was running like a madman for the nearest cab-stand.

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VII

THE SENTIMENTALISTS

Kent's time from Alameda Square to the capitol was the quickest a flogged cab-horse could make, but he might have spared the horse and saved the double fee. On the broad steps of the south portico he, uprushing three at a bound, met the advance guard of the gallery contingent, down-coming. The House had adjourned.

"One minute, Harnwicke!" he gasped, falling upon the first member of the corporations' lobby he could identify in the throng. "What's been done?"

"They've taken a fall out of us," was the brusk reply. "House Bill Twenty-nine was reported by the committee on judiciary and rushed through after you left. Somebody engineered it to the paring of a finger-nail: bare quorum to act; members who might have filibustered weeded out, on one pretext or another, to a man; pages all excused, and nobody here with the privilege of the floor. It was as neat a piece of gag-work as I ever hope to see if I live to be a hundred."

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Kent faced about and joined the townward dispersal with his informant.

"Well, I suppose that settles it definitely; at least, until we can test its constitutionality in the courts," he said.

Harnwicke thought not, being of the opinion that the vested interests would never say die until they were quite dead. As assistant counsel for the Overland Short Line, he was in some sense the dean of the corps of observation, and could speak with authority.

"There is one chance left for us this side of the courts," he went on; "and now I think of it, you are the man to say how much of a chance it is. The bill still lacks the governor's signature."

Kent shook his head.

"It is his own measure. I have proof positive that he and Meigs and Hendricks drafted it. And all this fine-haired engineering to-night was his, or Meigs'."

"Of course; we all know that. But we don't know the particular object yet. Do they need the new law in their business as a source of revenue? Or do they want to be hired to kill it? In other words, does Bucks want a lump sum for a veto? You know the man better than any of us."

"By Jove!" said Kent. "Do you mean to say you would buy the governor of a state?"

Harnwicke turned a cold eye on his companion as

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they strode along. He was of the square-set, plain-spoken, aggressive type—a finished product of the modern school of business lawyers.

"I don't understand that you are raising the question of ethics at this stage of the game, do I?" he remarked.

Kent fired up a little.

"And if I am?" he retorted.

"I should say you had missed your calling. It is baldly a question of business—or rather of self-preservation. We needn't mince matters among ourselves. If Bucks is for sale, we buy him."

Kent shrugged.

"There isn't any doubt about his purchasability. But I confess I don't quite see how you will go about it."

"Never mind that part of it; just leave the ways and means with those of us who have riper experience—and fewer hamperings, perhaps—than you have. Your share in it is to tell us how big a bid we must make. As I say, you know the man."

David Kent was silent for the striding of half a square. The New England conscience dies hard, and while it lives it is given to drawing sharp lines on all the boundaries of culpability. Kent ended by taking the matter in debate violently out of the domain of ethics and standing it upon the ground of expediency.

"It will cost too much. You would have to bid high—not to overcome his scruples, for he has none;

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but to satisfy his greed—which is abnormal. And, besides, he has his pose to defend. If he can see his way clear to a harvest of extortions under the law, he will probably turn you down—and will make it hot for you later on in the name of outraged virtue."

Harnwicke's laugh was cynical.

"He and his little clique don't own the earth in fee simple. Perhaps we shall be able to make them grasp that idea before we are through with them. We have had this fight on in other states. Would ten thousand be likely to satisfy him?"

"No," said Kent. "If you add another cipher, it might."

"A hundred thousand is a pot of money. I take it for granted the Western Pacific will stand its prorate?"

The New England conscience bucked again, and Kent made his first open protest against the methods of the demoralizers.

"I am not in a position to say: I should advise against it. Unofficially, I think I can speak for Loring and the Boston people. We are not more saintly than other folk, perhaps; and we are not in the railroad business for health or pleasure. But I fancy the Advisory Board would draw the line at bribing a governor—at any rate, I hope it would."

"Rot!" said Harnwicke. And then: "You'll reap

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the benefits with other interstate interests; you'll have to come in."

Kent hesitated, but not now on the ground of the principle to be defended.

"That brings in a question which I am not competent to decide. Loring is your man. You will call a conference of the 'powers,' I take it?"

"It is already called. I sent Atherton out to notify everybody as soon as the trap was sprung in the House. We meet in the ordinary at the Camelot. You'll be there?"

"A little later—if Loring wants me. I have some telephoning to do before this thing gets on the wires."

They parted at the entrance to the Camelot Club, and Kent went two squares farther on to the Wellington. Ormsby had not yet returned, and Kent went to the telephone and called up the Brentwood apartments. It was Penelope that answered.

"Well, I think you owe it," she began, as soon as he had given his name. "What did I do at Miss Van Brock's to make you cut me dead?"

"Why, nothing at all, I'm sure. I—I was looking for Mr. Ormsby, and—"

"Not when I saw you," she broke in flippantly. "You were handing Miss Portia an ice. Are you still looking for Mr. Ormsby?"

"I am—just that. Is he with you?"

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"No; he left here about twenty minutes ago. Is it anything serious?"

"Serious enough to make me want to find him as soon as I can. Did he say he was coming down to the Wellington?"

"Of course, he didn't," laughed Penelope. And then: "Whatever is the matter with you this evening, Mr. Kent?"

"I guess I'm a little excited," said Kent. "Something has happened—something I can't talk about over the wires. It concerns you and your mother and sister. You'll know all about it as soon as I can find Ormsby and send him out to you."

Penelope's "Oh!" was long-drawn and gasping.

"Is any one dead?" she faltered.

"No, no; it's nothing of that kind. I'll send Ormsby out, and he will tell you all about it."

"Can't you come yourself?"

"I may have to if I can't find Ormsby. Please don't let your mother go to bed until you have heard from one or the other of us. Did you get that?"

"Ye-es; but I should like to know more—a great deal more."

"I know; and I'd like to tell you. But I am using the public telephone here at the Wellington, and—Oh, damn!" Central had cut him out, and it was some minutes before the connection was switched in again.

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"Is that you, Miss Penelope? All right; I wasn't quite through. When Ormsby comes, you must do as he tells you to, and you and Miss Elinor must help him convince your mother. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't understand anything. For goodness' sake, find Mr. Ormsby and make him run! This is perfectly dreadful!"

"Isn't it? And I'm awfully sorry. Good-by."

Kent hung up the receiver, and when he was asking a second time at the clerk's desk for the missing man, Ormsby came in to answer for himself. Whereupon the crisis was outlined to him in brief phrase, and he rose to the occasion, though not without a grimace.

"I'm not sure just how well you know Mrs. Hepzibah Brentwood," he demurred; "but it will be quite like her to balk. Don't you think you'd better go along? You are the company's attorney, and your opinion ought to carry some weight."

David Kent thought not; but a cautious diplomatist, having got the idea well into the back part of his head, was not to be denied.

"Of course, you'll come. You are just the man I'll need to back me up. I sha'n't shirk; I'll take the mother into the library and break the ice, while you are squaring things with the young women. Penelope won't care the snap of her finger either way; but Elinor has some notions that you are fitter to cope with than

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I am. After, if you can give me a lift with Mrs. Hepzibah, I'll call you in. Come on; it's getting pretty late to go visiting."

Kent yielded reluctantly, and they took a car for the sake of speed. It was Penelope who opened the door for them at 124 Tejon Avenue; and Ormsby made it easy for his coadjutor, as he had promised.

"I want to see your mother in the library for a few minutes," he began. "Will you arrange it, and take care of Mr. Kent until I come for him?"

Penelope "arranged" it, not without another added pang of curiosity, whereupon David Kent found himself the rather embarrassed third of a silent trio gathered about the embers of the sitting-room fire.

"Is it to be a Quaker meeting?" asked Penelope, sweetly, when the silence had grown awe-inspiring.

Kent laughed for pure joy at the breaking of the spell.

"One would think we had come to drag you all off to jail, Ormsby and I," he said; and then he went on to explain. "It's about your Western Pacific stock, you know. To-day's quotations put it a point and a half above your purchase price, and we've come to persuade you to unload, *pronto,* as the member from the Rio Blanco would say."

"Is that all?" said Penelope, stifling a yawn. "Then

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I'm not in it: I'm an infant." And she rose and went to the piano.

"You haven't told us all of it: what has happened?" queried Elinor, speaking for the first time since her greeting of Kent.

He briefed the story of House Bill Twenty-nine for her, pointing out the probabilities.

"Of course, no one can tell what the precise effect will be," he qualified. "But in my opinion it is very likely to be destructive of dividends. Skipping the dry details, the new law, which is equitable enough on its face, can be made an engine of extortion in the hands of those who administer it. In fact, I happen to know that it was designed and carried through for that very purpose."

She smiled.

"I have understood you were in the opposition. Are you speaking politically?"

"I am stating the plain fact," said Kent, nettled a little by her coolness. "Decadent Rome never lifted a baser set of demagogues into office than we have here in this State at the present moment."

He spoke warmly, and she liked him best when he put her on the footing of an equal antagonist.

"I can't agree with your inference," she objected. "As a people we are neither obsequious nor stupid."

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"Perhaps not. But it is one of the failures of a popular government that an honest majority may be controlled and directed by a small minority of shrewd rascals. That is exactly what has happened in the passage of this bill. I venture to say that not one man in ten who voted for it had the faintest suspicion that it was a 'graft'."

"If that be true, what chances there are for men with the gift of true leadership and a love of pure justice in their hearts!" she said half-absently; and he started forward and said: "I beg pardon?"

She let the blue-gray eyes meet his and there was a passing shadow of disappointment in them.

"I ought to beg yours. I'm afraid I was thinking aloud. But it is one of my dreams. If I were a man I should go into politics."

"To purify them?"

"To do my part in trying. The great heart of the people is honest and well-meaning: I think we all admit that. And there is intelligence, too. But human nature is the same as it used to be when they set up a man who *could* and called him a king. Gentle or simple, it must be led."

"There is no lack of leadership, such as it is," he hazarded.

"No; but there seems to be a pitiful lack of the right kind: men who will put self-seeking and un-

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worthy ambition aside and lift the standard of justice and right-doing for its own sake. Are there any such men nowadays?"

"I don't know," he rejoined gravely. "Sometimes I'm tempted to doubt it. It is a frantic scramble for place and power for the most part. The kind of man you have in mind isn't in it; shuns it as he would a plague spot."

She contradicted him firmly.

"No, the kind of man I have in mind wouldn't shun it; he would take hold with his hands and try to make things better; he would put the selfish temptations under foot and give the people a leader worth following—be the real mind and hand of the well-meaning majority."

Kent shook his head slowly.

"Not unless we admit a motive stronger than the abstraction which we call patriotism."

"I don't understand," she said; meaning, rather, that she refused to understand.

"I mean that such a man, however exalted his views might be, would have to have an object more personal to him than the mere dutiful promptings of patriotism to make him do his best."

"But that would be self-seeking again."

"Not necessarily in the narrow sense. The old knightly chivalry was a beautiful thing in its way, and

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it gave an uplift to an age which would have been frankly brutal without it: yet it had its well-spring in what appeals to us now as being a rather fantastic sentiment."

"And we are not sentimentalists?" she suggested.

"No; and it's the worse for us in some respects. You will not find your ideal politician until you find a man with somewhat of the old knightly spirit in him. And I'll go further and say that when you do find him he will be at heart the champion of the woman he loves rather than that of a political constituency."

She became silent at that, and for a time the low sweet harmonies of the nocturne Penelope was playing filled the gap.

Kent left his chair and began to wish honestly for Ormsby's return. He was searing the wound again, and the process was more than commonly painful. They had been speaking in figures, as a man and a woman will; yet he made sure the mask of metaphor was transparent, no less to her than to him. As many times before, his heart was crying out to her; but now behind the cry there was an upsurging tidal wave of emotion new and strange; a toppling down of barriers and a sweeping inrush of passionate rebellion.

Why had she put it out of her power to make him her champion in the Field of the Lust of Mastery? Instantly, and like a revealing lightning flash, it dawned

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upon him that this was his awakening. Something of himself she had shown him in the former time: how he was rusting inactive in the small field when he should be doing a man's work, the work for which his training had fitted him, in the larger. But the glamour of sentiment had been over it all in those days, and to the passion-warped the high call is transmitted in terms of self-seeking.

He turned upon her suddenly.

"Did you mean to reproach me?" he asked abruptly.

"How absurd!"

"No, it isn't. You are responsible for me, in a certain sense. You sent me out into the world, and somehow I feel as if I had disappointed you."

"'But what went ye out for to see?'" she quoted softly.

"I know," he nodded, sitting down again. "You thought you were arousing a worthy ambition, but it was only avarice that was quickened. I've been trying to be a money-getter."

"You can be something vastly better."

"No, I am afraid not; it is too late."

Again the piano-mellowed silence supervened, and Kent put his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, being very miserable. He believed now what he had been slow to credit before: that he had it in him to hew his way to the end of the line if only

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the motive were strong enough to call out all the reserves of battle-might and courage. That motive she alone, of all the women in the world, might have supplied, he told himself in keen self-pity. With her love to arm him, her clear-eyed faith to inspire him. . . . He sat up straight and pushed the cup of bitter herbs aside. There would be time enough to drain it farther on.

"Coming back to the stock market and the present crisis," he said, breaking the silence in sheer self-defense; "Ormsby and I—"

She put the resurrected topic back into its grave with a little gesture of apathetic impatience she used now and then with Ormsby.

"I suppose I ought to be interested, but I am not," she confessed. "Mother will do as she thinks best, and we shall calmly acquiesce, as we always do."

David Kent was not sorry to be relieved in so many words of the persuasive responsibility, and the talk drifted into reminiscence, with the Croydon summer for a background.

It was a dangerous pastime for Kent; perilous, and subversive of many things. One of his meliorating comforts had been the thought that however bitter his own disappointment was, Elinor at least was happy. But in this new-old field of talk a change came over her and he was no longer sure she was entirely happy.

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She was saying things with a flavor akin to cynicism in them, as thus:

"Do you remember how we used to go into raptures of pious indignation over the make-believe sentiment of the summer man and the summer girl? I recollect your saying once that it was wicked; a desecration of things which ought to be held sacred. It isn't so very long ago, but I think we were both very young that summer—years younger than we can ever be again. Don't you?"

"Doubtless," said David Kent. He was at a pass in which he would have agreed with her if she had asserted that black was white. It was not weakness; it was merely that he was absorbed in a groping search for the word which would fit her changed mood.

"We have learned to be more charitable since," she went on; "more charitable and less sentimental, perhaps. And yet we prided ourselves on our sincerity in that young time, don't you think?"

"I, at least, was sincere," he rejoined bluntly. He had found the mood-word at last: it was resentment; though, being a man, he could see no good reason why the memories of the Croydon summer should make her resentful.

She was not looking at him when she said: "No; sincerity is always just. And you were not quite just, I think."

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"To you?" he demanded.

"Oh, no; to yourself."

Portia Van Brock's accusation was hammering itself into his brain. *You have marred her between you. . . . For your sake she can never be quite all she ought to be to him; for his sake she could never be quite the same to you.* A cold wave of apprehension submerged him. In seeking to do the most unselfish thing that offered, had he succeeded only in making her despise him?

The question was still hanging answerless when there came the sound of a door opening and closing, and Ormsby stood looking in upon them.

"We needn't keep these sleepy young persons out of bed any longer," he announced briefly; and the co-adjutor said good-night and joined him at once.

"What luck?" was David Kent's anxious query when they were free of the house and had turned their faces townward.

"Just as much as we might have expected. Mrs. Hepzibah refuses point-blank to sell her stock—won't talk about it. 'The idea of parting with it now, when it is actually worth more than it was when we bought it!'" he quoted, mimicking the thin-lipped, acidulous protest. "Later, in an evil minute, I tried to drag you in, and she let you have it square on the point of the

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jaw—intimated that it was a deal in which some of you inside people needed her block of stock to make you whole. She did, by Jove!"

Kent's laugh was mirthless.

"I was never down in her good books," he said, by way of accounting for the accusation.

If Ormsby thought he knew the reason why, he was magnanimous enough to steer clear of that shoal.

"It's a mess," he growled. "I don't fancy you had any better luck with Elinor."

"She seemed not to care much about it either way. She said her mother would have the casting vote."

"I know. What I don't know is, what remains to be done."

"More waiting," said Kent, definitively. "The fight is fairly on now—as between the Bucks crowd and the corporations, I mean—but there will probably be ups and downs enough to scare Mrs. Brentwood into letting go. We must be ready to strike when the iron is hot; that's all."

The New Yorker tramped a full square in thoughtful silence before he said: "Candidly, Kent, Mrs. Hepzibah's little stake in Western Pacific isn't altogether a matter of life and death to me, don't you know? If it comes to the worst, I can have my broker play the part of the god in the car. Happily, or unhappily,

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whichever way you like to put it, I sha'n't miss what he may have to put up to make good on her three thousand shares."

David Kent stopped short and wheeled suddenly upon his companion.

"Ormsby, that's a thing I've been afraid of, all along; and it's the one thing you must never do."

"Why not?" demanded the straightforward Ormsby.

Kent knew he was skating on the thinnest of ice, but his love for Elinor made him fearless of consequences.

"If you don't know without being told, it proves that your money has spoiled you to that extent. It is because you have no right to entrap Miss Brentwood into an obligation that would make her your debtor for the very food she eats and the clothes she wears. You will say she need never know: be very sure she would find out, one way or another; and she would never forgive you."

"Um," said Ormsby, turning visibly grim. "You are frank enough—to draw it mildly. Another man in my place might suggest that it isn't Mr. David Kent's affair."

Kent turned about and caught step again.

"I've said my say—all of it," he rejoined stolidly. "We've been decently modern up to now, and we won't go back to the elemental things so late in the day. All

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the same, you'll not take it amiss if I say that I know Miss Brentwood rather better than you do."

Ormsby did not say whether he would or would not, and the talk went aside to less summary ways and means preservative of the Brentwood fortunes. But at the archway of the Camelot Club, where Kent paused, Ormsby went back to the debatable ground in an outspoken word.

"I know pretty well now what there is between us, Kent, and we mustn't quarrel if we can help it," he said. "If you complain that I didn't give you a fair show, I'll retort that I didn't dare to. Are you satisfied?"

"No," said David Kent; and with that they separated.

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VIII

THE HAYMAKERS

By the terms of its dating clause the new trust and corporation law became effective at once, "the public welfare requiring it"; and though there was an immediate sympathetic decline in the securities involved, there was no panic, financial or industrial, to mark the change from the old to the new.

Contrary to the expectations of the alarmists and the lawyers, and somewhat to the disappointment of the latter, the vested interests showed no disposition to test the constitutionality of the act in the courts. So far, indeed, from making difficulties, the various alien corporations affected by the new law wheeled promptly into line in compliance with its provisions, vying with one another in proving, or seeming to prove, the time-worn aphorism that capital can never afford to be otherwise than strictly law-abiding.

In the reorganization of the Western Pacific, David Kent developed at once and heartily into that rare and

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much-sought-for quantity, a man for an emergency. Loring, also, was a busy man in this transition period, yet he found time to keep an appreciative eye on Kent, and, true to his implied promise, pushed him vigorously for the first place in the legal department of the localized company. Since the resident manager stood high in the Boston counsels of the company, the pushing was not without results; and while David Kent was still up to his eyes in the work of flogging the affairs of the newly named Trans-Western into conformity with the law, his appointment as general counsel came from the Advisory Board.

At one time, when success in his chosen vocation meant more to him than he thought it could ever mean again, the promoted subordinate would have had an attack of jubilance little in keeping with the grave responsibilities of his office. As it fell out, he was too busy to celebrate, and too sore on the sentimental side to rejoice. Hence, his recognition of the promotion was merely a deeper plunge into the flood of legalities and the adding of two more stenographers to his office force.

Now there is this to be said of such submersive battlings in a sea of work: while the fierce toil of the buffeting may be good for the swimmer's soul, it necessarily narrows his horizon, inasmuch as a man with his head in the sea-smother lacks the view-point of the captain who fights his ship from the conning tower.

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So it befell that while the newly appointed general counsel of the reorganized Western Pacific was bolting his meals and clipping the nights at both ends in a strenuous endeavor to clear the decks for a possible battle-royal at the capital, events of a minatory nature were shaping themselves elsewhere.

To bring these events down to their focusing point in the period of transition, it is needful to go back a little; to a term of the circuit court held in the third year of Gaston the prosperous.

Who Mrs. Melissa Varnum was; how she came to be traveling from Midland City to the end of the track on a scalper's ticket; and in what manner she was given her choice of paying fare to the conductor or leaving the train at Gaston—these are details with which we need not concern ourselves. Suffice it to say that Kent, then local attorney for the company, mastered them; and when Mrs. Varnum, through Hawk, her counsel, sued for five thousand dollars damages, he was able to get a continuance, knowing from long experience that the jury would certainly find for the plaintiff if the case were then allowed to go to trial.

And at the succeeding term of court, which was the one that adjourned on the day of Kent's transfer to the capital, two of the company's witnesses had disappeared; and the one bit of company business Kent had been successful in doing that day was to postpone

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for a second time the coming to trial of the Varnum case.

It was while Kent's head was deepest in the flood of reorganization that a letter came from one Blashfield Hunnicott, his successor in the local attorneyship at Gaston, asking for instructions in the Varnum matter. Judge MacFarlane's court would convene in a week. Was he, Hunnicott, to let the case come to trial? Or should he—the witnesses still being unproducible—move for a further continuance?

Kent took his head out of the cross-seas long enough to answer. By all means Hunnicott was to obtain another continuance, if possible. And if, before the case were called, there should be any new developments, he was to wire at once to the general office, and further instructions would issue.

It was about this time, or, to be strictly accurate, on the day preceding the convening of Judge MacFarlane's court in Gaston, that Governor Bucks took a short vacation—his first since the adjournment of the Assembly.

One of the mysteries of this man—the only one for which his friends could not always account plausibly—was his habit of dropping out for a day or a week at irregular intervals, leaving no clue by which he could be traced. While he was merely a private citizen these

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disappearances figured in the local notes of the Gaston *Clarion* as "business trips," object and objective point unknown or at least unstated; but since his election the newspapers were usually more definite. On this occasion, the public was duly informed that "Governor Bucks, with one or two intimate friends, was taking a few days' recreation with rod and gun on the headwaters of Jump Creek"—a statement which the governor's private secretary stood ready to corroborate to all and sundry calling at the gubernatorial rooms on the second floor of the capitol.

Now it chanced that, like all gossip, this statement was subject to correction as to details in favor of the exact fact. It is true that the governor, his gigantic figure clad in sportsmanlike brown duck, might have been seen boarding the train on the Monday evening; and in addition to the ample hand-bag there were rod and gun cases to bear out the newspaper notices. None the less, it was equally true that the keeper of the Gun Club shooting-box at the terminus of the Trans-Western's Jump Creek branch was not called upon to entertain so distinguished a guest as the State executive. Also, it might have been remarked that the governor traveled alone.

Late that same night, Stephen Hawk was keeping a rather discomforting vigil with a visitor in the best suite of rooms the Mid-Continent Hotel in Gaston af-

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forded. The guest of honor was a brother lawyer—though he might have refused to acknowledge the relationship with the ex-district attorney—a keen-eyed, business-like gentleman, whose name as an organizer of vast capitalistic ventures had traveled far, and whose present attitude was one of undisguised and angry contempt for Gaston and all things Gastonian.

"How much longer have we to wait?" he demanded impatiently, when the hands of his watch pointed to the quarter-hour after ten. "You've made me travel two thousand miles to see this thing through: why didn't you make sure of having your man here?"

Hawk wriggled uneasily in his chair. He was used to being bullied, not only by the good and great, but by the little and evil as well. Yet there was a rasp to the great man's impatience that irritated him.

"I've been trying to tell you all the evening that I'm only the hired man in this business, Mr. Falkland. I can't compel the attendance of the other parties."

"Well, it's damned badly managed, as far as we've gone," was the ungracious comment. "You say the judge refuses to confer with me?"

"Ab-so-lutely."

"And the train—the last train the other man can come on; is that in yet?"

Hawk consulted his watch.

"A good half-hour ago."

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"You had your clerk at the station to meet it?"

"I did."

"And he hasn't reported?"

"Not yet."

Falkland took a cigar from his case, bit the end of it like a man with a grudge to satisfy, and began again.

"There is a very unbusinesslike mystery about all this, Mr. Hawk, and I may as well tell you shortly that my time is too valuable to make me tolerant of half-confidences. Get to the bottom of it. Has your man weakened?"

"No; he is not of the weakening kind. And, besides, the scheme is his own from start to finish, as you know."

"Well, what is the matter, then?"

Hawk rose.

"If you will be patient a little while longer, I'll go to the wire and try to find out. I am as much in the dark as you are."

This last was not strictly true. Hawk had a telegram in his pocket which was causing him more uneasiness than all the rasping criticisms of the New York attorney, and he was re-reading it by the light of the corridor bracket when a young man sprang from the ascending elevator and hurried to the door of the parlor suite. Hawk collared his Mercury before he could rap on the door.

"Well?" he queried sharply.

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"It's just as you suspected—what Mr. Hendricks' telegram hinted at. I met him at the station and couldn't do a thing with him."

"Where has he gone?"

"To the same old place."

"You followed him?"

"Sure. That is what kept me so long."

Hawk hung upon his decision for the barest fraction of a second. Then he gave his orders concisely.

"Hunt up Doctor Macquoid and get him out to the club-house as quick as you can. Tell him to bring his hypodermic. I'll be there with all the help he'll need." And when the young man was gone, Hawk smote the air with a clenched fist and called down the Black Curse of Shielygh, or its modern equivalent, on all the fates subversive of well-laid plans.

A quarter of an hour later, on the upper floor of the club-house at the Gentlemen's Driving Park, four men burst in upon a fifth, a huge figure in brown duck, crouching in a corner like a wild beast at bay. A bottle and a tumbler stood on the table under the hanging lamp; and with the crash of breaking glass which followed the mad-bull rush of the duck-clothed giant, the reek of French brandy filled the room.

"Hold him still, if you can, and pull up that sleeve." It was Macquoid who spoke, and the three apparitors, breathing hard, sat upon the prostrate man and bared

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his arm for the physician. When the apomorphia began to do its work there was a struggle of another sort, out of which emerged a pallid and somewhat stricken reincarnation of the governor.

"Falkland is waiting at the hotel, and he and MacFarlane can't get together," said Hawk, tersely, when the patient was fit to listen. "Otherwise we shouldn't have disturbed you. It's all day with the scheme if you can't show up."

The governor groaned and passed his hand over his eyes.

"Get me into my clothes—Johnson has the grip—and give me all the time you can," was the sullen rejoinder; and in due course the Honorable Jasper G. Bucks, clothed upon and in his right mind, was enabled to keep his appointment with the New York attorney at the Mid-Continent Hotel.

But first came the whipping-in of MacFarlane. Bucks went alone to the judge's room on the floor above the parlor suite. It was now near midnight, but MacFarlane had not gone to bed. He was a spare man, with thin hair graying rapidly at the temples and a care-worn face; the face of a man whose tasks or responsibilities, or both, have overmatched him. He was walking the floor with his head down and his hands—thin, nerveless hands they were—tightly locked behind him, when the governor entered.

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For a large man the Honorable Jasper was usually able to handle his weight admirably; but now he clung to the door-knob until he could launch himself at a chair and be sure of hitting it.

"What's this Hawk's telling me about you, MacFarlane?" he demanded, frowning portentously.

"I don't know what he has told you. But it is too flagrant, Bucks; I can't do it, and that's all there is about it." The protest was feebly fierce, and there was the snarl of a baited animal in the tone.

"It's too late to make difficulties now," was the harsh reply. "You've got to do it."

"I tell you I can not, and I will not!"

"A late attack of conscience, eh?" sneered the governor, who was sobering rapidly now. "Let me ask a question or two. How much was that security debt your son-in-law let you in for?"

"It was ten thousand dollars. It is an honest debt, and I shall pay it."

"But not out of the salary of a circuit judge," Bucks interposed. "Nor yet out of the fees you make your clerks divide with you. And that isn't all. Have you forgotten the gerrymander business? How would you like to see the true inwardness of that in the newspapers?"

The judge shrank as if the huge gesturing hand had struck him.

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"You wouldn't dare," he began. "You were in that, too, deeper than—"

Again the governor interrupted him.

"Cut it out," he commanded. "I can reward, and I can punish. You are not going to do anything technically illegal; but, by the gods, you are going to walk the line laid down for you. If you don't, I shall give the documents in the gerrymander affair to the papers the day after you fail. Now we'll go and see Falkland."

MacFarlane made one last protest.

"For God's sake, Bucks! spare me that. It is nothing less than the foulest collusion between the judge, the counsel for the plaintiff—and the devil!"

"Cut that out, too, and come along," said the governor, brutally; and by the steadying help of the chair, the door-post and the wall of the corridor, he led the way to the parlor suite on the floor below.

The conference in Falkland's rooms was chiefly a monologue with the sharp-spoken New York lawyer in the speaking part. When it was concluded the judge took his leave abruptly, pleading the lateness of the hour and his duties for the morrow. When he was gone the New Yorker began again.

"You won't want to be known in this, I take it," he said, nodding at the governor. "Mr. Hawk here will answer well enough for the legal part, but how about

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the business end of it. Have you got a man you can trust?"

The governor's yellow eyebrows met in a meaning scowl.

"I've got a man I can hang, which is more to the purpose. It's Major Jim Guilford. He lives here; want to meet him?"

"God forbid!" said Falkland, fervently. He rose and whipped himself into his overcoat, turning to Hawk: "Have your young man get me a carriage, and see to it that my special is ready to pull east when I give the word, will you?"

Hawk went obediently, and the New Yorker had his final word with the governor alone.

"I think we understand each other perfectly," he said. "You are to have the patronage: we are to pay for all actual betterments for which vouchers can be shown at the close of the deal. All we ask is that the stock be depressed to the point agreed upon within the half-year."

"It's going to be done," said the governor, trying as he could to keep the eye-image of his fellow conspirator from multiplying itself by two.

"All right. Now as to the court affair. If it is managed exactly as I have outlined, there will be no trouble —and no recourse for the other fellows. When I say

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that, I'm leaving out your Supreme Court. Under certain conditions, if the defendant's hardship could be definitely shown, a writ of *certiorari* and *supersedeas* might issue. How about that?"

The governor closed one eye slowly, the better to check the troublesome multiplying process.

"The Supreme Court won't move in the matter. The ostensible reason will be that the court is now two years behind its docket."

"And the real reason?"

"Of the three justices, one of them was elected on our ticket; another is a personal friend of Judge MacFarlane. The goods will be delivered."

"That's all, then; all but one word. Your judge is a weak brother. Notwithstanding all the pains I took to show him that his action would be technically unassailable, he was ready to fly the track at any moment. Have you got him safe?"

Bucks held up one huge hand with the thumb and forefinger tightly pressed together.

"I've got him right there," he said. "If you and Hawk have got your papers in good shape, the thing will go through like a hog under a barbed-wire fence."

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IX

THE SHOCKING OF HUNNICOTT

It was two weeks after the date of the governor's fishing trip, and by consequence Judge MacFarlane's court had been the even fortnight in session in Gaston, when Kent's attention was recalled to the forgotten Varnum case by another letter from the local attorney, Hunnicott.

"Varnum *vs.* Western Pacific comes up Friday of this week, and they are going to press for trial this time, and no mistake," wrote the local representative. "Hawk has been chasing around getting affidavits; for what purpose I don't know, though Lesher tells me that one of them was sworn by Houligan, the sub-contractor who tried to fight the engineer's estimates on the Jump Creek work.

"Also, there is a story going the rounds that the suit is to be made a blind for bigger game, though I guess this is all gossip, based on the fact that Mr. Semple Falkland's private car stopped over here two weeks ago,

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from three o'clock in the afternoon till midnight of the same day. Jason, of the *Clarion,* interviewed the New Yorker, and Falkland told him he had stopped over to look up the securities on a mortgage held by one of his New York clients."

Kent read this unofficial letter thoughtfully, and later on took it in to the general manager.

"Just to show you the kind of jackal we have to deal with in the smaller towns," he said, by way of explanation. "Here is a case that Stephen Hawk built up out of nothing a year ago. The woman was put off one of our trains because she was trying to travel on a scalper's ticket. She didn't care to fight about it; but when I had about persuaded her to compromise for ten dollars and a pass to her destination, Hawk got hold of her and induced her to sue for five thousand dollars."

"Well?" said Loring.

"We fought it, of course—in the only way it could be fought in the lower court. I got a continuance, and we choked it off in the same way at the succeeding term. The woman was tired out long ago, but Hawk will hang on till his teeth fall out."

"Do you 'continue' again?" asked the general manager.

Kent nodded.

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"I so instructed Hunnicott. Luckily, two of our most important witnesses are missing. They have always been missing, in point of fact."

Loring was glancing over the letter.

"How about this affidavit business, and the Falkland stop-over?" he asked.

"Oh, I fancy that's gossip, pure and simple, as Hunnicott says. Hawk is sharp enough not to let us know if he were baiting a trap. And Falkland probably told the *Clarion* man the simple truth."

Loring nodded in his turn. Then he broke away from the subject abruptly. "Sit down," he said; and when Kent had found a chair: "I had a caller this morning—Senator Duvall."

State Senator Duvall had been the father, or the ostensible father, of the Senate amendment to House Bill Twenty-nine. He was known to the corporations' lobby as a legislator who would sign a railroad's death-warrant with one hand and take favors from it with the other; and Kent laughed.

"How many did he demand passes for, this time? Or was it a special train he wanted?"

"Neither the one nor the other, this morning, as it happened," said the general manager. "Not to put too fine an edge upon it, he had something to sell, and he wanted me to buy it."

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"What was it?" Kent asked quickly.

Loring was rubbing his eye-glasses absently with the corner of his handkerchief.

"I guess I made a mistake in not turning him over to you, David. He was too smooth for me. I couldn't find out just what it was he had for sale. He talked vaguely about an impending crisis and a man who had some information to dispose of; said the man had come to him because he was known to be a firm friend of the Trans-Western, and so on."

Kent gave his opinion promptly.

"It's a capitol-gang deal of some sort to hold us up; and Duvall is willing to sell out his fellow conspirators if the price is right."

"Have you any notion of what it is?"

Kent shook his head.

"Not the slightest. The ways have been tallowed for us, thus far, and I don't fully understand it. I presented our charter for re-filing yesterday, and Hendricks passed it without a word. As I was coming out of the secretary's office I met Bucks. We were pretty nearly open enemies in the old days in Gaston, but he went out of his way to shake hands and to congratulate me on my appointment as general counsel."

"That was warning in itself, wasn't it?"

"I took it that way. But I can't fathom his drift;

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which is the more unaccountable since I have it on pretty good authority that the ring is cinching the other companies right and left. Some one was saying at the Camelot last night that the Overland's reorganization of its within-the-State lines was going to cost all kinds of money in excess of the legal fees."

Loring's smile was a wordless sarcasm.

"It's the reward of virtue," he said ironically. "We were not in the list of subscribers to the conditional fund for purchasing a certain veto which didn't materialize."

"And for that very reason, if for no other, we may look out for squalls," Kent asserted. "Jasper G. Bucks has a long memory; and just now the fates have given him an arm to match. I am fortifying everywhere I can, but if the junto has it in for us, we'll be made to sweat blood before we are through with it."

"Which brings us back to Senator Duvall. Is it worth while trying to do anything with him?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm opposed to the method—the bargain and sale plan—and I know you are. Turn him over to me if he comes in again."

When Kent had dictated a letter in answer to Hunnicott's, he dismissed the Varnum matter from his mind, having other and more important things to think of. So, on the Friday, when the case was reached on

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Judge MacFarlane's docket—but really, it is worth our while to be present in the Gaston court-room to see and hear what befalls.

When the Varnum case was called, Hunnicott promptly moved for a third continuance, in accordance with his instructions. The judge heard his argument, the old and well-worn one of the absence of important witnesses, with perfect patience; and after listening to Hawk's protest, which was hardly more than mechanical, he granted the continuance.

Then came the after-piece. Court adjourned, and immediately Hawk asked leave to present, "at chambers," an amended petition. Hunnicott was waylaid by a court officer as he was leaving the room; and a moment later, totally unprepared, he was in the judge's office, listening in some dazed fashion while Hawk went glibly through the formalities of presenting his petition.

Not until the papers were served upon him as the company's attorney, and the judge was naming three o'clock of the following afternoon as the time which he would appoint for the preliminary hearing, did the local attorney come alive.

"But, your Honor!—a delay of only twenty-four hours in which to prepare a rejoinder to this petition—to allegations of such astounding gravity?" he began,

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shocked into action by the very ungraspable magnitude of the thing.

"What more could you ask, Mr. Hunnicott?" said the judge, mildly. "You have already had a full measure of delay on the original petition. Yet I am willing to extend the time if you can come to an agreement with Mr. Hawk, here."

Hunnicott knew the hopelessness of that and did not make the attempt. Instead, he essayed a new line of objection.

"The time would be long enough if Gaston were the headquarters of the company, your Honor. But in such a grave and important charge as this amended petition brings, our general counsel should appear in person, and—"

"You are the company's attorney, Mr. Hunnicott," said the judge, dryly; "and you have hitherto been deemed competent to conduct the case in behalf of the defendant. I am unwilling to work a hardship to any one, but I can not entertain your protest. The preliminary hearing will be at three o'clock to-morrow."

Hunnicott knew when he was definitely at the string's end; and when he was out of the judge's room and the Court House, he made a dash for his office, dry-lipped and panting. Ten minutes sufficed for the writing of a telegram to Kent, and he was half-way down

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to the station with it when it occurred to him that it would never do to trust the incendiary thing to the wires in plain English. There was a little-used cipher code in his desk provided for just such emergencies, and back he went to labor sweating over the task of securing secrecy at the expense of the precious minutes of time. Wherefore, it was about four o'clock when he handed the telegram to the station operator, and adjured him by all that was good and great not to delay its sending.

It was just here he made his first and only slip, since he did not stay to see the thing done. It chanced that the regular day operator was off on leave of absence, and his substitute, a young man from the train-despatcher's office, was a person who considered the company wires an exclusive appanage of the train service department. At the moment of Hunnicott's assault he was taking an order for Number 17; and observing that the lawyer's cipher "rush" covered four closely written pages, he hung it upon the sending hook with a malediction on the legal department for burdening the wires with its mail correspondence, and so forgot it.

It was nine o'clock when the night operator came on duty; and being a careful man, he not only looked first to his sending hook, but was thoughtful enough

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to run over the accumulation of messages waiting to be transmitted, to the end that he might give precedence to the most important. And when he came to Hunnicott's cipher with the thrice-underlined "RUSH" written across its face, and had marked the hour of its handing in, he had the good sense to hang up the entire wire business of the railroad until the thing was safely out of his office.

It was half-past nine when the all-important cipher got itself written out in the headquarters office at the capital; and for two anxious hours the receiving operator tried by all means in his power to find the general counsel—tried and failed. For, to make the chain of mishaps complete in all its links, Kent and Loring were spending the evening at Miss Portia Van Brock's, having been bidden to meet a man they were both willing to cultivate—Oliver Marston, the lieutenant-governor. And for this cause it wanted but five minutes of midnight when Kent burst into Loring's bedroom on the third floor of the Clarendon, catastrophic news in hand.

"For heaven's sake, read that!" he gasped; and Loring sat on the edge of the bed to do it.

"So! they've sprung their mine at last: this is what Senator Duvall was trying to sell us," he said quietly, when he had mastered the purport of Hunnicott's war news.

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Kent had caught his second wind in the moment of respite, and was settling into the collar in a way to strain the working harness to the breaking point.

"It's a put-up job from away back," he gritted. "If I'd had the sense of a pack-mule I should have been on the lookout for just such a trap as this. Look at the date of that message!"

The general manager did look, and shook his head. "'Received, 3:45, P. M.; Forwarded, 9:17, P. M.' That will cost somebody his job. What do we do?"

"We get busy at the drop of the hat. Luckily, we have the news, though I'll bet high it wasn't Hawk's fault that this message came through with no more than eight hours' delay. Get into your clothes, man! The minutes are precious, now!"

Loring began to dress while Kent walked the floor in a hot fit of impatience.

"The mastodonic cheek of the thing!" he kept repeating, until Loring pulled him down with another quiet remark.

"Tell me what we have to do, David. I am a little lame in law matters."

"Do? We have to appear in Judge MacFarlane's court to-morrow afternoon prepared to show that this thing is only a hold-up with a blank cartridge. Hawk meant to take a snap judgment. He counted on throwing the whole thing up against Hunnicott, knowing

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perfectly well that a little local attorney at a way-station couldn't begin to secure the necessary affidavits."

Loring paused with one end of his collar flying loose.

"Let me understand," he said. "Do we have to disprove these charges by affidavits?"

"Certainly; that is the proper rejoinder—the only one, in fact," said Kent; then, as a great doubt laid hold of him and shook him: "You don't mean to say there is any doubt about our ability to do it?"

"Oh, no; I suppose not, if it comes to a show-down. But I was thinking of your man Hunnicott. Doesn't it occur to you that he is in just about as good a fix to secure those affidavits in Gaston as we are here, David?"

"Good Lord! Do you mean that we have to send to Boston for our ammunition?"

"Haven't we? Don't you see how nicely the thing is timed? Ten days later our Trans-Western reorganization would be complete, and we could swear our own officers on the spot. These people know what they are about."

Kent was walking the floor again, but now the strength of the man was coming uppermost.

"Never mind: we'll wire Boston, and then we'll do what we can here. Could you get me to Gaston on a special engine in three hours?"

"Yes."

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"Then we have till eleven o'clock to-morrow to prepare. I'll be ready by that time."

"David, you are a brick when it comes to the infighting," said the general manager; and then he finished buttoning his collar.

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X

WITHOUT BENEFIT OF CLERGY

At ten forty-eight on the Saturday morning Kent was standing with the general manager on the Union Station track platform beside the engine which was to make the flying run to Gaston.

Nine hours of sharp work lay between the hurried conference in Loring's bedroom and the drive to the station at a quarter before eleven. Boston had been wired; divers and sundry friends of the railway company had been interviewed; some few affidavits had been secured; and now they were waiting to give Boston its last chance, with a clerk hanging over the operator in the station telegraph office to catch the first word of encouragement.

"If the Advisory Board doesn't send us something pretty solid, I'm going into this thing lame," said Kent, dubiously. "Of course, what Boston can send us will be only corroborative; unfortunately we can't wire

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affidavits. But it will help. What we have secured here lacks directness."

"Necessarily," said Loring. "But I'm banking on the Board. If we don't get the ammunition before you have to start, I can wire it to you at Gaston. That gives us three hours more to go and come on."

"Yes; and if it comes to the worst—if the decision be unfavorable—it can only embarrass us temporarily. This is merely the preliminary hearing, and nothing permanent can be established until we have had a hearing on the merits, and we can go armed to that, at all events."

The general manager was looking at his watch, and he shut the case with a snap.

"Don't you let it come to that, as long as you have a leg to stand on, David," he said impressively. "An interregnum of ten days might make it exceedingly difficult for us to prove anything." Then, as the telegraph office watcher came to the door and shook his head as a sign that Boston was still silent: "Your time is up. Off with you, and don't let Oleson scare you when he gets 219 in motion. He is a good runner, and you have a clear track."

Kent clambered to the footplate of the smart eight-wheeler.

"Can you make it by two o'clock?" he asked, when

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the engineer, a big-boned, blue-eyed Norwegian, dropped the reversing lever into the corner for the start.

"Ay tank maybe so, ain'd it? Yust you climb opp dat odder box, Mester Kent, and hol' you' hair on. Ve bane gone to maig dat time, als' ve preak somedings, *ja!*" and he sent the light engine spinning down the yards to a quickstep of forty miles an hour.

Kent's after-memory of that distance-devouring rush was a blurred picture of a plunging, rocking, clamoring engine bounding over mile after mile of the brown plain; of the endless dizzying procession of oncoming telegraph poles hurtling like great side-flung projectiles past the cab windows; of now and then a lonely prairie station with waving semaphore arms, sighted, passed and left behind in a whirling sand-cloud in one and the same heart-beat. And for the central figure in the picture, the one constant quantity when all else was mutable and shifting and indistinct, the big, calm-eyed Norwegian on the opposite box, hurling his huge machine doggedly through space.

At 12:45 they stopped for water at a solitary tank in the midst of the brown desert. Kent got down stiffly from his cramped seat on the fireman's box and wetted his parched lips at the nozzle of the tender hose.

"Do we make it, Jarl?" he asked.

The engineer wagged his head.

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"Ay tank so. Ve maig it all right iff dey haf bane got dose track clear."

"There are other trains to meet?"

"*Ja;* two bane comin' dis vay; ant Nummer Sam-teen ve pass opp by."

Oleson dropped off to pour a little oil into the speed-woundings while the tank was filling; and presently the dizzying race began again. For a time all things were propitious. The two trains to be met were found snugly withdrawn on the sidings at Mavero and Agricultа, and the station semaphores beckoned the flying special past at full speed. Kent checked off the dodging mile-posts: the pace was bettering the fastest run ever made on the Prairie Division—which was saying a good deal.

But at Juniberg, twenty-seven miles out of Gaston, there was a delay. Train Number 17, the east-bound time freight, had left Juniberg at one o'clock, having ample time to make Lesterville, the next station east, before the light engine could possibly overtake it. But Lesterville had not yet reported its arrival; for which cause the agent at Juniberg was constrained to put out his stop signal, and Kent's special came to a stand at the platform.

Under the circumstances, there appeared to be nothing for it but to wait until the delayed Number 17 was

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heard from; and Kent's first care was to report to Loring, and to ask if there were anything from Boston.

The reply was encouraging. A complete denial of everything, signed by the proper officials, had been received and repeated to Kent at Gaston—was there now awaiting him. Kent saw in anticipation the nicely calculated scheme of the junto crumbling into small dust in the precise moment of fruition, and had a sharp attack of ante-triumph which he had to walk off in turns up and down the long platform. But as the waiting grew longer, and the dragging minutes totaled the quarter-hour and then the half, he began to perspire again.

Half-past two came and went, and still there was no hopeful word from Lesterville. Kent had speech with Oleson, watch in hand. Would the engineer take the risk of a rear-end collision on a general manager's order? Oleson would obey orders if the heavens fell; and Kent flew to the wire again. Hunnicott, at Gaston, was besought to gain time in the hearing by any and all means; and Loring was asked to authorize the risk of a rear-end smash-up. He did it promptly. The light engine was to go on until it should "pick up" the delayed train between stations.

The Juniberg man gave Oleson his release and the order to proceed with due care while the sounder was still clicking a further communication from headquarters. Loring was providing for the last contingency by

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sending Kent the authority to requisition Number 17's engine for the completion of the run in case the track should be blocked, with the freight engine free beyond the obstruction.

Having his shackles stricken off, the Norwegian proceeded "with due care," which is to say that he sent the eight-wheeler darting down the line toward Lesterville at the rate of a mile a minute. The mystery of the delay was solved at a point half-way between the two stations. A broken flange had derailed three cars of the freight, and the block was impassable.

Armed with the general manager's mandatory wire, Kent ran forward to the engine of the freight train and was shortly on his way again. But in the twenty-mile run to Gaston more time was lost by the lumbering freight locomotive, and it was twenty minutes past three o'clock when the county seat came in sight and Kent began to oscillate between two sharp-pointed horns of a cruel dilemma.

By dropping off at the street-crossing nearest the Court House, he might still be in time to get a hearing with such documentary backing as he had been able to secure at the capital. By going on to the station he could pick up the Boston wire which, while it was not strictly evidence, might create a strong presumption in his favor; but in this case he would probably be too late to use it. So he counted the rail-lengths, watch in hand,

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with a curse to the count for his witlessness in failing to have Loring repeat the Boston message to him during the long wait at Juniberg; and when the time for the decision arrived he signaled the engineer to slow down, jumped from the step at the nearest crossing and hastened up the street toward the Court House.

In the mean time, to go back a little, during this day of hurryings to and fro Blashfield Hunnicott had been having the exciting experiences of a decade crowded into a corresponding number of hours. Early in the morning he had begun besieging the headquarters wire office for news and instructions, and, owing to Kent's good intentions to be on the ground in person, had got little enough of either.

At length, to his unspeakable relief, he had news of the coming special; and with the conviction that help was at hand he waited at the station with what coolness there was in him to meet his chief. But as the time for the hearing drew near he grew nervous again; and all the keen pains of utter helplessness returned with renewed acuteness when the operator, who had overheard the Juniberg-Lesterville wire talk, told him that the special was hung up at the former station.

"O my good Lord!" he groaned. "I'm in for it with empty hands!" None the less, he ran to the baggage-room end of the building and, capturing an express wagon, had himself trundled out to the Court House.

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The judge was at his desk when Hunnicott entered, and Hawk was on hand, calmly reading the morning paper. The hands of the clock on the wall opposite the judge's desk pointed to five minutes of the hour, and for five minutes Hunnicott sat listening, hoping against hope that he should hear the rush and roar of the incoming special.

Promptly on the stroke of three the judge tapped upon his desk with his pencil.

"Now, gentlemen, proceed with your case; and I must ask you to be as brief as possible. I have an appointment at four which can not be postponed," he said quietly; and Hawk threw down his paper and began at once.

Hunnicott heard his opponent's argument mechanically, having his ear attuned for whistle signals and wheel drummings. Hawk spoke rapidly and straight to his point, as befitted a man speaking to the facts and with no jury present to be swayed by oratorical effort. When he came to the summarizing of the allegations in the amended petition, he did it wholly without heat, piling up the accusations one upon another with the careful method of a bricklayer building a wall. The wall-building simile thrust itself upon Hunnicott with irresistible force as he listened. If the special engine should not dash up in time to batter down the wall—

Hawk closed as dispassionately as he had begun, and

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the judge bowed gravely in Hunnicott's direction. The local attorney got upon his feet, and as he began to speak a telegram was handed in. It was Kent's wire from Juniberg, beseeching him to gain time at all hazards, and he settled himself to the task. For thirty dragging minutes he rang the changes on the various steps in the suit, knowing well that the fatal moment was approaching when—Kent still failing him—he would be compelled to submit his case without a scrap of an affidavit to support it.

The moment came, and still there was no encouraging whistle shriek from the dun plain beyond the open windows. Hawk was visibly disgusted, and Judge MacFarlane was growing justly impatient. Hunnicott began again, and the judge reproved him mildly.

"Much of what you are saying is entirely irrelevant, Mr. Hunnicott. This hearing is on the plaintiff's amended petition."

No one knew better than the local attorney that he was wholly at the court's mercy; that he had been so from the moment the judge began to consider his purely formal defense, entirely unsupported by affidavits or evidence of any kind. None the less, he strung his denials out by every amplification he could devise, and, having fired his last shot, sat down in despairing breathlessness to hear the judge's summing-up and decision.

Judge MacFarlane was mercifully brief. On the part

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of the plaintiff there was an amended petition fully fortified by uncontroverted affidavits. On the part of the defendant company there was nothing but a formal denial of the allegations. The duty of the court in the premises was clear. The prayer of the plaintiff was granted, the temporary relief asked for was given, and the order of the court would issue accordingly.

The judge was rising when the still, hot air of the room began to vibrate with the tremulous thunder of the sound for which Hunnicott had been so long straining his ears. He was the first of the three to hear it, and he hurried out ahead of the others. At the foot of the stair he ran blindly against Kent, dusty, travel-worn and haggard.

"You're too late!" he blurted out. "We're done up. Hawk's petition has been granted and the road is in the hands of a receiver."

Kent dashed his fist upon the stair-rail.

"Who is the man?" he demanded.

"Major Jim Guilford," said Hunnicott. Then, as footfalls coming stairward were heard in the upper corridor, he locked arms with Kent, faced him about and thrust him out over the door-stone. "Let's get out of this. You look as if you might kill somebody."

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XI

THE LAST DITCH

It was a mark of the later and larger development of David Kent that he was able to keep his head in the moment of catastrophes. In boyhood his hair had been a brick-dust red, and having the temperament which belongs of right to the auburn-hued, his first impulse was to face about and make a personal matter of the legal robbery with Judge MacFarlane.

Happily for all concerned, Hunnicott's better counsels prevailed, and when the anger fit passed Kent found himself growing cool and determined. Hunnicott was crestfallen and disposed to be apologetic; but Kent did him justice.

"Don't blame yourself: there was nothing else you could have done. Have you a stenographer in your office?"

"Yes."

"A good one?"

"It's young Perkins: you know him."

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"He'll do. 'Phone him to run down to the station and get what telegrams there are for me, and we'll talk as we go."

Once free of the Court House, Kent began a rapid-fire of questions.

"Where is Judge MacFarlane stopping?"

"At the Mid-Continent."

"Have you any idea when he intends leaving town?"

"No; but he will probably take the first train. He never stays here an hour longer than he has to after adjournment."

"That would be the Flyer east at six o'clock. Is he going east?"

"Come to think of it, I believe he is. Somebody said he was going to Hot Springs. He's in miserable health."

Kent saw more possibilities, and worse, and quickened his pace a little.

"I hope your young man won't let the grass grow under his feet," he said. "The minutes between now and six o'clock are worth days to us."

"What do we do?" asked Hunnicott, willing to take a little lesson in practice as he ran.

"The affidavits I have brought with me and the telegrams which are waiting at the station must convince MacFarlane that he has made a mistake. We shall prepare a motion for the discharge of the receiver and for

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the vacation of the order appointing him, and ask the judge to set an early day for the hearing on the merits of the case. He can't refuse."

Hunnicott shook his head.

"It has been all cut and dried from 'way back," he objected. "They won't let you upset it at the last moment."

"We'll give them a run for their money," said Kent. "A good bit of it depends upon Perkins' speed as a stenographer."

As it befell, Perkins did not prove a disappointment, and by five o'clock Kent was in the lobby of the Mid-Continent, sending his card up to the judge's room. Word came back that the judge was in the café fortifying the inner man in preparation for his journey, and Kent did not stand upon ceremony. From the archway of the dining-room he marked down his man at a small table in the corner, and went to him at once, plunging promptly into the matter in hand.

"The exigencies of the case must plead my excuse for intruding upon you here, Judge MacFarlane," he began courteously. "But I have been told that you were leaving town—"

The judge waved him down with a deprecatory fork.

"Court is adjourned, Mr. Kent, and I must decline to discuss the case *ex parte*. Why did you allow it to go by default?"

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"That is precisely what I am here to explain," said Kent, suavely. "The time allowed us was very short; and a series of accidents—"

Again the judge interrupted.

"A court can hardly take cognizance of accidents, Mr. Kent. Your local attorney was on the ground and he had the full benefit of the delay."

"I know," was the patient rejoinder. "Technically, your order is unassailable. None the less, a great injustice has been done, as we are prepared to prove. I am not here to ask you to reopen the case at your dinner-table, but if you will glance over these papers I am sure you will set an early day for the hearing upon the merits."

Judge MacFarlane forced a gray smile.

"You vote yea and nay in the same breath, Mr. Kent. If I should examine your papers, I should be reopening the case at my dinner-table. You shall have your hearing in due course."

"At chambers?" said Kent. "We shall be ready at any moment; we are ready now, in point of fact."

"I can not say as to that. My health is very precarious, and I am under a physician's orders to take a complete rest for a time. I am sorry if the delay shall work a hardship to the company you represent; but under the circumstances, with not even an affidavit offered by your side, it is your misfortune. And now I

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shall have to ask you to excuse me. It lacks but a few minutes of my train time."

The hotel porter was droning out the call for the east-bound Flyer, and Kent effaced himself while Judge MacFarlane was paying his bill and making ready for his departure. But when the judge set out to walk to the station, Kent walked with him. There were five squares to be measured, and for five squares he hung at MacFarlane's elbow and the plea he made should have won him a hearing. Yet the judge remained impassible, and at the end of the argument turned him back in a word to his starting point.

"I can not recall the order at this time, if I would, Mr. Kent; neither can I set a day for the hearing on the merits. What has been done was done in open court and in the presence of your attorney, who offered no evidence in contradiction of the allegations set forth in the plaintiff's amended petition, although they were supported by more than a dozen affidavits; and it can not be undone in the streets. Since you have not improved your opportunities, you must abide the consequences. The law can not be hurried."

They had reached the station and the east-bound train was whistling for Gaston. Kent's patience was nearly gone, and the auburn-hued temperament was clamoring hotly for its innings.

"This vacation of yours, Judge MacFarlane: how

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long is it likely to last?" he inquired, muzzling his wrath yet another moment.

"I can not say; if I could I might be able to give you a more definite answer as to the hearing on the merits. But my health is very miserable, as I have said. If I am able to return shortly, I shall give you the hearing at chambers at an early date."

"And if not?"

"If not, I am afraid it will have to go over to the next term of court."

"Six months," said Kent; and then his temper broke loose. "Judge MacFarlane, it is my opinion, speaking as man to man, that you are a scoundrel. I know what you have done, and why you have done it. Also, I know why you are running away, now that it is done. So help me God, I'll bring you to book for it if I have to make a lifetime job of it! It's all right for your political backers; they are thieves and bushwhackers, and they make no secret of it. But there is one thing worse than a trickster, and that is a trickster's tool!"

For the moment while the train was hammering in over the switches they stood facing each other fiercely, all masks flung aside, each after his kind; the younger man flushed and battle-mad; the elder white, haggard, tremulous. Kent did not guess, then or ever, how near he came to death. Two years earlier a judge had been shot and maimed on a western circuit and since then,

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MacFarlane had taken a coward's precaution. Here was a man that knew, and while he lived the cup of trembling might never be put aside.

It was the conductor's cry of "All aboard!" that broke the homicidal spell. Judge MacFarlane started guiltily, shook off the angry eye-grip of his accuser, and went to take his place in the Pullman. One minute later the east-bound train was threading its way out among the switches of the lower yard, and Kent had burst into the telegraph office to wire the volcanic news to his chief.

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XII

THE MAN IN POSSESSION

Appraised at its value in the current coin of street gossip, the legal seizure of the Trans-Western figured mainly as an example of the failure of modern business methods when applied to the concealment of a working corporation's true financial condition.

This unsympathetic point of view was sufficiently defined in a bit of shop-talk between Harnwicke, the cold-blooded, and his traffic manager in the office of the Overland Short Line the morning after the newspaper announcement of the receivership.

"I told you they were in deep water," said the lawyer, confidently. "They haven't been making any earnings —net earnings—since the Y. S. & F. cut into them at Rio Verde, and the dividends were only a bluff for stock-bracing purposes. I surmised that an empty treasury was what was the matter when they refused to join us in the veto affair."

"That is one way of looking at it," said the traffic

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manager. "But some of the papers are claiming that it was a legal hold-up, pure and simple."

"Nothing of the kind," retorted the lawyer, whose respect for the law was as great as his contempt for the makers of the laws. "Judge MacFarlane had no discretion in the matter. Hawk had a perfect right to file an amended petition, and the judge was obliged to act upon it. I'm not saying it wasn't a devilish sharp trick of Hawk's. It was. He saw a chance to smite them under the fifth rib, and he took it."

"But how about his client: the woman who was put off the train? Is she any better off than she was before?"

"Oh, she'll get her five thousand dollars, of course, if they don't take the case out of court. It has served its turn. It's an ugly crusher for the Loring management. Hawk's allegations charge all sorts of crookedness, and neither Loring nor Kent seemed to have a word to say for themselves. I understand Kent was in court, either in person or by attorney, when the receivership order was made, and that he hadn't a word to say for himself."

This view of Harnwicke's, colored perhaps by the fact that the Trans-Western was a business competitor of the Short Line, was the generally accepted one in railroad and financial circles at the capital. Civilization apart, there is still a deal of the primitive in human

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nature, and wolves are not the only creatures that are prone to fall upon the disabled member of the pack and devour him.

But in the State at large the press was discussing the event from a political point of view; one section, small but vehement, raising the cry of trickery and judicial corruption, and prophesying the withdrawal of all foreign capital from the State, while the other, large and complacent, pointed eloquently to the beneficent working of the law under which the cause of a poor woman, suing for her undoubted right, might be made the whip to flog corporate tyranny into instant subjection.

As for the dispossessed stock-holders in the far-away East, they were slow to take the alarm, and still slower to get concerted action. Like many of the western roads, the Western Pacific had been capitalized largely by popular subscription; hence there was no single holder, or group of holders, of sufficient financial weight to enter the field against the spoilers.

But when Loring and his associates had fairly got the wires hot with the tale of what had been done, and the much more alarming tale of what was likely to be done, the Boston inertness vanished. A pool of the stock was formed, with the members of the Advisory Board as a nucleus; money was subscribed, and no less a legal light than an ex-attorney-general of the state of Massachusetts was despatched to the seat of war to advise

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with the men on the ground. None the less, disaster out-travels the swiftest of "limited" trains. Before the heavily-feed consulting attorney had crossed the Hudson in his westward journey, Wall Street had taken notice, and there was a momentary splash in the troubled pool of the Stock Exchange and a vanishing circle of ripples to show where Western Pacific had gone down.

In the meantime Major James Guilford, somewhile president of the Apache National Bank of Gaston, and antecedent to that the frowning autocrat of a twenty-five-mile logging road in the North Carolina mountains, had given bond in some sort and had taken possession of the company's property and of the offices in the Quintard Building.

His first official act as receiver was to ask for the resignations of a dozen heads of departments, beginning with the general manager and pausing for the moment with the supervisor of track. That done, he filled the vacancies with political troughsmen; and with these as assistant decapitators the major passed rapidly down the line, striking off heads in daily batches until the overflow of the Bucks political following was provided for on the railroad's pay-rolls to the wife's cousin's nephew.

This was the work of the first few administrative days or weeks, and while it was going on, the business attitude of the road remained unchanged. But once seated firmly in the saddle, with his awkward squad well in

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hand, the major proceeded to throw a bomb of consternation into the camp of his competitors.

Kent was dining with Ormsby in the grill-room of the Camelot Club when the waiter brought in the evening edition of the *Argus*, whose railroad reporter had heard the preliminary fizzing of the bomb fuse. The story was set out on the first page, first column, with appropriate headlines.

WAR TO THE KNIFE AND THE KNIFE TO THE HILT!

TRANS-WESTERN CUTS COMMODITY RATE.

Great Excitement in Railroad Circles. Receiver Guilford's Hold-up.

Kent ran his eye rapidly down the column and passed the paper across to Ormsby.

"I told you so," he said. "They didn't find the road insolvent, but they are going to make it so in the shortest possible order. A rate war will do it quicker than anything else on earth."

Ormsby thrust out his jaw.

"Have we got to stand by and see 'em do it?"

"The man from Massachusetts says yes, and he knows, or thinks he does. He has been here two weeks

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now, and he has nosed out for himself all the dead-walls. We can't appeal, because there is no decision to appeal from. We can't take it out of the lower court until it is finished in the lower court. We can't enjoin an officer of the court; and there is no authority in the State that will set aside Judge MacFarlane's order when that order was made under technically legal conditions."

"You could have told him all that in the first five minutes," said Ormsby.

"I did tell him, and was mildly sat upon. To-day he came around and gave me back my opinion, clause for clause, as his own. But I have no kick coming. Somebody will have to be here to fight the battle to a finish when the judge returns, and our expert will advise the Bostonians to retain me."

"Does he stay?" Ormsby asked.

"Oh, no; he is going back with Loring to-night. Loring has an idea of his own which may or may not be worth the powder it will take to explode it. He is going to beseech the Boston people to enlarge the pool until it controls a safe majority of the stock."

"What good will that do?"

"None, directly. It's merely a safe preliminary to anything that may happen. I tell Loring he is like all the others: he knows when he has enough and is willing to stand from under. I'm the only fool in the lot."

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Ormsby's smile was heartening and good for sore nerves.

"I like your pluck, Kent; I'll be hanged if I don't. And I'll back you to win, yet."

Kent shook his head unhopefully.

"Don't mistake me," he said. "I am fighting for the pure love of it, and not with any great hope of saving the stock-holders. These grafters have us by the nape of the neck. We can't make a move till MacFarlane comes back and gives us a hearing on the merits. That may not be till the next term of court. Meanwhile, the temporary receiver is to all intents and purposes a permanent receiver; and the interval would suffice to wreck a dozen railroads."

"And still you won't give up?"

"No."

"I hope you won't have to. But to a man up a tree it looks very much like a dead cock in the pit. As I have said, if there is any backing to do, I'm with you, first, last, and all the time, merely from a sportsman's interest in the game. But is there any use in a little handful of us trying to buck up against a whole state government?"

The coffee had been served, and Kent dropped a lump of sugar into his cup.

"Ormsby, I'll never let go while I'm alive enough to fight," he said slowly. "One decent quality I have—

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and the only one, perhaps: I don't know when I'm beaten. And I'll down this crowd of political plunderers yet, if Bucks doesn't get me sand-bagged."

His listener pushed back his chair.

"If you stood to lose anything more than your job I could understand it," he commented. "As it is, I can't. Any way you look at it, your stake in the game isn't worth the time and effort it will take to play the string out. And I happen to know you're ambitious to do things—things that count."

"What is it you don't understand—the motive?"

"That's it."

Kent laughed.

"You are not as astute as Miss Van Brock. She pointed it out to me last night—or thought she did—in two words."

Ormsby's eyes darkened, and he did not affect to misunderstand.

"It would be a grand-stand play," he said half-musingly, "if you should happen to worry it through, I mean. I believe Mrs. Hepzibah would be ready to fall on your neck and forgive you, and turn me down." Then, half-jestingly: "Kent, what will you take to drop this thing permanently and go away?"

David Kent's smile showed his teeth.

"The one thing you wouldn't be willing to give. You

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asked me once when we had fallen over the fence upon this forbidden ground if I were satisfied, and I told you I wasn't. Do we understand each other?"

"I guess so," said Ormsby. "But— Say, Kent, I like you too well to see you go up against a stone fence blindfolded. I'm like Guilford: I am the man in possession. And possession is nine points of the law."

Kent rose and took the proffered cigar from Ormsby's case.

"It depends a good bit upon how the possession is gained—and held—doesn't it?" he rejoined coolly. "And your figure is unfortunate in its other half. I am going to beat Guilford."

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XIII

THE WRECKERS

Just why Receiver Guilford, an officer of the court who was supposed to be nursing an insolvent railroad to the end that its creditors might not lose all, should begin by declaring war on the road's revenue, was a question which the managers of competing lines strove vainly to answer. But when, in defiance of all precedent, he made the cut rates effective to and from all local stations on the Trans-Western, giving the shippers at intermediate and non-competitive points the full benefit of the reductions, the railroad colony denounced him as a madman, and gave him a month in which to find the bottom of a presumably empty treasury.

But the event proved that the major's madness was not altogether without method. It is an axiom in the carrying trade that low rates make business; create it, so to speak, out of nothing. Given an abundant crop, low prices, and high freight rates in the great cereal belt, and, be the farmers never so poor, much of the

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grain will be stored and held against the chance of better conditions.

So it came about that Major Guilford's relief measure was timed to a nicety, and the blanket cut in rates opened a veritable flood-gate for business in Trans-Western territory. From the day of its announcement the traffic of the road increased by leaps and bounds. Stored grain came out of its hiding places at every country cross-roads to beg for cars; stock feeders drove their market cattle unheard-of distances, across the tracks of competing lines, over and around obstacles of every sort, to pour them into the loading corrals of the Trans-Western.

Nor was the traffic all outgoing. With the easing of the money burden, the merchants in the tributary towns began thriftily to take advantage of the low rates to renew their stocks; long-deferred visits and business trips suddenly became possible; and the saying that it was cheaper to travel than to stay at home gained instant and grateful currency.

In a short time the rolling stock of the road was taxed to its utmost capacity, and the newly appointed purchasing agent was buying cars and locomotives right and left. Also, to keep pace with the ever-increasing procession of trains, a doubled construction force wrought night and day installing new side tracks and passing points.

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Under the fructifying influence of such a golden shower of prosperity, land values began to rise again, slowly at first, as buyers distrusted the continuance of the golden shower; more rapidly a little later, as the Guilford policy defined itself in terms of apparent permanence.

Towns along the line—hamlets long since fallen into the way-station rut of desuetude—awoke with a start, bestirring themselves joyfully to meet the inspiriting conditions. At Midland City, Stephen Hawk, the new right-of-way agent, ventured to ask municipal help to construct a ten-mile branch to Lavabee: it was forthcoming promptly; and the mass meeting, at which the bond loan was anticipated by public subscription shouted itself hoarse in enthusiasm.

At Gaston, where Hawk asked for a donation of land whereon the company might build the long-promised division repair-shops, people fought with one another to be first among the donors. And at Juniberg, where the company proposed to establish the first of a series of grain subtreasuries—warehouses in which the farmers of the surrounding country could store their products and borrow money on them from the railroad company at the rate of three per cent. per annum—at Juniberg enough money was subscribed to erect three such depots as the heaviest tributary crop could possibly fill.

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It was while the pendulum of prosperity was in full swing that David Kent took a day off from sweating over his problem of ousting the receiver and ran down to Gaston. Single-eyed as he was in the pursuit of justice, he was not unmindful of the six lots standing in his name in the Gaston suburb, and from all accounts the time was come to dispose of them.

He made the journey in daylight, with his eyes wide open and the mental pencil busy at work noting the changes upon which the State press had been dilating daily, but which he was now seeing for the first time. They were incontestable—and wonderful. He admitted the fact without prejudice to a settled conviction that the sun-burst of prosperity was merely another brief period of bubble-blowing. Towns whose streets had been grass-grown since the day when each in turn had surrendered its right to be called the terminus of the westward-building railroad, were springing into new life. The song of the circular saw, the bee-boom of the planing-mill and the tapping of hammers were heard in the land, and the wayside hamlets were dotted with new roofs. And Gaston—

But Gaston deserved a separate paragraph in the mental note-book, and Kent accorded it, marveling still more. It was as if the strenuous onrush of the climaxing Year Three had never been interrupted. The ma-

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