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Uneasy Street

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UNEASY STREET

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OTHER BOOKS BY

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

EYES OF THE BLIND, THE
LOOT
PLUNDER
RANSOM
SPORT OF KINGS, THE

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"CARRY THIS, PLEASE."
SHE SAID.
"THIS" WAS A DIAMOND PIN.

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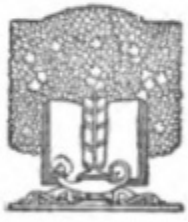
Uneasy Street

By

Arthur Somers Roche

Illustrated by

James Montgomery Flagg



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TO

MY CHARMING WIFE

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"Carry this, please," she said.
'This' was a diamond pin. . . . . *Frontispiece*

OPPOSITE PAGE

"I'm no blackmailer, Mr. Baird." 120

"Suppose I tell you I can put Rodney Baird in jail?" 226

Eileen rose and dropped him a courtesy. . . 282

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UNEASY STREET

I

THE long mirror held a most presentable figure. It was true that the collar of the coat did not fit as snugly about the neck as Baird would have wished, but one must not expect too much of ready-to-wear garments if one can't take the time to permit necessary alterations. Anyway, it was a moment to which he had looked forward for eighteen months, and he would not be captious. Furthermore, ready-made though the suit might be, it undoubtedly fitted much better than any tailored garment that he might have had made at Donchester. Of course, had he time, he'd go to one of the tailors on the Avenue and be outfitted *right*.

He discovered a sardonic smile on the lips of the man in the mirror. He'd better amend that last wordless statement of his. Had he time and *money*, he'd patronize the Avenue. He shrugged his shoulders—noting, as he did so, that the collar hunched a trifle—and walked to the window. He picked from a chair and tossed upon the bed a pair of breeches and a blouse; upon the latter were the two silver bars of a captain.

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He drew the chair close to the window and sat down. Upon the sill he rested his elbows. Chin in palms, he leaned forward through the open window. It was the last day of the last year of the great war, but nature had been merciful to New York. The air was but as crisp as one might expect on an October evening. But, had it been zero weather, Baird would still have leaned through the open window. Below—twelve stories below—was Broadway!

New York's lamp was lighted to-night. Over in Jersey, on Long Island, even to Connecticut, Baird knew, the city's illumination was visible against the sky. New York, with the passing of the war, had come into her own again.

Baird sniffed the keen air greedily. His eyes were avid for the electric displays. His ears drank in the holiday roar from the streets below. It was only seven o'clock, but already the suburbs had sent their cohorts to throng Broadway. With cowbells and horns, with harsh rattles and shrill whistles, with confetti and feather ticklers, the crowds swirled and eddied about Times Square.

It was a sight. Even to a man who had witnessed Paris celebrating peace, it was a sight. For this was something more than New York's annual greeting to the new year; it was, Baird sensed, the city's formal but joyous tossing-away of the burden of war.

He withdrew from the window. Too bad to leave New York when one had merely glimpsed it! But ex-captains of the A. E. F. must look for work.

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Not, thank the Lord, that Rodney Baird must look very far. Robbins & Robbins, real estate, Donchester, Massachusetts, had cordially invited their departing chief bookkeeper to return when the war ended. The old job would be waiting. He was lots luckier than a good many of the chaps who had crossed with him, who had gone with him to Upton to wait demobilization. Still— Restlessly he walked to the window again.

The crowd on Broadway was greater now. Every minute it was augmented by fresh hordes coughed forth from the subways. The city was getting into its stride. It would be sort of fun to go out and stroll round. He'd do it! His train did not leave until eleven.

He was struggling into his overcoat when the telephone bell rang.

"Captain Rodney Baird?"

"*Ex*-Captain Baird," he answered. "That you, Jimmy?"

"Yea, bo! James McPherson Ladd, lately second lieutenant of infantry, all filled up with desire to call a captain names. Where have you been hiding, anyway?"

"Only got my discharge yesterday, Jimmy. Beat it into town this afternoon, bought me some new store garments, and a ticket home——"

"Tear up your ticket home," advised Ladd. "New York is home to men of brains. Haven't I been telling you for six months that James McPherson Ladd, senior, needs a willing young partner? And he knows that I'll never be willing. But more of

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this, anon, me boy. You're at the Tramby. It will take you one minute to reach the street, ninety seconds to find a taxi, and eleven minutes—in the mob to-night—to reach the Chummy Club. We await you."

"But I haven't any clothes—and who's 'we?'"

"We? Wait—" Baird heard him call, "Eileen, come here and tell Captain Baird how much you love him!"

Baird waited a moment. Then, over the wire, came a girl's voice.

"Captain Baird," it said, "I'm to tell you how much I love you."

"Well, tell me," he laughed.

"Over the 'phone?" she asked.

"Did Jimmy tell you that I've just been discharged and haven't had time to get any clothes——"

"No; he didn't tell me that, but he's told me so much about you. And he's been trying all day to reach you. You'll be up here in fifteen minutes, eh?"

Baird was rather dazed as he hung up the receiver. That Jimmy Ladd should have gone to any trouble to locate him was in itself somewhat surprising. True, Ladd and he had been quite good friends, but he had assumed that their friendship would cease upon discharge. For young Ladd was an heir to millions, and he, Rodney Baird, was a bookkeeper from the town of Donchester, Massachusetts. Not that a bookkeeper wasn't as good as anyone else, but, somehow or other, al-

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though laborers had won commissions and college men had failed to do so, the war was over. Things must return to the *status quo ante.*

He colored as he glanced in the mirror. Then he berated himself for his pettiness. Jimmy Ladd was a fine young chap who paid him the compliment of wishing to introduce him to his women friends. Jimmy had waved aside his protest that he had no clothing with him. A lately discharged officer was not supposed—away from his own home town, too—to have evening clothes with him. And, anyway, they could take him as he was, he told himself defiantly.

The defiant mood was still with him as he surrendered hat and coat to the attendant at the Chummy Club. He wore the least bit of a frown as he advanced to the door of the main dining-room. Tall, good-looking, well enough built for his figure to defy the ready-made suit, there was that touch of diffidence in his manner that sometimes indicates modesty, but more often a self-consciousness that is born twin to conceit.

They didn't have Chummy Clubs in Donchester. As he glanced over the crowded room, Baird remembered the Donchester restaurant that had essayed a cabaret. It had not lasted long. The city council had threatened a revocation of the liquor license, and the restaurant had meekly yielded to Puritanism.

But if Donchester had thought that innocuous cabaret harmful, what would Donchester think of the performance going on here now? That girl with

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the auburn hair and the hot gray eyes, dancing with the slim, red-cheeked youth! It would never do in Donchester—he was sure of that.

The girl with the auburn hair passed him again. He knew that she spoke to her immaculately groomed partner. Doubtless she was calling attention to his clothing, so out of place among these dinner jackets and tail coats. He looked swiftly away.

And then some one pounded him on the back and breathed fervent salutation into his ears. It was the slim youth, the red-cheeked healthy-looking companion of the girl with the auburn hair.

"I didn't know you in those clothes, Rod, and I'll bet a cooky that you didn't know me. You old son of a gun—gosh, but you are changed! Long pants and lapels sure make a hero look like a bookkeeper!"

It was an unfortunate phrase, and Baird's blush grew more vivid. As though Ladd were far away, he heard him go through the formalities of introduction to the auburn-haired girl. He heard his own voice stammering acknowledgment of his presentation to Miss Eileen Elsing. Quite to his amazement, he found himself upon the dancing-floor, his arm round Miss Eileen Elsing, her face quite close to his. They had progressed three-quarters of the way round the room before the girl spoke.

"Jimmy's a bit of an ass, isn't he?"

"Eh? I beg pardon," stammered Baird.

"Oh, if he's *that* good a friend, I apologize," she said lazily. Her voice was languid, almost

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heavy, yet rich and vibrant, too. "But," she went on, "why did he warn me that you couldn't dance?"

"Kindness," replied Baird.

The girl glanced up at him. She was not short. The upward glance, so close were her eyes, had the effect on Baird almost of physical contact. She was not over twenty-four, he decided. Sophisticated as those eyes were, they held youth in them.

"Are all heroes mock-modest?" she asked. "You dance extremely well, and are extremely well aware of it." Again her eyes roamed over his face.

"Thank you," he murmured; "but I wasn't aware of it."

"Oh, you're a bit clumsy about the new steps, but —if you'd let me guide you——"

The gloved hand that rested upon his right arm exerted a slight pressure. Immediately he found himself half reversing and moving backward.

"You see," she said. "With me to guide you——"

"Paradise," he muttered.

"Back with banality from war," she said. "Couldn't you think of something newer?"

"But you wanted *something*, and I don't think quickly," he retorted.

The music ceased. The dancers applauded for an encore while the girl looked inquiringly at Baird.

He nodded, and she led him to the table where Ladd now sat. There were others there, a Mrs. Dabney and a Miss Boffert—the former a much-rouged, plump brunette, and the other a rather bulky girl. Also, there was Mr. Dabney, whose

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crisp mustache consorted ill with the black ribbon from which suspended his eye-glasses.

Apparently they were conserving energy against the later evening, for they had not been dancing. Introductions were made with a casualness that surprised Baird, accustomed to the stiff, somewhat self-conscious formality of Donchester. Immediately they were made, Mrs. Dabney demanded the attention of Jimmy Ladd, while her husband leaned toward Miss Boffert. Baird settled himself in his chair. He had read, in Sunday editions, of the Chummy Club. He had heard Jimmy Ladd mention it. Of course, he had known that it was not strictly a club, that it was, at least, semipublic. But that it should prove to be merely a restaurant was something of a surprise.

The room—he judged correctly that there were other rooms, private dining-rooms and the like—held tables sufficient to accommodate perhaps two hundred people comfortably. But to-night there were half as many more here, seated at the tables that were so closely jammed together, or moving about upon the dancing-floor in the center of the room.

Carnival was in the air. Uniforms predominated; nevertheless, there was no lack of wine upon the tables.

Watching the confetti being thrown, observing the toy balloons which were batted around by the enthusiastic merrymakers, listening to the ever-increasing noise, Baird wondered how spontaneous it all was—how much of it was due to alcohol, and

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how much to natural ebullience of spirit. For himself, the defiant resentfulness that had possessed him when he entered the room had passed away. It was without self-consciousness that he rescued a balloon from Miss Elsing's auburn head and threw it at a pretty blonde at the next table.

"And without a drink, either," commented the girl.

He looked at her.

"What do you mean?"

"My Puritan friend"—she shrugged her shoulders—"one could hardly imagine you, a moment ago, able to enter into the spirit of this affair. You were frowning, angry——"

"Oh, not all that!" he protested. "I was looking for Jimmy. The light hurt my eyes, and——"

"Why prevaricate? You *are* a Puritan, and you were shocked when you came in here. Well, I hardly blame you. To return from the trenches and find—this." She looked about her, her lips faintly curled, her eyes, Baird sensed, a trifle hard, "And now"—and she laughed mockingly—"you are doing your best to seem a bit bored."

"I'm not," he said hotly.

"No? Are you really bored?"

"Of course not! I—I'm having—a bully time."

"I'm not, then, and I am bored," she told him. Her voice was the least bit petulant. "I warned Jimmy that we shouldn't start out until after the theater; but no—he wouldn't have it. Just back from France and waste time in a theater! Still, perhaps he isn't wasting time here."

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Her glance at Jimmy, leaning so closely toward the pretty Mrs. Dabney, was explanatory of her words. Baird could not help casting his eyes toward Mrs. Dabney's husband. But if that gentleman was conscious of the flirtation occurring before his eyes, he was not too concerned about it. The dance-music struck up again. Miss Elsing turned to Baird.

"Are you really a worshiper of the great god Jazz," she demanded, "or do you dance so well because you have no other accomplishments?"

It was a casual impertinence. To resent it would be to dignify it too greatly. Yet he did resent it, because it seemed to him that this girl recognized him for what he was, a bookkeeper stealing a few last hours before returning to his desk. She would hardly, he felt, be as rude to some one in her own class. Her own class! It was his own mental phraseology, but, had she uttered it herself, he could not have been more angry.

"Dancing bores me," he said curtly.

"Me, too, Steve," she said. "Let's get out of here." At his blank look, she laughed. "Oh, don't be shocked again. This is New Year's eve. And we're all to meet at the Central at twelve. If you can't trust yourself, trust me."

He rose with her. They drifted across the dancing-floor together, and out by the check-room. As she put on her wraps she glanced toward the room they had just left.

"Too engrossed—both couples," she announced

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shortly. "They'll not miss us until it's time to leave. Carry this, please."

"This" was a diamond pin. Little of jewelry as Baird knew, he recognized the exquisite taste of the ornament. About three inches long, nine diamonds were set in platinum filigree. Five of the stones weighed perhaps a carat apiece; the other four were chips. But it was the lovely flawlessness of the five larger stones that won Baird's admiration. Pure white, they flashed in the electric lights. So brilliantly did they gleam to the furtive eye of an extremely white-faced gentleman about to surrender his coat and hat to the attendant that he changed his mind.

"It's a beauty!" said Baird.

"It *is* effective," the girl admitted. "But I shouldn't have worn it; the clasp is loose. And as a rather dear—a funny little aunt—gave it to me I should hate to lose it. So—you take care of it."

"I'll be most careful," he laughed. He dropped the trinket into his waistcoat pocket. The white-faced gentleman drew a bit nearer to them. The girl looked up at Baird. In her eyes was a certain cool hardness.

"Please do," she said. "I should hate to ask you to replace it."

She did not notice his gasp as she preceded him through the revolving door. Again that resentment toward her possessed him.

Outside, the girl looked up at him. Her hand slipped through his arm. She drew close to him. The coolness, the hardness had gone from her eyes.

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She seemed, for the moment, confiding, friendly. Her nearness exhilarated him. He forgot his resentment completely. Three steps, and they were swallowed up by the hilarious throng. So many persons bumped against him that he ceased to notice it. It was a very simple matter for the white-faced gentleman to abstract from his waistcoat pocket the diamond pin.

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II

THE Central, while not the city's newest hotel, was one of its most fashionable. The crowd which had engaged tables in its dining-room to-night apparently was made up of exactly the same sort of people whom Baird had seen at the Chummy Club.

It was close on to midnight when Eileen Elsing and her companion entered the main dining-room of the big hotel. Baird marveled at the girl. The girls whom he had left behind him in Donchester eighteen months or so ago would have been brazen to leave a party with a strange man, and wander, unchaperoned, for more than two hours through the crowded city streets. Also, he was quite certain that even had they dared brave the conventions, they would never have braved the city pavements in dancing-slippers.

Yet, as a downward glance showed him, this girl's slippers showed not a fleck of city mud on their satin tops. She was, undoubtedly, of a sort different from the girls of Donchester.

It was all new to Baird. Girls of Miss Elsing's class—it suddenly occurred to him that he knew nothing of her station in life. For that matter, beyond the fact that Jimmy Ladd's father was

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wealthy, he knew nothing of Jimmy's social position. It had never interested him.

That Miss Elsing was a young woman of wealth he'd assumed from her presence in Jimmy Ladd's party. Not that, in the school of democracy from which he had just been discharged, a man's money had made any difference. Still, as he'd known for a year or more that Ladd "traveled" with a wealthy set, he had been content with the quiet assumption that the end of the war would mean the termination of a pleasant acquaintance. Jimmy Ladd had, it was true, mentioned once or twice that his father could "use a bright chap" in his office. But Baird had dismissed Ladd's well-meant words with a smile.

But now, after some hours in the company of Eileen Elsing, Donchester began to seem less like home and more like jail. The girl intrigued him.

Hardly had they left the Chummy Club when they were swept away by the hilarious crowd. A well-dressed crowd, too, for the most part. Baird had never seen so many men and women in evening dress outside of a theater or ball. Women wore evening clothes on the street here, apparently on their way from theater to restaurant. In Donchester, evening clothes were "occasions." Here they were matters casual. It was another mark of New York's uniqueness. As far as Times Square they had pushed their way, jostling and being jostled. At first, Baird had wanted to resent the men who leered, who thrust feathers into the face of the girl. But her own good-humored acceptance of the night and its follies had shamed him into

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acquiescence. A bit out of breath, they reached the Tramby.

"Let's have a drink," she proposed.

"You're improving," she told him, a few moments later. They had managed to crowd into the Tramby grill, and she had ordered a high-ball. Baird was sipping ginger-ale.

"Yes?" he said.

She drank rather deeply.

"Uh-huh," she nodded. "You're recovering from shock. I should say that you'll be completely cured in another hour or so. You may even order a drink for yourself."

He felt himself blush.

"I drink occasionally," he said shortly.

"Every eight or ten years, eh?" She did not jeer. Her voice, as always, seemed lazily indifferent. Yet Baird read into it something of scorn.

"A bit more often than that," he declared. "But in the army—well, it can't very well be done."

She looked about the room.

"Nevertheless—it seems to be done," she announced. For here, as in the Chummy Club, uniforms predominated.

He made no answer. He suddenly remembered that he had a ticket for the eleven-o'clock train.

A few hours ago, that departure had seemed the only course in the world for him to follow. New York meant nothing to him. But now—New Year's celebrations were a novelty to him. This girl was a novelty. He might never see the like of either again.

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"Let's go," she said suddenly. "I want to walk some more."

The waiter brought him the check. Baird smothered a whistle. The Tramby grill taxed its patrons a dollar cover-charge. Of course, it was New Year's eve, but—three dollars and forty-five cents for two drinks! Nevertheless, he flattered himself that he was correctly nonchalant as he gave the waiter four dollars.

At the door of the grill-room, he hesitated a moment.

"I intended to leave on the eleven o'clock for Donchester, Miss Elsing, but——"

She cast him a glance over her shoulder.

"To-morrow is another day," she told him. "The trains will still be running."

Once again they were in the street, buffeted by the crowds. What it was about her that conquered him Baird could not tell. She was handsome, boldly handsome, but he had seen more beautiful women. She had charm, of a sort, but he had encountered greater. That she was a lady, even, he could not be sure. Certainly, the ladies of Donchester would hesitate at drinking high-balls in public cafés. He glanced surreptitiously at his watch. It was ten-thirty; he had time in which to attend to his bags and catch the train. He said no more about leaving. Arm in arm, they fought their way up Broadway.

Jimmy Ladd was waiting for them in the lobby of the Central.

"Swift work, Eileen!" he said, with a grin. To

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Baird, "I suppose that you've shouted, '*Kamerad!*' into her shell-like ears?"

Baird colored. He was becoming annoyed with himself at his lack of apt retort, at his easy blushing.

"Hustle," said Ladd. "The crowd's all inside."

A long table had been prepared for Ladd's guests at the Central. Around it were fifteen or sixteen people. This time, Ladd made no pretense of introduction. Dabney affixed his eye-glasses and stared at the late arrivals. His crisp mustache was not so jaunty now, and his devotion to Miss Boffert was more pronounced.

Baird looked down the table. Jimmy Ladd's acquaintance was most catholic. He tried to satisfy himself as to the occupations, the importance, of the persons at the party. He gave it up. Good-naturedly noisy, all of them, the most riotous seemed to be those whose hair, if they were women, was grayest, or whose heads, if they were men, were baldest.

One thing they were remarkable for—their clothing. At least, they were remarkable judged by Donchester standards. He knew enough of women's clothing to realize that Mrs. Dabney's simple-appearing black-lace frock must have cost several hundred dollars. And the yellow gown that Eileen Elsing wore did more than hint of money.

But it was the clothing of the men that amazed him. In Donchester, the putting-on of evening clothes was still something of a ceremony. Men

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wore them a trifle self-consciously, as, in an earlier generation, they wore their Sunday suits.

But in New York, practically every one who was not in uniform dressed for the evening. And, somehow, they seemed to be comfortable, to have none of the difficulties with collar and tie and obtrusive shirt-front that always annoyed Baird. Even Dabney, a trifle rumpled now, had in his garb a certain nicety of cut that was foreign to Baird's experience, that rumpling could not take away.

Who were these people, anyway? If quiet was one of the first requisites of gentility—as he had been brought up to believe—these people were not gently born. Yet, it was a celebration. And it was the sort of celebration that Baird would have assumed would naturally have been confined to youth. Only, in New York, there were no old. That, if anything, was the great outstanding fact of the evening. In Donchester, men definitely surrendered their claims to young women at forty. In New York, apparently, men surrendered their claims at death, and not before.

Nor was it, oddly enough, disgusting. He rather liked the old blades of Manhattan. Why should a man yield his patent leathers to carpet slippers if he didn't choose to? The poets sometimes rhapsodized over the graceful slipping into old age. Well, who loves a quitter? And in this city, the home of ambitious youth, he was a quitter who relinquished youth.

Baird saw Jimmy Ladd on the dancing-floor, holding closely to him a pale, blonde girl. Quite with-

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out meaning to, Baird cast a questioning look at Mrs. Dabney. But in that lady's eyes was only a good-natured tolerance. He turned to Miss Elsing.

"Shall we dance?" he suggested.

She yawned frankly.

"I'm tired from the walk. What an asinine way to spend an evening!"

"Thank you," said Baird curtly.

She laughed.

"Oh, I didn't mean you. But—all this. To shout and cavort and make fools of ourselves—I simply can't do it without liquor. Join me? It *might* enliven you?"

The barb in her voice, more than in her words, stung. He had been in the girl's company more than two hours—had had her all alone—and the result, for her, had been boredom. And yet he knew, without vanity, that he didn't bore most women. He damned the self-consciousness that, he thought, rendered him tongue-tied with this girl.

He felt suddenly angry with himself. Why the devil had he missed his train? Who was this girl, anyway? What did he care whether she liked him, whether she thought him amusing? As for needing liquor to loosen his tongue, he could talk well enough without it, if the girl only knew it, and—he reached for a glass. Then he reached for another.

Now, an old-fashioned whisky cocktail and a glass of champagne merely open the eyes of some men. Others they put to sleep. Others strike a happy medium. Baird had been absolutely "on the wagon" for twenty months. The whisky and wine at first

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warmed him. Then his eyes became slightly blurred and his voice thick. Then his vision grew extraordinarily keen and his voice remarkably clear and distinct.

"Shall we dance?" he asked the girl again.

She eyed him amusedly.

"If you wish," she assented.

The room was stifling. His throat was parched when they reached their seats again. Two more glasses of champagne joined the other tributes to the occasion.

Suddenly the lights went out. It was midnight. The New Year had arrived. The extra glasses of wine gave Baird a fictitious boldness. In the darkness, Miss Elsing lighted a cigarette. Her red lips gleamed as vividly, to his heated imagination, as the flame of the match which she held. And as the match was tossed away and her lighted cigarette came away from her mouth, he leaned forward.

His kiss was returned! There was no doubt about that. The first lips that his own had touched in two years welcomed the salutation. Then, as he would have kissed her again, a pair of soft hands pressed against his cheeks, and the mouth so close to his own was withdrawn.

The din in the room was terrific, yet Baird was unconscious of it. The humming in his ears drowned all external noise. The lights flashed on again. He found himself, with the others standing up, waving a champagne-glass, and shrieking welcome to the New Year. But he saw only Eileen Elsing.

He leaned toward her, but Jimmy Ladd was ahead

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of him. He saw her whisked away in Jimmy's arms. Surely no one in the world danced as divinely as Eileen Elsing. Heedless of the invitation in the eyes of other women guests of Ladd, he poured himself a glass of wine and continued staring at Eileen. Dance with anyone else? Not he!

Of course it was all right for Eileen to dance with Jimmy, to dance with anyone. She was perfect. She could do no wrong. And Jimmy—bless his dear heart!—had introduced Baird to Eileen. Jimmy would always be their dearest friend.

"It's all right, Jimmy," he said to that gay young gentleman as the dance ended and the couple returned to the table.

"What's all right, Roddy me boy?" asked Ladd.

Baird beamed benevolently. Genial kindness exuded from him. Some men fight; some men cry; some are happy; some are morose. Liquor is the most versatile thing in the world. No effects are beyond its power. It made Baird tolerant, generous.

"Your dancing with Eileen," he replied. "No objection to it at all, Jimmy. Dance with her whenever you want. I like to watch you."

Ladd eyed his guest critically.

"Gets you pretty quick, doesn't it, Rod?"

Baird nodded heavily, ponderously.

"Minute I saw her—knew it." He placed his hand upon his heart. "Dance, Eileen?"

Miss Elsing grinned at Jimmy Ladd. To Baird, she replied:

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"Let's sit it out. And let's have a little something to cool off."

She did not offer the least objection as Baird held her hand.

It was almost impossible to converse any longer. Nineteen-nineteen was coming in with a bang. It was immensely thrilling. What a friendly sort New Yorkers were! Welcomed a fellow in quite as though they'd known him all their lives, and— He tried to say something of this to Miss Elsing, but she evidently misunderstood him. However, she smiled and held out her glass. Baird poured champagne into it.

Some drops fell on the girl's hand. He bent over and kissed them away. He looked up angrily as a shout of laughter came from the end of the table. But it was only that Mr. Dabney had come to life.

The difficulty with the Waiters' Union had resulted in the engaging of girls as waitresses at the Central. An extremely pretty girl had just served Mr. Dabney with something. Inspiration had come to him as he started to tip her.

"Worth just fifty cents, m'dear, if I put it in your hand. Worth five dollars if I put it in your stocking. What say?"

The waitress essayed coyness, but failed in the endeavor. Five dollars was five dollars. She turned slightly to one side; her skirt was raised; into her stocking-top Dabney slipped the five-dollar bill.

No invention of modern history has ever been acclaimed with the enthusiasm that greeted Mr. Dabney's strikingly original idea. There was a yell

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from Ladd's table; as explanation shot about the room, hilarity reached its highest pitch. Immediately a dozen girls stood close to tables, while unsteady hands that held bills fumbled at the tops of stockings.

Baird's eyes were frightened as he turned to Miss Elsing. But he reconsidered his offer to take her home as he saw the mirth in her eyes, the broad smile on her lips.

The disgust left his own eyes. *Honi soit qui mal y pense!* After all, evil was in the thought, not in the deed. It really, when you stopped to think of it, was something of a lark, this idea of Dabney's.

He reached into his waistcoat pocket as the waitress passed by him. He touched her on the arm. She turned, and her face was vaguely familiar. Somewhere, sometime, he'd seen her. But he could not place her now. He drew her near to him; he tipped her exactly as Dabney had done. The girl laughed, thanked him, and moved on. He turned to Eileen for approval.

"You warm up as the evening progresses," she told him.

Jimmy Ladd was settling with a head waiter for the party. Baird joined him.

"Hadn't we better have more wine?" he asked.

Obsequiously the waiter took his order. Five minutes later, the check was presented. Hotels are rather careful about these matters on New Year's eve.

Baird fished in his pocket. He drew forth several bills. Horror suddenly came to him. Of his army

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savings, he had had one hundred and thirty dollars left after paying for his new clothing. Now he had something like seventeen dollars. He had, undoubtedly, put a hundred-dollar bill in the stocking of the pretty waitress. He could feel perspiration on his forehead. What would Miss Elsing think?

"Oh, Jimmy!" he said. "Haven't any money with me—I'm a fearful ass. Would you mind——"

"Surest thing!" And Jimmy handed him a wad of bills. Baird selected a hundred. He paid the waiter. Magnificently he waved the change—a matter of twenty dollars—away. For by now he was talking with Eileen again.

He was in the midst of an ardent declaration, to which the girl listened smilingly, when a slim man, of forty-five, perhaps, groomed to the point of affectation, joined the party. Immediately he appropriated Eileen. She seemed not at all unwilling to be appropriated. Taken aback, Baird surveyed the ivory shoulder that she turned to him. Angry speech trembled on his lips when Ladd touched him.

"Lay off, Roddy!" warned Jimmy. "You've been playing with the same engagement long enough. Lots of other pretty girls here would like to talk to you. And Sam Blackmar is one of these all-or-nothing people, you know."

"No; I didn't know," snapped Baird. "Who is he? Who invited him to——"

"I invited him here," interrupted Jimmy dryly. Then he grinned. "Cheer up, old top! And give the girl a chance. Unless some handsome black-

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guard like yourself interferes, she's going to be real sensible and make a few millions quicker than you or I ever will."

"Yes? You mean——"

"Why, I mean that she's going to marry him—if she's sane," said Ladd.

"'Sane?'" Baird's laugh was unpleasant. Jimmy Ladd never knew how nearly Baird came to driving his glass into the other's face. Then Baird laughed again. He lifted the glass, but to his own lips. As Eileen rose and surrendered her slim waist to Blackmar, Baird quietly stole away from the party.

There was gaiety enough in the restaurants and hotels of Fifth Avenue still. The limousines and taxis, whose drivers dozed on their seats as they waited for the revelers, were proof enough of that.

But the street itself was lonesome. He turned toward Broadway, past rows of dwelling-houses, dark, quiet, out of place so near the Central and its kindred resorts, yet suggesting a wholesomeness not observable in the restaurants.

The crisp air soothed Baird's temples. He was conscious of having drunk too much; a bad to-morrow confronted him. The wandering taxi-man who halted beside him failed to win a fare. The air, the exercise of the walk—Baird wanted these things.

But Broadway was little more attractive than the Avenue. Its crowds, too, had vanished. Confetti, torn ticklers, broken horns, dismantled rattles, silent cow-bells strewed the streets. The lights were dimmed. The atmosphere held something ghostly,

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something chill. Unconsciously he quickened his steps. He felt, he imagined, as a scrub-woman who comes to a room that has held a banquet must feel. Half-eaten viands, bottles, bedraggled table-linen, scattered chairs— Broadway seemed like this. There is no place so lonesome as a place that has been recently filled with people. No desert is as vacant as a summer resort in the winter. It is because people leave behind them something intangible, something of the spirit that has animated them. Deserts are not filled with ghosts; empty houses are.

Now, in the faint hour before dawn, Broadway, almost deserted of people—though lights still gleamed in the restaurants—was filled with ghosts. Baird quickened his steps. The glamour was gone. How foolish to have seen any glamour there at all!

Yet that attitude was unjust. The curtain descends on the play; the stage is cleared; the scenery is hoisted aloft or piled away. Yet, if the play has been entertaining, who regrets the time spent in listening to it?

So, he had not been foolish to see glamour to-night. If Broadway and the Avenue had been representative of New York—people undoubtedly became intoxicated at county fairs, but does one condemn the fair? To-night, had he been in the mood for it, he would have felt the great reaction from the stress of war; he would have seen a million people expressing their joy at merely being alive. Liquor did not make the celebration; it was merely an inconsiderable portion of it for the great majority.

He stopped at the entrance to the Tramby. The

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great majority! To the north, east, west, and even south were homes—real homes, with real people. With kindly people, too. Not one quarrel had he observed in the streets to-night. Kindly, decent people. He looked up Longacre Square. The great hotels, the tall office-buildings—these were the monuments that had been builded by the people whom he had seen at play to-night. New York could be gay, but, in the chill dawn after a night of revelry, one was more conscious of New York's ability to work than of its penchant for play.

He drew in a last breath of air and entered the hotel. It was overheated; he had hardly reached the elevator before the headache that had been threatening him arrived. He was nodding when he reached his door.

He had always been a methodical sort of person, and the army had accentuated this trait in him. Always he placed his effects in an orderly row upon his dresser—pocketbook, fountain pen, keys, money. He grimaced as he counted the latter. Less than three dollars! Suddenly the blur of the evening's recollections left him. Events stood out sharply. He had borrowed a hundred dollars from Jimmy Ladd. Well, after all, he needn't repay that immediately. As for his hotel bill, he could pawn his wrist-watch. His face grew suddenly blank as his fingers, dipping into his waistcoat pocket, failed to encounter Eileen Elsing's pin. Slowly, then frantically, he searched his other pockets. It was gone! He sat down on the edge of the bed. What was it the girl had said? That

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she would hate to ask him to replace it? He exhaled heavily. That meant that she would not hesitate to do so, if he remembered correctly the expression in her eyes.

But even if she didn't ask him to replace it, how long would he be content to remain under any obligation to a girl who flirted with one man, *kissed* him, while she was cold-bloodedly planning to marry, *for money*, another man twice her age?

He stared down between his knees. Something protruded from under the bed. He pulled it out. It was a worn, canvas-covered steamer-trunk, small, unfashionable. A porter, doubtless, had put it in his room by mistake. Savagely he kicked at the unoffending box. It disappeared under the bed. Tomorrow he'd notify the office— He'd lost Eileen Elsing's pin. That was the only thought of which he was capable. He wondered what it was worth? A thousand dollars? It was long before uneasy slumber came to him.

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III

PAIN is the most vital thing in the world. If conscience worked directly upon anatomy, there would be fewer sinners. That is why drunkards are always much more remorseful than burglars. Drunkards are certain to pay within twenty-four hours. Burglars may escape for years.

Baird had slept heavily. But now, as he painfully opened his eyelids, he was sure that he had not slept more than half an hour, although his wrist-watch told him that it was almost two o'clock. Only the sternest critic would have accused him of having been intoxicated last night, but—memory was a bit inactive, and his limbs ached. Intoxicated or not, he had drunk too much.

He'd missed his train home. But that could hardly be blamed to liquor. He'd decided to miss it before he'd had a single drink. Because a girl, of a sort different from any he had hitherto known, intrigued him, he had stayed over.

A girl of a different sort. Yes; she was all of that. She was the sort who willingly exchanged her youth and beauty for money. He sneered at himself. What difference did it make to him?

Suddenly he closed his eyes; memory was less sluggish. Brilliantly, despite his lids, there danced

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before his eyes a pin—of platinum—from which glistened nine diamonds. Memory was racing now. How she had hesitated when she said that an aunt had given it to her! Aunt!

But what difference did it make to him who had given it to her? Except that, of course, he would be even more anxious to replace a gift from Blackmar than one from an aunt. Why, he did not know. It was just so. Hurt, angry pride made him forget, for the moment, his aches.

What an ass he'd made of himself last night! The hundred dollars that he had borrowed from Ladd, the pin that he'd lost—for the moment he waved these matters aside, while memory brooded bitterly upon his attitude toward Eileen Elsing. He supposed the girl flattered herself that she'd made a conquest. He sat up in bed and swung his feet to the floor.

A cold bath, breakfast, the raising of some money on his watch— On the floor, right at his foot, was a bill. His brows drew together as he bent over and picked it up. A hundred-dollar bill! Where on earth— Ladd had given him a hundred. But he had spent that. His own hundred-dollar bill had been slipped into the waitress's stocking at the Central. But had it? He'd been drinking. He might easily have made a mistake. And when he'd turned in last night, perhaps he hadn't been as methodically careful as he imagined. He had doubtless dropped this on the floor. His telephone-bell rang. The bill clutched in his hand, he walked to the instrument.

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"Good-morning, Indian! How you feeling?" It was Jimmy Ladd, as cheerful as though his last night's festivities had had milk as their inspirational base.

"Sort of so-so," said Baird.

"You ran out on us," accused Ladd.

"It was a bit too strong for me," apologized Baird.

"For you? Not if you got into the proper training, old top. I think you've an honest-to-God talent for being a rum-hound, Rod. Of course, you're out of practise and all that, but you have a way of leaping at the old juice, and enveloping it, and making it feel at home that I envy."

"Was I as bad as that?" asked Baird.

Ladd laughed.

"'Course not. Except for a minute or two, when I thought you'd pull Blackmar apart to see what made him tick."

"What *does* make him tick?" demanded Baird.

"He doesn't. He shrieks to heaven. It's the kale that does it for him. Do you suppose Eileen Elsing could hear him if it wasn't for that?"

"I wasn't thinking of Miss Elsing."

The laugh that came over the wire was extremely distasteful to him.

"Why try to deceive your uncle James?" demanded Ladd. "Why, if I introduced a man to Eileen and he didn't spend at least a week doing nothing else but think of her, I'd drop his acquaintance! There'd be something wrong with that man."

"Oh, she's very nice," said Baird shortly.

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"'Very nice!'" mimicked Ladd. "She's a perfect corker—that's what Eileen is!"

"And is going to marry a man for his money," sneered Baird.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," argued Ladd. "Blackmar's kept out of jail so far, and he has a remarkable taste in neckties. And a man who can make eight or ten millions isn't exactly a human zero."

"I suppose not," said Baird stiffly.

"Had breakfast?" demanded Ladd abruptly.

"Just woke up."

"Then I'll come over and you can weep on my shoulder about Eileen, and I'll weep on yours."

It was rather crude of Jimmy to harp on Miss Elsing, but still Baird supposed that he *had* given cause for it.

"What are you weeping about?" he demanded.

"Me?" Ladd's laugh was not quite as care-free now. "Have I ever, Roddy me buck, intimated that my esteemed father is no unchastened hellion?"

"I think that you once said that he'd rather chase up a church aisle than Broadway," answered Baird.

"You quote me accurately," declared Ladd. "And perhaps, in some moment of girlish confidence, I have painted a portrait of myself in the character of the erring son."

"I seem to remember something like that," admitted Baird.

"Yea, bo! 'Never darken my door again!' That's father. He used to be able to repeat it backward. And then I joined the army. Forgiven? I almost drowned beneath his forgiveness.

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And then I returned from France, and got my discharge, and the glamour wore off when I dallied with the grape, and—well, father delivered his famous lecture again this morning. I am no longer Little Sunshine, the Hero Heir. I am Door-Darkener, the Profligate. He happened to be slumbering lightly this morning when I crashed into the ancestral mansion, and he even neglected the office today, in order that he might parentally pry open my eyes. I've forgotten the verbiage of the ultimatum, but the gist of it is: 'On your way!' Bless his dear old heart, I'm a fearful rotter, and in three or four days, when he's begun to miss me, I'll trot home and explain to him that New Year's doesn't happen often, and isn't going to happen at all if the Prohibitionists get their way. But I've talked enough. I'll be over in twenty minutes."

Baird's mouth was hard as he hung up the telephone. Jimmy hadn't said so, hadn't even hinted it, but the intimation was there. Ladd could use the hundred that he had loaned Baird last night. Jimmy would never be crude enough to say so, but —Baird was glad that he had not tipped the waitress so generously last night. Thank heaven that he could settle the debt to Jimmy at once!

He stepped hurriedly beneath the shower. The cold spray revived him physically, and mentally, too. Of course he'd been an utter jackass, but it was all in the game of life, he supposed. Lots of men, through no particular fault of their own, suffered accidents entailing much more serious consequences than the replacing of a diamond pin.

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And Eileen Elsing would receive a new diamond pin. Most certainly she would!

In Linestream, a suburb of Donchester, there was a corner lot. Before the war, Baird had been offered fifteen hundred dollars for the property, which represented the entire savings of his father. Of course, prices had dropped a bit, but there wasn't the slightest doubt that he could get a thousand dollars for it half an hour after he notified any one of a dozen real-estate firms that it was in the market. His own firm, Robbins & Robbins— But no; he'd rather not say anything about it to them. Both the Robbinses were prosy old fogies who took great personal interest in their employees.

Rubbed briskly dry, he stepped into his bedroom again. He reached under the bed for his shoes. His hand encountered a bit of paper, two bits of paper. He straightened up, staring blankly at two hundred-dollar bills!

Maybe he had drunk enough last night to make a mistake in thinking that he had given a waitress a hundred-dollar tip. But certainly he had not been in such condition as to acquire two hundred dollars without recollection of the fact. He glanced quickly at his overcoat. It was his own brand-new one; he had not walked off with the wrong one.

He sat dazedly down upon the edge of the bed. He remembered perfectly having gone through all his pockets searching for the diamond pin. He couldn't have pulled three hundred-dollar bills from his pocket without seeing or feeling them. It was credible that he'd dropped one bill, but three—

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never! He got on his knees and looked beneath the bed. There was that little canvas trunk—he remembered that, remembered kicking it angrily under the bed. There were more bills on the floor by the trunk. The cover was partly open; money seemed to be oozing from it.

He reached farther under and pulled the trunk out. His wits were acute now. He knew at once that his angry kick last night had forced the lock, had permitted the money that was so tightly packed inside to expand with the cessation of pressure, to flutter upon the floor.

A knock sounded upon the door. Harshly he called a question. A maid answered him. Sudden drops were upon his forehead. He laughed nervously as he wiped them away, and called to the maid to return in an hour.

An hour? Why not ten minutes? By some amazing error, this trunkful of money had been placed in his room, and his only course was to telephone the office at once, inform the hotel staff of the affair, and— How much money was there? If they were all hundreds, like these bills that he saw— But there were thousands, too. Suddenly it seemed that the only important thing in the world was the adding of this money. His fingers trembled as he began counting.

Two hundred and three thousand and seven hundred—but he mustn't forget the hundred that he had first picked up, and which now he knew could not possibly be his own. Two hundred and three

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thousand and eight hundred dollars! And it had been left in his room!

He walked to the window and stared unseeingly at Times Square. He must think, *think!* This money, this fortune—it wasn't his. He mustn't lose sight of that fact for a second.

He turned back from the window and sat down. The telephone, silent against the wall, seemed to call to him. The obvious thing, the only thing, was to telephone down-stairs and have this trunk and its contents removed.

But there was no law forbidding a man to play with his fancy. How on earth had it come into his room? Well, it hadn't walked in—that was sure. And it no longer seemed credible that a hotel porter had accidentally delivered it to this room. Trunks containing fortunes are not carelessly entrusted to porters.

Well then, why hadn't the person who left it here claimed it? For eleven hours, at least, it had been undisturbed in the room— His telephone-bell rang. The girl announced Mr. Ladd.

"Tell him that I'll be down in five minutes," said Baird.

He hung up and looked again at the trunk. He didn't have a hundred with which to pay Jimmy Ladd, and Jimmy would undoubtedly be grateful, in view of the parental displeasure incurred to-day, for repayment. But there was no necessity for weighing Jimmy's possible gratitude against—well, against theft. A person looking on, watching him,

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would be justified in thinking that he intended keeping this money.

He laughed. But his mirth was not reassuring to himself. Two hundred and three thousand and eight hundred dollars! He'd never even seen so much money. Why, if it came to that, he doubted if Rockefeller had ever seen so much. Bankers might have, but the big millionaires of the country paid their bills, acquired their properties with checks. So much cash—

And *why* hadn't it been claimed? People who have mislaid two hundred thousand dollars don't oversleep, even on the day after New Year's eve.

Could it be possible that its last possessor did not intend to claim the money? Well, what difference did that make? His duty was very clearly defined. He'd telephone down-stairs immediately and— The bell rang again. He answered it. It was Ladd, speaking from down-stairs, announcing that he, for one, was starved, and purposed beginning his late breakfast.

"With you right away," said Baird.

Once again he looked at the trunk. Then he walked over to it and picked it up. In his own trunk, purchased yesterday, he placed the canvas one. There was plenty of room. It had needed a big new trunk to hold his uniforms and trophies acquired abroad. Carefully he locked it. It was certainly his duty to guard this money against the possible depredations of a maid. He was slightly dizzy as he entered the elevator.

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IV

JIMMY LADD, in matters gastronomical at any rate, was a man of his word. Also, he had a persuasive way with head waiters. The *maître d'hôtel*, a captain, a waiter, and a 'bus-boy were all scurrying round the corner-seat of the Tramby grill, administering to the young man's wants, when Baird entered the room.

"How do you do it, Jimmy?" asked Baird, as the captain drew out a chair for him.

Ladd thrust his pointed spoon into the iced grapefruit; he conveyed a morsel to his mouth.

"What? Get action? Roddy, when I walk into a restaurant, the check-boy knows that it's Christmas. He flashes the word ahead that Santa has arrived." He dug again into his grapefruit. "That's one of the arguments that father uses to bolster up his frightful injustices toward me." He grinned. "Father says that if I'd earned my own money, I wouldn't be so lavish with it. And he can't see it at all when I point out to him that my main objection to work is that it will doubtless cause me to set too great a value upon money. He has the thrift idea. I try to point out its economic falsity, its glaring immorality, but he'll not listen. He told me, this morning, that I was a sucker for

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every parasite in New York. Yes, sir; he said 'sucker.' If you knew father, you'd realize the extent of his wrath. And when I told him that so highly esteemed a character as the late 'Diamond Jim' Brady had said that there was a lot of fun in being a sucker if you could afford it, father told me that I could no longer afford it." His countenance took on a look of mock horror. "I trust, old top, that you can pay for this sumptuous repast?"

"If you can eat it." Baird grimaced.

A waiter removed Jimmy's fruit. Upon a hot plate he placed buckwheat cakes and sausages. Generously he applied golden sirup to the dish. Baird shook his head.

"Yours is a point of view that could only gain ground in this town, Jimmy."

"Well, New York demands the best, the most up-to-date," chuckled Ladd. "Give the old burg time, and it will spread its philosophy all over the nation. 'Cause why? Because we're the happiest folk in the country."

"You think so?"

"I know it," said Ladd emphatically. "This town is full of folks born and raised somewhere else. But show me the town that has many New Yorkers! There ain't no such place. And if there is," he went on, blissfully unconscious of contradictory utterance, "those New Yorkers are all looking forward to the day when they'll have enough money to come back to the big town. And people don't care about a place where they aren't happy."

Baird poured a second cup of coffee.

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"Sorry I don't see it your way, Jimmy. But, to me, the town is simply the home of the bluffer, the would-be, the imitator, the social climber."

"You have a grouch," declared Jimmy. "Therefore you quote the envious. Let me tell you something, man: The bluffer and the imitator have a decidedly legitimate ambition. They aren't clams. They know that some one else has more on the ball than they have; so they ape him. By and by, if they imitate and bluff long enough, they'll *be* the real thing. Take a prize-fighter beginning his career. Do any sneer at him because he hopes to be champion? And because, at the outset, he avoids the best men, admitting that, at present, they are superior to him, is he a joke? Not by a long shot! He's a wise Patsy. But he studies the champion's tactics, his methods—imitates him in every way. Sensible boy!"

"No argument," said Baird. "He has a more or less legitimate ambition. But your woman, for instance, who sends her husband to the grindstone, presses his nose against it, so that he may make more money in order that she may have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Vanderbilt—— She is a fool, and her husband is a greater fool."

Jimmy nodded to the waiter. The dishes were removed. Carefully, with fingers that shook not at all, Baird noticed, he selected and lighted a cigarette.

Baird's own fingers trembled. Though he followed every word of Jimmy's talk, the canvas trunk up-stairs loomed large in the background of his

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mind. Whose was it? Had its owner missed it? Was a search already being instituted?

Luxuriously, Ladd inhaled cigarette smoke.

"Calling names doesn't prove anything," he said. "We hear a lot about expensive wives. Let me tell you something, boy: Ambition is a funny thing. A man would be content with ten thousand a year, say. His wife wants fifty. She makes him hustle. He gets the fifty. His nose is at the grindstone, as you say. But it sharpens his nose. It makes him smell opportunity, and—he doesn't sag, physically or mentally. Show me an extravagant wife and, nine times out of ten, I'll show you a successful husband."

"Yes," jeered Baird; "and a man who's killing himself for nothing, so that his wife may visit on the Avenue."

"Well, the Avenue's a nice place, Rod; you must admit that," chuckled Ladd. "And why shouldn't she want to know the people who live there?"

"Because she doesn't belong with them," snapped Baird.

Ladd laughed.

"There's a fine democratic doctrine! Why doesn't she belong there if she's an attractive person socially and her husband has money enough?"

"Why isn't she content with her old friends?" Baird avoided a direct reply.

"Are you? Is anyone? What's life but movement, change? You've had five thousand a year, say. You make ten thousand a year. Do *you* run round with the same people? You bet your life

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you don't—either here or in your home town of Donchester! Or in Peking, China, or Valparaiso, or Evanston, Illinois. And I'll tell you why. A motor trip is proposed. Two couples. The ten-thousand-dollar couple wants to stay at a hotel a little more expensive than the five-thousand-dollar people can afford. So they travel with another ten-thousand-dollar couple. And I'll tell you something else: The rich don't forsake their poor acquaintances so much as the poor forsake them. The five-thousand-dollar women call on the ten-thousand-dollar women. They resent her new rugs, her silver. They quit calling."

"Where did you learn all this, Jimmy?" chaffed Baird.

"Oh, I picked it up in various places," grinned Ladd. "Believe me, Rod, I know a lot about money and what it does to people."

"You never made any," said Baird sardonically.

"But I've spent a bunch," chuckled Jimmy. "You can learn as much watching the parade go as watching it come."

"Well, you're all wrong, anyway," said Baird.

"That's what you say—now. Wait till you've been in this town a while longer."

"Afraid I'll never change, then. I must get away to-day," said Baird.

"Oh, but you'll come back. Of course, now that father is on the outs with his angel child—— But he'll get over it in a week at the outside. And then I want you to meet him. There's lots of opportunity in his office, and I want you there, Roddy me buck."

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Baird's heart leaped. Strangely, he, who had had nothing, had attracted the friendship of this youth who had had everything. Carefully cultivated, Jimmy Ladd's regard might lead to— He was ashamed of himself for cold-bloodedly thinking to profit by another's generosity.

"It's awfully decent of you, Jimmy, but——"

"But, gosh—I don't often meet anyone that isn't after something, that isn't always remembering who father is. And you're a nice little man, Rod; I'm for you. That's settled. I'll wire you when to come on. And I'll only introduce you to some regular folks. Of course, I'll only introduce you to girls that have already refused to marry me, like Eileen, because you're a handsome blade, Rod, and——"

"Miss Elsing refused to marry you?" asked Baird.

"Surest thing you know! But I'm in darned good company. We're going to form a club—Rejected Suitors of Eileen. I know at least seven other members. And that reminds me—just after I rang you up this afternoon, she 'phoned. Told me to remind you that you had a pin of hers. Asked me to bring you along to tea. She's going to be with Blackmar at the Amsterdam. You can wait over for a late train, eh?"

"Why—er—yes; I—must see Miss Elsing," stammered Baird. "I—you see, Jimmy, I lost that pin of hers."

Jimmy pursed his lips.

"Better bring along enough cash to buy her another, then. Eileen is strictly business. And I think Blackmar gave her the pin. He's a fussy old bird,

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Blackmar. Myself, I think that maybe Eileen is making a mistake, but eight millions make loud music."

"Wouldn't you have that sometime?" hinted Baird.

"Father is quite hale and hearty, thank you," grinned Jimmy. "And Blackmar *has* his."

"And she'd marry a man for his money?" asked Baird.

Jimmy shrugged.

"Where does a lawyer take his talent? To the highest bidder, eh? And a doctor, and an author —anyone at all? Why shouldn't Eileen?"

"But—but it comes down to—selling herself," protested Baird.

"Does it? All right. Would you have her sell herself for a pretty speech or a pleasant smile or a good-looking face? It's a queer thing the way people look at marriage. A girl throws herself away on a good-looking poor young blackguard, and people call her a fool. She throws herself away on a rich young blackguard, and people say that she's made a good match."

"They say that in New York, perhaps," argued Baird.

"They say it anywhere," retorted Ladd. "But if she happens to marry a man twenty years older than herself, she has to prove, absolutely, that she loves the man before people will believe her. Why?"

"Because people suspect that money has entered into the affair."

"If they're both young, that doesn't matter," said

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Ladd. "People have the wrong idea, absolutely, about marriage. It's the man's fault, too. A man forty-five offers himself to a young girl. He's grown a bit bald, a bit paunchy; his youthful good looks are gone. But to offset that, he has a record of successful achievement. But does he want the lady to marry him because of his undoubted assets? Not by a jugful! He wants to be married for something that he hasn't got. Gosh, when some girl accepts me, I hope she doesn't do it because I can dance the shimmy! I'm willing to be married because I have brains, because I've made some use of them." He colored slightly. "Of course," he went on, more constrained in manner, "I'll never mount to a damn, anyway. But just supposing—— People seem to think that love is a matter of sex attraction. It sure is; but marriage is something else again, Mawruss. Of course, I think it's better all round if the girl loves the man, but if she respects him, and he has undoubted material assets—— I'm not blaming Eileen a bit."

"I guess I look at it differently," said Baird. He had the faintest sneer in his voice.

"You don't look at it sensibly," said Ladd. "Take Eileen. You know what a little sister of the rich is? Well, Eileen is one of them. Father died ten years ago. Her uncle brought her on here. Uncle has two daughters older than Eileen. They'll never win prizes in beauty contests. Chance for jealousy, eh? You said it. Eileen always in the background—cast-off gowns, all that. And would they let her fit herself for a job? Not so's you'd

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notice it. An old-maid aunt might come in handy when the cousins got married—keep house, all that sort of thing.

"But you can't keep a wise girl down. And Eileen is wise. She's got used to certain things—things that cost money. Does she want to give them up? Does anyone? Well, she's normal. First thing her uncle knew, Eileen, in her cast-off gowns and made-over suits, was a belle. The cousins could leave her out of parties, but other people wouldn't. When half a dozen men in a certain set want to marry a girl, they manage to see that she's invited around. Eileen isn't a one-punch person, Rod. She gets 'em, but she holds 'em, too. There's an Eileen that one doesn't meet at first—an Eileen who's gentle, sweet. She has more than beauty, than brains, than charm. She has all those, the Lord knows, but she sticks to a friend the way a man does. She—oh, gosh, you'll find out.

"Well, there you have it. Where her cousins tossed away a thousand, Eileen counted a penny twice. Then another uncle died. He left her four thousand a year. And Eileen ups and moves. Little apartment all her own on Fifty-ninth, opposite the park. Cousins sighed with relief; Eileen was out of the market, would render herself *déclassée*. But not Eileen. Dug up a chaperon and is invited around—— It hasn't been any too easy for her, I'll tell the world. She's been trained with a million-dollar crowd—and *likes* it. She's had to count pennies—has to count 'em still, for that matter. Four

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thousand a year doesn't buy any yachts, you know. Every little jewel, every trinket——"

"I notice that she accepts them from a man to whom she's not married," said Baird.

"That pin, you mean?" Ladd shrugged. "I'm not saying that Eileen is perfect. I'm saying this: She found out early in the game that money makes this world go round. She found out that men can afford to be generous, but that women ought to run a cash business. That's why she won't hesitate a minute to let you pay for that pin. And you'll respect her more for it."

"Will I?" Baird's sneer was patent now.

"Sure you will! That's the masculine of it. If I lose your watch, you laugh it off. You won't hear to my getting another. That's because you are able to earn money to buy another one. But a woman—practically all that any of them have got they got as gifts from men. They only have a few years—most of them, poor things!—in which to collect their gifts. So they're jealous of those they have. It's plain business. You like it in a man; why not respect it in a woman, even though it's a bit different?" His face grew suddenly anxious. "Say—it won't break you, will it? That pin must be worth seven or eight hundred—— If you don't want to see her, I'll frame up some excuse, and——"

Here was Baird's chance. Jimmy Ladd was his friend. Friends forgive mistakes; they do not judge too harshly. It was a very simple thing to explain to Ladd that he was under a misapprehension, that Baird had permitted a wrong conception to arise

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in Ladd's mind. Ladd knew that Baird was in moderate circumstances. Why not tell him that he was in practically no circumstances at all, that he was dependent on the job waiting for him?

But pride assailed him—false pride. He had not destroyed certain assumptions that had grown up in Jimmy's mind. Last night, he had borrowed a hundred with an air of casualness that amounted, if one were strictly ethical, to deceit. To ask Miss Elsing to wait a day for payment of the value of her pin meant that Jimmy Ladd would know that Baird had not that much in the bank. Otherwise, he would naturally write a check.

Jimmy Ladd's friendship might prove a great asset. A position in the firm of Jimmy's father might lead to undreamed-of fortune. There was no future with Robbins & Robbins. There *was* a future with Jimmy Ladd in New York.

But that future was based on friendship; friendship is easily jeopardized. Jimmy Ladd, he knew, trusted him implicitly. But if Jimmy Ladd discovered that Baird had deceived him as to his financial standing— Jimmy had expressed great tolerance for the bluffer. But men often say things that they do not mean.

But it wasn't Jimmy that he was considering at all. He might as well be honest with himself. He was thinking of Eileen Elsing. She was not at all the sort of girl that interested him. He had his own ideas about the sort of girl that he liked. How could a man care for a woman who stood for all the things to which he was opposed? Ridicu-

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lous! He did not realize that he was whistling to keep his courage up, that nature works her plan without consulting us. If love were a mathematical formula, there would be no unhappy marriages. She was not at all the kind of girl that he had vaguely conceived might, some day, win his love. That was enough for him! A girl who would deliberately exchange herself for money, even though a marriage ceremony absolved her from open shame— He certainly was not going to submit himself to humiliation at her hands. And it would *be* humiliation to confess to her—though the confession went through Jimmy Ladd—that he had not cash enough in the bank to meet his obligation to her.

"Break me?" He laughed. He signed the check that the waiter had placed face downward on the table without glancing at it. He gave the man a dollar. "Not at all. And I owe you a hundred, Jimmy."

"No hurry at all, old chap!" protested Jimmy.

"Why not? I borrowed it in a hurry. Might as well pay it back the same way. And I'll have just time to drink a cup of tea with Miss Elsing before I catch my train."

"And you'll be ready to return soon?"

"Why—er——" Baird was thinking fast. "Maybe I'll return at once. I'd hardly like to go to work at my old place and leave them in a hurry. Just attend to my affairs there, and come back."

"Good boy!" exclaimed Jimmy. "This is Wednesday. By Saturday, father will be missing his

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erring son. We'll have Sunday dinner together—you, too—and Monday James McPherson Ladd has a new potential partner."

"You think there's a place for me?"

"I don't think it, Rod; I *know* it."

They were in the lobby now.

"Wait for me a minute or so, Jimmy," said Baird.

Ladd nodded assent, and Baird entered the elevator. In his room he stood still for two minutes. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

It certainly was not theft that he contemplated. Supposing that he'd had a thousand dollars in the bank? Would it be morally wrong for him to take a thousand from the canvas trunk, placing his own perfectly good check therein? He didn't think it would be.

Well, his corner lot in Linestream was the same as money in the bank. He'd return to-morrow afternoon, replace the money that he was going to take now. It was almost four o'clock. No one had come to claim the trunk and its contents. If, by any possible chance, they did come, how would they prove that he had taken anything from the contents? *Prove* it? But, pshaw!—no one would claim it. When he returned, he would notify the hotel authorities of finding the trunk, first replacing the money that he had taken. He was not going to make any confession that would humiliate him in the eyes of Eileen Elsing. He would pay her for her pin.

He opened his trunk, and from the canvas box inside took a thousand dollars. This time he was

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not dizzy when he walked to the elevator, but his color was high.

Twenty-four hours ago, he had looked forward to his return to Donchester, to the taking-up, where he had left off, of what had seemed to be a satisfactory career. In so far as youth ever looks ahead, he had forecast his future as one of not too arduous labor rewarded with modest pay. Some day, he had always dreamed, he might possibly achieve a minor interest in the firm of Robbins & Robbins, might go home each night to find dinner upon the table, presided over by a nice, comfortable girl—pretty, of course—who would hang breathlessly upon his speech.

Last night, he had met a different sort of girl. He had met a girl who, when she married, would leave the preparation of dinner to a competent chef and a capable butler. He had met a girl who would not look upon home as the end-all and be-all of existence, but who would treat home as man treats it—a place to go when the important things of the day had been attended to. A girl, in short, who possessed as much individuality as any man, and who would not permit that individuality to be submerged beneath marriage.

He had had, last night, his first glimpse of a life whose participants were not hampered by such petty matters as the price-list on the menu. He had met, on terms of equality, persons to whom wealth, because they had it, was a casual thing. And the very casualness with which it was treated enhanced its value in his eyes.

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Donchester, while he had been in the army, had seemed some earthly paradise to which, if God were kind, he might be some day permitted to return. But now Donchester seemed the tomb of ambition, the burial-ground of hope.

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V

THE tea-hour is perhaps the most charming in the better New York restaurants. Breakfast is unattractive; the loveliest feminine face is not improved by electric lights in the morning. Luncheon is an utilitarian proposition, too much like putting gasoline in the tank. Dinner and supper are apt to be feverishly gay.

But tea is a function of refinement. One senses that here New York has, for the time, forgotten haste. Conversation is quieter; restraint, unforced, is in the atmosphere. The orchestras, even when they play the latest "jazz," seem subdued. It is the hour of candle-light, when New York seeks relaxation after the labors of the day. Entering this atmosphere slowed the fevered pulse of Baird.

Blackmar and Eileen were seated in the center of the Amsterdam's tea-room when Baird and Ladd arrived. Plates had been laid for the later comers, and the girl was already munching at a toasted muffin.

"Hello, revelers!" Eileen greeted them. "You remember Mr. Blackmar, Captain Baird?"

The smile on Blackmar's lips seemed faintly contemptuous, superior, to Baird. He bowed stiffly. But stiffness left him as Eileen flashed upon him a

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smile whose radiance he had not suspected. She wore a tailor-made suit—of blue serge, he guessed. A stiff flat hat of the same color sat jauntily upon her mass of auburn hair. A cream-colored collar, stiff enough to suggest masculinity, added to the boyish effect of the suit and hat.

Baird hated masculine women; he liked, he thought, soft, frilly, trailing garments for them. But the most severe tailor could not take away from Eileen Elsing the rounded lines of her figure. Her femininity was merely accented by her garb. She looked boyish, but one knew that she was all girl.

"Tea?" She looked from Baird to Ladd.

The latter grinned.

"Not a chance, Eileen. You may have better luck with Baird, but I just finished a grapefruit, three cups of coffee, five sausages, seven buckwheat cakes, some toast——"

"Spare us, Jimmy!" begged Eileen. "By the day after to-morrow, maybe, I can listen to such material matters, but on the first day of January——" She shuddered. "Didn't you make *any* good resolutions, Jimmy? I hope Captain Baird has some sense of the tribute due to the morning after."

"Oh, Baird isn't a hardened sinner like me," laughed Jimmy. "Besides, he has worry on his soul. That pin of yours——"

Baird saw the girl stiffen. Her lips wore a smile that was purely mechanical as she turned to him.

"My pin?" she questioned. "It worried you?"

"It's been worrying me for some time," inter-

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posed Blackmar. "That's why I'm here to-day. I have a man down-town—sort of a wonder, he is. I always did distrust the clasp on that pin, but Eileen wouldn't have it changed. Thinks a good clasp would be too bulky. But now she's going to let this little jeweler in Maiden Lane repair it. Sorry I can't tea with you boys—though I imagine Eileen will do most of the teaing," he chuckled. "But I'll take the pin, Captain Baird, if you don't mind, and run along." He looked at his watch.

It was quite the thinnest watch that Baird had ever seen. Like the perfectly cut clothing of the man, it suggested affectation. Even the trim of his mustache— How a man could make a fortune and yet give so much thought to his appearance! He looked away from Blackmar and met the coolly questioning eyes of the girl. He felt his face burn.

"Your pin—yes—it has worried—— I—you see, Miss Elsing, I've lost it," he blurted.

The girl's expression did not change, unless hardness crept into her eyes. A matter of a few seconds—though, to Baird, it seemed minutes—she stared at him. Then she shrugged. She turned to Blackmar.

"Better run along, Sam, and keep that engagement that interferes with tea."

Upon him Baird felt, mocking his embarrassment, the cynical glance of Blackmar. He was furious with himself because he blushed.

"I—er—Miss Elsing, I—have been unpardonably careless and, of course, I want to replace——"

"Of course," she said, coolly. "As it happens,

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though, I doubt if another pin like it can be found in the city."

"How did you lose it?" asked Blackmar. It was a perfectly natural question, but, somehow, in the man's tones, Baird felt sneering elation.

"If I knew that," he answered, "I would know how to find it."

Blackmar's lips pursed. He made no reply, but there radiated from him an atmosphere of incredulity.

"What does it matter?" asked Eileen. "Captain Baird is—not accustomed to New Year's celebrations, and——"

Blackmar's mustache moved. The smile was fleeting. But Baird caught it. He *had* made an ass of himself last night, and doubtless Miss Elsing had retailed his asininity to Blackmar. It would be just like the girl, he told himself. How cordially he disliked her!

"Well, it doesn't matter, Eileen. As a matter of fact, Arabin's have another pin almost like it. I'll try and drop in there to-morrow and get it for you."

Baird felt as though some one had removed him from the scene. This calm assumption of Blackmar that—

"In that case," he said evenly, "*I'll* drop into Arabin's. I think, Miss Elsing, that we have just time, if I'm to catch an evening train."

"Oh, see here, Baird," protested Blackmar; "just forget the matter. I'll get Eileen another pin. She shouldn't have worn it, anyway."

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Once again the man's words were all right. Indeed, a listener might have thought Blackmar the essence of tactful kindness. But Baird, resentful of the man, read contempt in his voice. What right had Blackmar to assume that he, Rodney Baird, was not able to make good his own losses? Further, there was patronage, too much patronage, in the way he spoke to Baird. Why not "*Mr.* Baird," instead of simply "Baird"?

"You'll forgive my feeling, Mr. Blackmar, that it's a matter I can't forget?"

The two men eyed each other a moment. Blackmar's eyebrows raised. To Baird, he was the epitome of well-bred insolence. There was not a word to which he could take exception, yet never had he so desired to drive his fist against a man's face.

"Just as you say, my boy," replied Blackmar. "You'll pardon my running-away, Eileen, but—" He nodded cordially to Ladd, bowed with the least trace of formality to Baird, and left the table.

Baird looked after him, his eyes hard. He turned to the girl. Somehow he felt awkward, conscious of his newly purchased clothing. No wonder, seeing him unconventionally clad last night and wearing the same suit this afternoon, Blackmar thought him unable to replace the pin.

"I'm to catch the five-o'clock, Miss Elsing," he said. "If you wouldn't mind——"

"And you won't have any tea?" she asked.

"Thank you—no," he told her.

Jimmy Ladd signaled the waiter.

"This is my party," said the girl.

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Jimmy grinned.

"When the hundred that Baird just paid me is gone—say to-morrow, Eileen—I'll let you buy me dinner."

She smiled.

"Father?"

Jimmy bowed.

"You said it. And it usually takes four days, you know."

The girl laughed, yet in her laughter was the hint of a sigh.

"Oh, Jimmy, Jimmy! And everyone thought that when you returned from France——" For the first time, Baird glimpsed gentleness in the girl. But Ladd's grin grew broader.

"I haven't time, you know. Prohibition is coming."

The gentleness left her eyes.

"You irritate me, Jimmy. You mayn't come with us."

She looked at Baird and rose. The waiter had not yet returned with Ladd's change.

"It's all right," said Ladd mock-mournfully. "Leave me to my teaful shame. Send me a wire, Rod, the minute you're coming back."

"I'll do that," promised Baird. Warmly he shook Ladd's hand.

Outside, in the taxi the Amsterdam doorman had summoned, the girl looked curiously at Baird.

"You're returning to New York, then? To live here?"

"I hope so," he told her.

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He looked straight ahead, but he felt her eyes still curiously upon him. Inexplicably he thrilled. It annoyed him. Beautiful she undoubtedly was; the jaunty boyishness of her apparel, accenting her girlishness as it did, rendered her more intriguing to the eye even than she had been last night. She had brains, too. How he knew that, he could not tell, but he knew it. Certainly she had said nothing to indicate their possession. And she could be gentle, sympathetic, understanding. That much he knew from her words, her look when she had chided Jimmy for his wildness. Her later harshness could not obliterate her moment of softness.

But—she was mercenary. Jimmy Ladd could be as much of a sophist as he chose; nevertheless, nice girls—the kind that Baird had known in Donchester—were not like Eileen Elsing. They did not accept diamond pins from men, even though engaged to them; they did not, by their attitude and speech, show how absolutely they expected strangers to replace jewels which they had entrusted to the strangers for safekceping.

It was her hard matter-of-factness about it that angered him, that disgusted him. Yet, why shouldn't she be matter of fact? Wasn't it more honest to be matter of fact? Why should she wave the matter aside, profess not to mind, when he would know perfectly well that she *did* mind? Pretty protestations were all very well, but if they were insincere, of what sense were they?

"So you're coming back to New York?" She broke in upon his musings. "I'm glad of that."

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He thrilled again.

"You mean that?"

Her eyes widened. They were lovely eyes of, now, a warm gray.

"Why shouldn't I?" she asked. "And you're coming to see me."

Whether by accident or design, her hand slid from her lap and touched his. Gloved though it was, Baird sensed its firmness, its warmth. He looked at her; her eyes held mockery in them now. Her head was perched on one side—quizzically, it seemed to him. It grew above the fur collar of the overcoat that she wore like some lovely, though exotic, flower.

"May I?" he asked. His voice shook slightly.

Her nod was assent enough. He hardly dared breathe lest his hand move and remind her of its proximity to her own. They did not speak again until the taxi drew up before Arabin's.

Then they exchanged mutual smiles. Baird understood now the queer look on the taxi-man's face when he had given him the address. The girl laughed.

"Captain Baird, you have stolen my wits."

He bowed.

"The brain first, and then the heart."

Her eyes did not rebuke his banality. Her lips curved in a pretty *moue*.

"And I call myself a New Yorker, and forget that all shops are closed on New Year's. Oh, well—shall we walk?"

With fingers that shook with sudden relief, Baird

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took from his pocket money for the taxi-man. Decision could wait! Explanations that a false pride forbade to be given verbally could be given in writing. He turned to the girl, his eyes blurred, to find her smiling into the eyes of an affable, portly gentleman, whose bland smile seemed to envelop her.

"Mr. Arabin, Captain Baird," the young man heard her say.

He took the gloved hand that the famous jeweler extended. Like a condemned criminal who has been notified that a pardon is on the way and who suddenly hears that the report was cruelly false, he heard Arabin say:

"You were on your way to my store? On New Year's? What sort of a celebration did you attend last night, Miss Elsing?"

She chuckled.

"If you were the kindly person you looked, Mr. Arabin, you would take us inside and let me pick my trinket."

He shrugged.

"The trays are all in the vaults."

"But you helped me select the pin that I wish to replace," she protested. "The one that Mr. Blackmar bought for me."

Arabin touched the cleft in his chin with a forefinger that, despite the glove that covered it, Baird knew to be as meticulously cared for as a woman's, and to be as soft and tenderly shaped.

"I know!" exclaimed the jeweler. "To serve you, Miss Elsing—come!"

There were an exchange of greetings with an

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obsequious watchman, the rolling-back of iron shutter-doors, the unlocking of an inner door, and then the trio were inside the great main room of Arabin's.

It was not absolutely deserted, Baird noted. This place, whose vaults held millions of dollars in gold and precious stones, was guarded as the Bank of England is probably guarded. But Arabin's prideful explanations as to the electric wirings, the marksmanship and proved courage of the special detectives who lounged around rolled off Baird's ears. He only knew that an unhappy fate had contrived against him. How many people in all New York were well-enough acquainted with Arabin to achieve entrance to his shop on a holiday? It gave him, though, another light upon the possible social importance of Eileen Elsing.

Arabin was no absentee owner, no owner who allowed others to do his work. He might be somewhat too bland an individual, but he was an artist, and took an artist's pride in his achievements. He knew, Baird gathered, the exact disposition of every article in his establishment. Five minutes after they were in his private office, Eileen was looking at a pin.

"I was extremely fond of the design of the other —could it be duplicated, Mr. Arabin? Just the least change——" She pointed to the setting of one of the larger diamonds. "All the large ones? Could the settings be changed?"

Arabin smiled.

"For you, Miss Elsing, all things can be done."

She nodded carelessly. Baird noticed that, now

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that she had got what she wanted, her affability toward the jeweler had slightly cooled.

"Then I'll take it," she said. "Or, rather, Captain Baird will. He lost the other. You're sure," she added, "that you can remember the setting?"

Arabin shrugged. He murmured a regret at Captain Baird's misfortune, but assured her that the change could be made. All designs were on file in the workrooms.

"A simple matter," he declared. "I doubt if it adds twenty dollars to the cost of the pin." He looked insinuatingly at Baird. "You have an account here, Captain?"

Baird shook his head.

"I thought I'd pay for it now."

"Certainly," murmured Arabin. He essayed mischievousness in his smile now. "The law forbids commercial transactions on a holiday, but—what is the law, Captain, when a lovely lady must be pleased? Thirty-five hundred and—I can't be exact as to the price of resetting. Not over thirty dollars at the outside, however. Do you wish my pen to write a check?"

Thirty-five hundred dollars! And Jimmy Ladd had thought that it would cost seven or eight hundred! *Thirty-five hundred dollars!* Yet the girl was looking at him. Arabin was waiting.

"I—er—just returned from abroad—— Don't know the condition of my account. Must return home—I——" He put his hand in his pocket and took out the roll of bills he had taken from the canvas trunk. "A deposit?" he asked desperately.

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Arabin bowed ingratiatingly. He was not a gentleman. A gentleman would have laughed at the idea of a deposit when this transaction was more of a favor on the jeweler's part than a business deal. However, being a business man—as well as an artist—all the time probably accounted for Arabin's great success.

"Why, certainly, Captain," said the jeweler. "A couple of hundred, shall we say? And you wish it sent?"

Baird handed him two hundred-dollar bills. Arabin scribbled a receipt.

"I'm going to Donchester; I'll be back in New York in—a couple of days——"

"It will take at least that long for the resetting, Captain," assented Arabin. "Friday, then. Would you care to look round the building?"

Baird mumbled an excuse. He must catch a train. Eileen had apparently been paying no attention to the conversation, being too absorbed, it seemed, in looking at the pin, which she now handed to the jeweler.

"All settled? You're a dear thing, Mr. Arabin, to take us in here."

"I will be dearer than that," he told her. "I shall say nothing to our friends as to this most amazing lapse of memory of yours. To go shopping on New Year's—— You *must* have welcomed in the New Year."

Outside, the succession of bolted doors and iron shutter-doors having been passed again, the girl spoke to Baird.

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"Friday, did he say? Then—suppose you bring it to my apartment and dine with me? Eh?"

He stammered an assent. He hailed a taxi. At its door, she looked at him regretfully.

"Sorry I can't ask you to come along, but I must pay a duty call in Gramercy Park—and you've to go to your hotel, I suppose?"

He nodded. She flashed him a smile and was gone.

Thirty-five hundred dollars! He turned back to Arabin's. He'd cancel the order! He'd get his two hundred back and leave New York and never return! How on earth could he ever possibly pay for it? How dared this girl—she was a snob, too, he'd just discovered, in addition to those other traits of character to which he objected—how dared she entrust him with a bauble worth that amount of money? It was her own carelessness, in the first place, wearing it insecurely clasped. And she'd said that it was a gift from an aunt last night, and to-day brazenly admitted that Blackmar had given it to her. For a girl like that—to worry— Jimmy Ladd had assured him positively that there would be a place for him in his father's firm. The salary would be—well, large. He might be able to buy the pin from his salary—delay, some weeks, its presentation. If he didn't buy the pin now, his opportunity with Ladd was gone.

And, anyway, he must go to Donchester and raise the thousand that he had borrowed—he shivered slightly at the word—from the canvas trunk. Thousand? He'd only spent three hundred of it so far.

On the first step of the short flight that led to

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'Arabin's, while the watchman looked at him with ready recognition, he stopped. No need of speaking to the jeweler now. His deposit covered ten times over the expense of the alteration in the setting. He could wait until day after to-morrow, anyway. There was no hurry.

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VI

"DON'T worry," "Worry killed a cat." "Attune yourself to the infinite and——"

The doctors began it, or thought that they did. As a matter of fact, when religion first emerged from the fearsome fog of superstition, it told man to hold to faith in the goodness of God—in other words, not to worry.

War itself, with its tendencies toward fatalism, teaches one not to worry. But Baird, fresh from warfare, crumpled a newspaper and threw it on the floor of the train. He had read an article which told that all ills are of the mind. "If," said the author, "we attune ourselves to the infinite——"

Security had come to Baird upon his return to the Tramby. The clerk who handed him his key was smilingly courteous; the elevator-boy was almost obsequious. In his absence, the maid had attended to his room. The big trunk was undisturbed. Surely there was nothing of suspicion in the hotel that related to Baird.

His first impulse, upon learning the cost of the trinket for Eileen Elsing, had been to cancel his order. His second was to postpone cancellation. His third was the same as his first.

But—as yet there was no hue and cry. The

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missing canvas trunk had evidently not been traced to his room, and if he left the Tramby to-day and returned to-morrow, and in his absence the money were found in his own big trunk, it would be easy to maintain utter ignorance of the matter. And if his trunk were undisturbed, he could replace the money that he had taken from it and inform the hotel authorities. It was unnecessary to pay his bill before leaving. Inasmuch as he was leaving practically all his baggage behind him, he could settle upon his return. It followed, therefore, that he did not need to take with him the seven hundred dollars that still remained to him of the thousand that he had abstracted from the trunk. Enough for his fare to Donchester— He might as well take fifty dollars with him. He returned the balance to the canvas trunk, and locked outside it his own bigger box.

He took with him a small hand-bag containing a change of linen, informed the clerk at the hotel desk that he would be gone overnight, and raced to the Grand Central in a taxi-cab.

The five-o'clock train was a popular one. The parlor-car chairs were all taken, and Baird was compelled to ride in a day coach.

But, somehow, with every minute that passed, his distaste for his surroundings became more acute. The people in this day coach— Perfectly decent people, no doubt about that. But there wasn't one of them who wouldn't have ridden in a parlor-car if the cost had not been too great.

Money! It was the most important thing in the

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world. Of course, a person could be happy without money, but it was very hard to be comfortable without it.

Back in the Hotel Tramby was a trunk that contained more than two hundred thousand dollars. With that much money— It was then that his eye spied the don't-worry article.

His lips twisted in a sneer as he threw the paper down. Philosophy for fools! How could a man help worrying when he had incurred obligations that were beyond his ability to meet?

But it was a long ride to Donchester. Baird had ample time in which to review the past twenty-four hours. It was quite true that he had lost Eileen Elsing's pin. But one cannot work in a real-estate office without acquiring a smattering of law. He remembered that one of the clerks had been attending night law-school a few years before. Facing an examination in a subject termed "Bailments," he had asked Baird to read him certain questions and check up on his answers.

And what, as Baird remembered it, had been the responsibility of a person who, for accommodation, not for cash, acted as custodian of the property of another? To use ordinary care—no more.

Well, he had certainly used ordinary care. He had put Miss Elsing's pin in his pocket. He would have done no more with a jewel of his own. Certainly there was no legal obligation on his part to replace the pin. As for the moral obligation—that was different. Of course, he should repay. *But if he couldn't?* Well, all he had to do was tell her so.

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Before his eyes floated the face of the girl. He could see those perfect eyebrows lifted, could see the faint curl of the red lips, could almost feel the contempt in the hot gray eyes. And she would tell Blackmar. He could hear their conversation.

"Baird get your pin, Eileen?" Blackmar would ask.

The girl would shrug her smooth, satiny shoulders.

"I understand that he's just a bookkeeper on a spree. I suppose that his salary would pay for it in a year or two," she'd say.

"Nasty little rotter!" Blackmar would sneer. "Oh, well, when a beggar's on horseback, he likes to pretend that he's a cavalier. I'll have it sent up tomorrow."

And they would dismiss him from their thoughts, save when they met Jimmy Ladd, at whom they would good-humoredly jibe for introducing a welsher into their lives.

A welsher! And Jimmy Ladd would think of his old comrade in arms as a man too poor in spirit to confess that he was poor in worldly goods.

Baird, in his room at the Portland, in Donchester—a room whose dinginess offended his eye after the luxury of the Tramby—awakened next morning with his mind made up. He must pay the price, the price of humiliation. Furthermore, he wouldn't sell his property. He'd taken three hundred and fifty dollars from the canvas trunk. To pay his bill at the Tramby—well, a loan of four hundred dollars would be more than enough, counting what he still had

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with him. He'd give a mortgage for that much. If he sold the land, he'd be under the temptation of spending it, and it was his only security against mishap.

Of course, it might be argued that he ought to realize all that he could and give Eileen Elsing the proceeds on account, but—if he waited until conditions in the real-estate market were better, he would realize just so much more. It would go to her, he told himself sternly. She'd *have* to wait.

He breakfasted hurriedly. He was at the office of Raymond & Gerritt at two minutes past nine. He got right down to business with the real-estate men. He waved aside congratulations upon his safe return from France.

"You know my lot in Linestream?" Gerritt, the junior partner, nodded assent. "I want to borrow four hundred on it," said Baird. Gerritt pursed his lips.

"All right. But why don't you sell? We have a client who'll pay twelve hundred——"

"You offered me fifteen hundred two years ago," said Baird.

"The real-estate market is stagnant," remarked Gerritt. "However, our client might go to thirteen hundred."

Baird shook his head.

"Don't want to sell. I want four hundred for—oh, make it a couple of years. And I want the money to-day—this morning."

Gerritt nodded.

"Have it for you at noon. But prices are sag-

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ging, Baird. Better take thirteen hundred and get out from under."

"Thanks, no," said Baird. "I'll be back at noon, then."

Outside, he whistled softly. Realty conditions weren't as bad as he'd pessimistically imagined. An offhand offer of thirteen hundred meant that, if he had time to bargain, he might get as much as he'd been offered two years ago. Oh, well—all the more proof that, if he hung on a few months, he'd get, perhaps, two thousand. Better for Miss Elsing to wait a few months and for him to get more.

He turned toward the office of Robbins & Robbins. The stenographer was the first to spy him. She gave a little shriek. The other clerks saw him; he was in the midst of a congratulatory little throng that did much to restore the self-esteem that he had lost in the last two days.

"The bosses in?" His voice unconsciously lowered, and he flushed resentfully. He, lately an officer in the United States army, whispered when he mentioned the men who had employed him.

Andrews, one of the salesmen, winked warningly.

"Better handle 'em careful, old top. You know—the old New England conscience stuff."

Baird stared.

"I don't get you," he said.

Andrews shrugged.

"Your little party at the Central night before last."

"What about it?" demanded Baird. He colored again.

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Andrews winked; there was extreme sophistication, so Andrews thought, in the wink.

"New Year's comes but once a year, of course," he said. "But this slipping the kale into a lady's stocking—— You know," went on Andrews, "it isn't done in Donchester."

"Who saw me?" demanded Baird.

"Herbert," replied the salesman. "He was over on some business or other. Got back yesterday afternoon. Told us all about it—some swell friends you must have, all right," he said enviously. "Well, Herbert didn't stop in the outer office. He told the bosses. Mamie"—he referred to the stenographer—"was in there. And the old boys were sure shocked."

Baird squared his shoulders. "Herbert" was the nephew of the two brothers Robbins. He was not employed by the firm, but, an attorney, he did considerable work for them. It was just like the sneaking little slacker—Herbert had claimed a dependent in the draft who, Baird had known, was *not* as dependent as young Robbins pretended—to tell his uncles. He walked brusquely into the inner office.

The two brothers Robbins sat at twin desks. Clean-shaven, with upper lips somewhat too long and thin for generosity, they looked almost like twins.

"I've come back to work," said Baird tersely. He didn't care a hoot whether they liked his manner or not. Listening to gossip about a man who'd just returned from abroad——

Both brothers rose. They shook hands con-

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strainedly. Each seemed to wait for the other to speak.

"You telegraphed me," Baird said.

The younger cleared his throat.

"Why, yes, of course, Baird, of course. But I—ah——"

The elder brother took up the burden.

"We—ah—we'd hoped, Baird, that participation in the great crusade would have—ah—er—purified you, as it were, by fire, and—ah——"

He stopped, helplessly. Baird eyed him coldly. Within him was rising a resentment that fought for outlet.

"But even if I'm not purified," he said, "my job is waiting for me?"

"Certainly, certainly," said the elder brother. "Most assuredly, but—er—we were most surprised —*most* surprised at hearing of your conduct night before last in New York."

"Yes? Just what did I do that surprised you?" asked Baird.

The brothers looked at each other.

"You were drinking—drinking most heavily, Mr. Baird. And you know that we permit *none* of our employees to drink. We shall most certainly insist upon an assurance, Mr. Baird, that, while you are in our employ, you refrain utterly from touching liquor."

"I see. Any other little things you want me to promise?"

The elder brother frowned.

"Your attitude is not conciliatory, Mr. Baird,"

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he said reprovingly. "And there is something else. Putting money in a waitress's stocking is not—ah—the sort of thing that we can countenance."

"I see," said Baird. Impulsive, hot-tempered, their seeming injustice fired him to instant wrath.

"Don't want me to take a class in Sunday-school, do you?" he queried.

"Now, now, Mr. Baird; this is not at all the sort of way to talk," remonstrated the younger brother.

"How about the way you're talking to me?" demanded Baird. "Is it any of your business what I do outside this office?"

"It certainly is!" snapped the elder brother. "No employee of ours can be outrageously and publicly immoral."

"There were some fairly respectable citizens in the Central Tuesday night," said Baird.

The brothers sniffed.

"Donchester, thank God, has different standards of respectability from New York," said the younger.

"Your nephew was there," said Baird.

The brothers stiffened.

"As a sightseer," said the elder. "Not as a participant in a godless orgy."

"That's what he tells you."

The brothers exchanged glances.

"Your manner," said the younger, "is not—er—repentant, Mr. Baird."

The flame of anger burned brightly now.

"If I were, I'd tell God about it—not you two!" he cried. "Does a job here mean that I must apolo-

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gize for everything you don't happen to approve of? Because, if it does, I don't want your job."

The partners stared at him. The man who had left them eighteen months ago had been a meek person.

"While you are in this frame of mind," said the elder, "it would perhaps be as well if you did not come back, Mr. Baird."

"You said it just ahead of me," said Baird.

He walked, almost blindly, from the office. He responded curtly to the questions of the clerks in the outer office. "I'm through," he told them. "Those godly gentlemen are too much for me. They'd foreclose a mortgage with a grin, but because a man attends a New Year's party——" He stalked from the building.

From a cigar store he called up Raymond & Gerritt.

"I'll take that thirteen hundred if I can get the cash by noon," he told the junior partner.

"You'll have it by noon," Gerritt promised.

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VII

THE night clerk at the Tramby greeted Baird by name. His smile, as he handed over the room key, was cordial.

"No mail, Captain," he said.

His nonchalant manner restored momentarily Baird's confidence, which had lessened as the distance to the Tramby had lessened. If anything was wrong, surely the clerk's manner would have indicated it.

In his room, with the door carefully locked behind him, he examined his trunk. Its contents were still undisturbed. He sat down on the edge of the bed and wiped his forehead with a trembling hand.

It had been a full day! Definitely he had cut all ties that had bound him to his former life. Donchester lay behind, not merely the five-hour train-journey but a cycle of existence in the rear.

Forty-eight hours' ago, Baird had been an easy-going sort of chap, adaptable, content, averagely ambitious. But to-night—

Excitement had carried him along through the forenoon and half the afternoon in Donchester. But once aboard the train, with the proceeds of the sale of his Linestream property in his pocket, reac-

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tion had set in. Up to now, he had assumed that, if, in his absence, a search of his trunk should reveal the money therein, he could deny all knowledge of the matter.

But, as the train sped along toward New York, doubt began to arise. For instance, he would have to convince the hotel people—the police, too—that it was quite reasonable to assume that whoever had left the money had possessed a key to Baird's trunk. Of course, it was not an impossibility that a stranger should own such a key, but it was rather an incredibility. He had no clear idea of what his actions would be if suspicion met him at the hotel.

Now, with the contents of the canvas trunk intact, he could realize how dangerous had been his position while he had been away. For if it had been discovered, and its rightful owner had known the exact amount that should have been in it— Come to think of it, the canvas trunk was packed most oddly. The money had been thrust in higgledy-piggledy. And you simply couldn't get around the dazing fact that there had been no hue and cry raised about its loss.

There had been no inquiry made about this money! That was the great outstanding fact, potential of illicit profit, pregnant with possibility.

He rose to his feet, with a shrug of his shoulders, as though tossing away a physical burden. He walked to the telephone. The sort of thoughts that were seething in his brain were not the proper guests for his mind to entertain. He'd been long enough in

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his room for him to have discovered the money. If he telephoned now, he would be acquitted of any possible charge that anyone could bring against him. Whereas, if he delayed, question might be raised against his honesty.

His honesty! The legacy of generations of decent, law-abiding men and respectable, modest women! Why, he wasn't even *dreaming* of tossing that legacy aside! It had been all right enough to *borrow*, for twenty-four or thirty-six hours, money that he could replace without difficulty, but—

The telephone-bell rang as he lifted the receiver from the hook.

"Captain Baird?"

He left a delightful shiver run up his back. The last voice that he had expected to hear, yet the most welcome.

"Miss Elsing!"

Her laugh was merry.

"Do you mean it, Captain Baird?"

"Mean what?" he stammered.

She laughed again.

"I'm a vain thing, Captain Baird. Do you know, I'm so conceited that I thought that your voice sounded, well—pleased."

"My voice is the truest barometer of my heart," he assured her.

"You've improved," she told him. "Does home always do that for you?"

"New York is my home now," he answered.

"Its effect is almost instant, isn't it?"

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"Perhaps it isn't New York that's the cause; it might be you," he said.

"Do you know," she laughed, "that there isn't a great deal of sense to what you say?"

"Do you demand sanity from your worshipers?"

"Aren't we breathless, though?"

"Why delay?" he demanded.

"Why, indeed!"

It was the merest hint at flirtation, but—Baird thrilled.

"I suppose," she said, "that you're wondering why I am so unmaidenly, not to say brazen, as to telephone you?"

"Do we question the gifts of the gods?" he retorted.

The faintest, most delightful whistle came along the wire.

"Captain Baird, you amaze me! I feared you were a stick."

"And now the stick puts forth leaves."

"Pretty flowers," she countered.

"I am bowing," he told her.

"I courtesy to you, Captain Baird. But—I didn't phone for all this, delightful though it is. You didn't know my address. And you are to dine with me to-morrow evening. The Creighton Arms, on West Fifty-ninth Street, at seven."

"I suppose," he said, "that Jimmy would have told me."

"Intimating, forward youth, that I thought up an excuse?"

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"Did you?" he asked.

"For your vanity, you shall be punished, sir. I shall invite Jimmy to dinner——"

"No!" he begged.

"And Sam Blackmar." She was very severe.

"No! No!" he cried. "The Constitution says that we are not to suffer cruel and unusual punishments, Miss Elsing."

"Well—you *should* be punished, you know. I might—heap coals of fire on your head. I might admit that my telephoning *was*—an excuse to talk. But I won't. Good-night, sir."

He heard the click of the instrument. Dazedly he hung up. Of course, a girl like her—engaged to a multimillionaire—wouldn't look at a chap like himself, but— The bell rang again. It was Jimmy Ladd.

"Took a chance, old topper, that you'd be back. So excited, anyway, that if you hadn't been in, I'd have talked to the hotel operator. Must talk to somebody when you have something to say, eh?"

Baird laughed.

"What's on your soul, Jimmy?"

"On my soul, Jimmy? How familiar you are! Do you know that you're talking to a man of power, place, and influence? I suppose, in your benighted ignorance, that you think that you're talking to the wastrel son of James McPherson Ladd, senior."

"What on earth have you been drinking, Jimmy?"

"Who? Me? My boy"—the voice was suddenly solemn—"you couldn't push a drink down past my

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prohibitory tonsils if you used a battering-ram. Roddy me lad, you are now listening to the junior partner of the firm of James McPherson Ladd & Company."

Baird trembled.

"On the level, Jimmy?"

"Yea, verily, comrade in arms! Father didn't wait four days. Sent for me to-night. Old boy feeling sort of down. Only heir comes to him. Hand-shake. 'Son,' says ancient sire, 'I have pursued wrong tactics. Made a fool of you. Now will pursue correct dope. Make you a partner, give you equal responsibilities, and you will cut the red-eye. Eh, what?' "

There were sounds of a laughing struggle at the other end of the telephone. Then a voice deeper than that of Jimmy spoke to Baird.

"This is the senile sire to whom my irreverent son refers, Captain Baird. He is a graceless vagabond, eh? I think that he has no redeeming virtues. Which is why I love him. I've been fighting him all my life, and I'm tired. He wins. I shall probably live long enough to see my name printed in bankruptcy, but——"

Another struggle sounded over the wire. Then Jimmy spoke again.

"Age has robbed him of his optimism, Roddy. Well, well, you and I together will show him a little business jazz."

Quite evenly, Baird spoke.

"You really think there's a place for me in your office?"

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"Think so? I don't know what Eileen Elsing would say if I didn't fix it for you to remain in New York."

"I don't think I understand, Jimmy."

Anxiously, Jimmy spoke.

"Well, for gosh sake, don't *mis*understand, Roddy old top. That was a joke in bad taste: Eileen has nothing to do with it. *I* want you; you're the laddie buck I need. But"—and he chuckled—"I don't think Eileen will mind a bit. And it will do Blackmar a lot of good. Success is making his liver torpid."

Into his tone, Baird tried to put an incredulous jeer.

"As if she'd look at me! When she's going to marry Blackmar!"

Jimmy Ladd laughed.

"Marriage isn't going to put any blinders over Eileen's eyes, boy. It'll take 'em off. Dining with her to-morrow night, eh? How about Saturday with us?"

"It's a go," said Baird.

"Fine stuff! And, meantime, be a good boy and say your prayers with an extra one for all the nice kindly barkeepers. There's a long, hard winter ahead of them. I'm on the wagon now. By-by."

Baird stood a moment by the telephone. All that he had to do was call the office now, tell them of the money in the canvas trunk, and—kick Opportunity down the front stoop.

He walked over to his trunk. Deliberately he took out of the canvas trunk inside three thousand dollars. He wouldn't postpone until to-morrow what

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he knew was to be done. He'd take the money *now!* Decision made, his mind was suddenly at peace. He was asleep three minutes after the lights were turned out.

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VIII

THERE is no more famous jewelry shop in the world than that of Arabin's. Its exterior resembles a great bank, its interior the dream of Aladdin.

One passes through a revolving door, embarrassedly conscious of the scrutiny of a uniformed doorman. One hesitates—unless one is a millionaire—a bit uncertainly beyond the entrance. Well-bred salesmen eye one aloofly. Sauntering along the aisles are other well-dressed, well-born-seeming gentlemen. They seem to bear no relationship to the heavy-hoofed detectives seen in hotels and banks. Yet the initiate know that the tails of frock coats may hide automatic pistols, that a most husky chest may rise and fall beneath a correct cravat.

Seldom, save during the Christmas shopping-season, is there any crowd in Arabin's. The stranger wonders how the great concern succeeds. And then, perhaps, he overhears a fragment of the conversation between a customer and a languid, though courteous clerk. One notes that the trifle under examination by the customer is priced at ninety-five thousand dollars or so. One understands.

At his late breakfast at the Tramby, this Friday morning, Baird had been attracted by one of Web-

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ster's cartoons in an afternoon paper. It was headed: "The Thrill That Comes Once in a Lifetime." A small boy was looking at a circus parade. Baird had recognized the cartoonist's gift for catching the quick joys of boyhood. Now, as he hesitated momentarily, he remembered the picture and smiled at his own thrill. Arabin's was to him what the circus was to the small boy.

Arabin was not in his office, but his smiling secretary took Baird in.

"Miss Elsing's pin? I think it's ready, Captain Baird."

He pressed a button; a dapper youth responded. In three minutes the secretary was opening a dainty box. Against its purple-satin lining the pin gleamed and glittered. In fancy, Baird saw it against the chiffon covering of Eileen's bosom. There was nothing of hesitation in the movements of his fingers whereby thirty-three hundred and twenty-two dollars were transferred from his pocket to the clerk.

No one would pick his pocket this time; no carelessness would lose this pin. Inside his waistcoat he buried the little box. Against it his heart beat furiously. His color was high as he left the shopping-place of wealth.

He was as indecisive as most persons. He was normal, had the normal brain. And the normal brain is as variable as an April day. But he had the element that makes for success in life. Having wandered uncertainly all round a problem, he could finally, having reluctantly made up his mind, follow

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through on the course chosen with no lingering unwillingness.

He had made his decision last night. There were, as yet, no qualms of regret. He had decided that it was necessary to his career, to his success, that Eileen's pin be given to her. It was a condition, not a theory, that confronted him. He had met the condition. Let theories go hang!

Idly, his lifting chest feeling the pressure of the little box in his waistcoat's inner pocket, Baird started up the avenue. Limousines, taxis, occasional hansoms, lured from their stables by the soft air, passed him, crowded with people whose furs cried of prosperity. Even those who rode the more democratic 'buses were garbed expensively. It was the "spendingest" year that New York, accustomed though she was to spending, had ever known. But Baird, though unaware that even New York asked itself dazed, the question, "Where do they get the money?" felt himself wondering what was the apparently inexhaustible source of the revenues that the country paid to Manhattan.

He passed Forty-second Street, still drinking in the wonder of the street. Power, glamour—and glory! Money meant that. It might be an unworthy sort of glory, but surely there was something legitimate in the exultant pleasure that a man took in his money. A thing inherently wrong could not exist for thousands of years. Therefore, wealth was legitimate. Its acquisition— But who cared about that? To *have* it—that was what counted.

He reached Fifty-ninth Street and remembered

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that Eileen lived on this street. He was to dine with her to-night, and—he ought to have apparel suitable to the occasion.

In his pockets were over a thousand dollars. Of course, ready-made evening clothes were all right, but— He had passed a most expensive-looking shop a few streets south. He retraced his steps and entered it. An inconspicuous sign in the window said, "Tailored clothing without the annoyance of a try-on." They might possibly fit him.

They could, quite correctly. He ordered a dinner jacket and a formal evening suit sent by special messenger to the Tramby.

Farther down the avenue he found a haberdashery. The clerk shrugged superciliously at being asked to show ready-to-wear shirts, but—there were some excellent soft and stiff shirts at seven dollars. They would do, of course, for an emergency—indeed, they were carried only as samples, really, of what the firm could do; they would fit, yes, but— Baird left with four shirts, an assortment of collars and ties, some really excellent links and studs that cost the mere trifle of one hundred and twenty-five dollars, and had been measured for a dozen outing shirts and half a dozen dress shirts. At another shop, he bought shoes suitable for evening wear. Then, in a taxi, he raced to the Tramby. He had no fears, this time, upon entering the lobby. If discovery had been made, he would brazen it out.

But discovery had not been made. The clerk's friendly smile as he received his key was proof enough of that. Up-stairs, in his room, he counted

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his money ruefully. He had spent, in adornment for himself, in the neighborhood of six hundred dollars.

Then he laughed. It was a good investment. A man who was to hold a prominent position in the firm of James McPherson Ladd & Company could well afford good clothing.

Dressed finally, he surveyed himself in the long mirror that backed the bathroom door. Not so bad. He removed the dress coat and the white waistcoat. It was to be an informal little dinner—just himself and the girl. A dinner jacket would do— He'd wear it.

At the door, he paused and looked at the trunk. It was locked all right. To-morrow, he'd look up rooms. Meantime, he'd not worry. His mouth was hard, cynical, as he locked the door and started for Eileen's apartment.

But it was soft when the tiny lift in the building where she lived deposited him opposite her door. And it was wreathed pleasurably when the door opened and the girl herself stood before him.

She dropped him a mock courtesy as he, with a daring that he had not known himself to possess, kissed her hand.

"My poverty does not annoy you, then?"

"'Poverty'?" He looked down the short hall, observing the prettily furnished drawing-room.

"I have but one maid," she pouted, "and she is in the kitchen. I answer the bell myself to-night."

He hung up his overcoat and followed her down the hall.

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"I see you that much the sooner," he told her.

She smiled at him.

"Do you know, Captain Baird, I like your pretty speeches."

They were in the drawing-room now. Beyond it he could see a tiny dining-room, its table daintily set.

But the rooms, delightful though they were, were but a setting for her. He had seen her, sophisticated-seeming, in evening dress. He had seen her, still with her air of extreme worldly wisdom, in a snug tailored suit whose boyishness could not take away her look of knowledge. But to-night she was a simple girl.

Her hair was low upon her head, a huge mass of it in the rear, hiding the nape of a neck that he knew was white as snow. Her dress was white, not nearly so low as that dress she had worn at the Chummy Club and the Central, yet permitting a hint of a gentle bosom. About her neck was a string of pearls.

She pirouetted before him.

"You like my frock?"

"I adore it—and you," he told her.

Her mouth pursed, but her eyes were merry. He noted, for the first time, the extreme length of her lashes.

"I see," she said, "that I shall have extreme difficulty in keeping you in hand, Captain Baird."

"You have merely to close your fingers; I am in your hand now," he said.

She whirled about again. He had danced with

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