

Jane Cable

George Barr McCutcheon

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[Illustration: "HIS FEEBLE GLANCE TOOK IN HER FACE WITH LIFELESS INTEREST"]

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Jane Cable

By George Barr McCutcheon

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CHAPTER I

WHEN JANE GOES DRIVING

It was a bright, clear afternoon in the late fall that pretty Miss Cable drove up in her trap and waited at the curb for her father to come forth from his office in one of Chicago's tallest buildings. The crisp, caressing wind that came up the street from the lake put the pink into her smooth cheeks, but it did not disturb the brown hair that crowned her head. Well-groomed and graceful, she sat straight and sure upon the box, her gloved hand grasping the yellow reins firmly and confidently. Miss Cable looked neither to right nor to left, but at the tips of her thoroughbred's ears. Slender and tall and very aristocratic she appeared, her profile alone visible to the passers-by.

After a very few moments, waiting in her trap, the smart young woman became impatient. A severe, little pucker settled upon her brow, and not once, but many times her eyes turned to the broad entrance across the sidewalk. She had telephoned to her father earlier in the afternoon; and he had promised faithfully to be ready at four o'clock for a spin up the drive behind Spartan. At three minutes past four the pucker made its first appearance; and now, several minutes later, it was quite distressing. Never before had he kept her waiting like this. She was conscious of the fact that at least a hundred men had stared at her in the longest ten minutes she had ever known. From the bottom of a very hot heart she was beginning to resent this scrutiny, when a tall young fellow swung around a near-by corner, and came up with a smile so full of delight, that the dainty pucker left her brow, as the shadow flees from the sunshine. His hat was off and poised gallantly above his head, his right hand reaching up to clasp the warm, little tan one outstretched to meet it.

"I knew it was you long before I saw you," said he warmly.

"Truly? How interesting!" she responded, with equal warmth. "Something psychic in the atmosphere today?"

"Oh, no," he said, reluctantly releasing her hand. "I can't see through these huge buildings, you know---it's impossible to look over their tops--I simply knew you were here, that's all."

"You're romantic, even though you are a bit silly," she cried gaily. "Pray, how could you know?"

"Simplest thing in the world. Rigby told me he had seen you, and that you seemed to be in a great rage. He dared me to venture into your presence, and--that's why I'm here."

"What a hopelessly, commonplace explanation! Why did you not leave me to think that there was really something psychic about it? Logic is so discouraging to one's conceit. I'm in a very disagreeable humour to-day," she said, in fine despair.

"I don't believe it," he disputed graciously.

"But I am," she insisted, smiling brightly. His heart was leaping high--so high, that it filled his eyes. "Everything has gone wrong with me to-day. It's pretty trying to have to wait in front of a big office building for fifteen minutes. Every instant, I expect a policeman to come up and order me to move on. Don't they arrest

people for blocking the street?"

"Yes, and put them in awful, rat-swarming dungeons over in Dearborn Avenue. Poor Mr. Cable, he should be made to suffer severely for his wretched conduct. The idea of--"

"Don't you dare to say anything mean about dad," she warned.

"But he's the cause of all the trouble--he's never done anything to make you happy, or--"

"Stop!--I take it all back--I'm in a perfectly adorable humour. It was dreadfully mean of me to be half-angry with him, wasn't it? He's in there, now, working his dear old brain to pieces, and I'm out here with no brain at all," she said ruefully.

To the ingenuous youth, such an appeal to his gallantry was well-nigh irresistible, and for a moment it seemed as if he would yield to the temptation to essay a brilliant contradiction; but his wits came to his rescue, for quickly realising that not only were the frowning rocks of offence to be avoided, but likewise the danger of floundering helplessly about in the inviting quicksands of inanity, he preserved silence--wise young man that he was, and trusted to his eyes to express an eloquent refutation. At last, however, something seemed to occur to him. A smile broke on his face.

"You had a stupid time last night?" he hazarded.

"What makes you think so?"

"I know who took you in to dinner."

The eyes of the girl narrowed slightly at the corners.

"Did he tell you?"

"No, I have neither seen nor heard from anyone present." She opened her eyes wide, now.

"Well, Mr. S. Holmes, who was it?"

"That imbecile, Medford."

Miss Cable sat up very straight in the trap; her little chin went up in the air; she even went so far as to make a pretence of curbing the impatience of her horse.

"Mr. Medford was most entertaining--he was the life of the dinner," she returned somewhat severely.

"He's a professional!"

"An actor!" she cried incredulously.

"No, a professional diner-out. Wasn't that rich young Jackson there?"

"Why, yes; but do tell me how you knew?" The girl was softening a little, her curiosity aroused.

"Of course I will," he said boyishly, at once pleased with himself and his sympathetic audience. "About five-thirty I happened to be in the club. Medford was there, and as usual catering to Jackson, when the latter was called to the 'phone. Naturally, I put two and two together." He paused to more thoroughly enjoy the look of utter mystification that hovered on the girl's countenance. It was very apparent that this method of deduction through addition was unsatisfying. "What Jackson said to Medford, on his return," the young man continued, "I did not hear; but from the expression on the listener's face I could have wagered that an invitation had been extended and accepted. Oh, we boys have got it down fine! Garrison is---"

"And who is Garrison?"

"Garrison is the head door man at the club. It's positively amazing the number of telephone calls he receives every afternoon from well-known society women!"

"What about? And what's that got to do with Mr. Medford taking me in to dinner?"

"Just this: Suppose Mrs. Rowden..."

"Mrs. Rowden!" The girl was nonplussed.

"Yes--wants to find out who's in the club? She 'phones Garrison. Instantly, after ascertaining which set--younger or older is wanted, from a small card upon which he has written a few but choice names of club members, he submits a name to her."

"Really, you don't mean to tell me that such a thing is actually done?" exclaimed Miss Cable, who as yet was socially so unsophisticated as to be horrified; "you're joking, of course!"

"But nine time out of ten," ignoring the interruption; "it is met with: 'Don't want him!' Another: 'Makes a bad combination!' A third: 'Oh, no, my dear, not a dollar to his name--hopelessly ineligible!' This last exclamation though intended solely for the visitor at her home, elicits from Garrison a low chuckle of approval of the speaker's discrimination; and presently, he hears: 'Goodness me, Garrison, there must be someone else!' Then, to her delights she is informed that Mr. Jackson has just come in; and he is requested to come to the 'phone, Garrison being dismissed with thanks and the expectation of seeing her butler in the morning."

"How perfectly delicious!" came from the girl. "I can almost hear Mrs. Rowden telling Jackson that he will be the dearest boy in the world if he will dine with her."

"And bring someone with him, as she is one man short," laughed Graydon, as he wound up lightly; "and here is where the professional comes in. We're all onto Medford! Why, Garrison has half a dozen requests a night--six times five--thirty dollars. Not bad--but then the man's a 'who's who' that never makes mistakes. I won't be positive that he does not draw pay from both ends. For, men like Medford, outside of the club, probably tip him to give them the preference. It would be good business."

There was so much self-satisfaction in the speaker's manner of uttering these last words, that it would not have required the wisdom of one older than Miss Cable to detect that he was thoroughly enjoying his pose of man of the world. He was indeed young! For, he had yet to learn that not to disillusion the girl, but to conform as much as possible to her ideals, was the surest way to win her favour; and his vanity surely would have received a blow had not David Cable at that moment come out of the doorway across the sidewalk, pausing for a moment to converse with the man who accompanied him. The girl's face lighted with pleasure and relief; but the young man regarding uneasily the countenance of the General Manager of the Pacific, Lakes & Atlantic R.R. Company, saw that he was white, tired and drawn. It was not the keen, alert expression that had been the admiration of everyone; something vital seemed to be missing, although he could not have told what it was. A flame seemed to have died somewhere in his face, leaving behind a faint suggestion of ashes; and through the young man's brain there flashed the remark of his fair companion: 'He's in there now, working his dear, old brain to pieces.'

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, Jane," said Cable, crossing to the curb. "Hello, Graydon; how are you?" His voice was sharp, crisp, and louder than the occasion seemed to demand, but it was natural with him. Years of life in an engine cab do not serve to mellow the tone of the human voice, and the habit is too strong to be overcome. There was no polish to the tones as they issued from David Cable's lips. He spoke with more than ordinary regard for the Queen's English, but it was because he never had neglected it. It was characteristic of the man to do a thing as nearly right as he knew how in the beginning, and to do it the same way until a better method presented itself.

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Cable, except that Jane has been abusing me because you were not here to---"

"Don't you believe a word he says, dad," she cried.

"Oh, if the truth isn't in me, I'll subside," laughed Graydon. "Nevertheless, you've kept her waiting, and it's only reasonable that she should abuse somebody."

"I am glad you were here to receive it; it saves my grey hairs."

"Rubbish!" was Miss Cable's simple comment, as her father took his place beside her.

"Oh, please drive on, Jane," said the young man, his admiring eyes on the girl who grasped the reins afresh and straightened like a soldier for inspection. "I must run around to the University Club and watch the score of the Yale-Harvard game at Cambridge. It looks like Harvard, hang it all! Great game, they say---"

"There he goes on football. We must be off, or it will be dark before we get away from him. Good-bye!" cried Miss Cable.

"How's your father, Gray? He wasn't feeling the best in the world, yesterday," said Cable, tucking in the robe.

"A case of liver, Mr. Cable; he's all right to-day. Good-bye!"

As Jane and her father whirled away, the latter gave utterance to a remark that brought a new brightness to her eyes and a proud throbbing to her heart; but he did not observe the effect.

"Bright, clever chap--that Graydon Bansemer," he said comfortably.

CHAPTER II

THE CABLES

The General Manager of the Pacific, Lakes & Atlantic Railroad System had had a hard struggle of it. He who begins his career with a shovel in a locomotive cab usually has something of that sort to look back upon. There are no roses along the pathway he has traversed. In the end, perhaps, he wonders if it has been worth while. David Cable was a General Manager; he had been a fireman. It had required twenty-five years of hard work on his part to break through the chrysalis. Packed away in a chest upstairs in his house there was a grimy, greasy, unwholesome suit of once-blue overalls. The garments were just as old as his railroad career, for he had worn them on his first trip with the shovel. When his wife implored him to throw away the "detestable things," he said, with characteristic humour, that he thought he would keep them for a rainy day. It was much simpler to go from General Manager to fireman than vice versa, and it might be that he would need the suit again. It pleased him to hear his wife sniff contemptuously.

David Cable had been a wayward, venturesome youth. His father and mother had built their hopes high with him as a foundation, and he had proved a decidedly insecure basis; for one night, in the winter of 1863, he stole away from his home in New York; before spring he was fighting in the far Southland, a boy of sixteen carrying a musket in the service of his country.

At the close of the Civil War Private Cable, barely eighteen, returned to his home only to find that death had destroyed its happiness: his father had died, leaving his widowed mother a dependant upon him. It was then, philosophically, he realised that labour alone could win for him; and he stuck to it with rigid integrity. In turn, he became brakeman and fireman; finally his determination and faithfulness won him a fireman's place on one of the fast New York Central "runs." If ever he was dissatisfied with the work, no one was the wiser.

Railroading in those days was not what it is in these advanced times. Then, it meant that one was possessed of all the evil habits that fall to the lot of man. David Cable was more or less contaminated by contact with his rough, ribald companions of the rail, and

he glided moderately into the bad habits of his kind. He drank and "gamboled" with the rest of the boys; but by nature not being vicious and low, the influences were not hopelessly deadening to the better qualities of his character. To his mother, he was always the strong, good-hearted, manly boy, better than all the other sons in the world. She believed in him; he worshipped her; and it was not until he was well up in the twenties that he stopped to think that she was not the only good woman in the world who deserved respect.

Up in Albany lived the Widow Coleman and her two pretty daughters. Mrs. Coleman's husband died on the battlefield, and she, like many women in the North and the South, after years of moderate prosperity, was compelled to support herself and her family. She had been a pretty woman, and one readily could see where her daughters got their personal attractiveness. Not many doors from the boisterous little eating-house in which the railroad men snatched their meals as they went through, the widow opened a book and newsstand. Her home was on the floor above the stand, and it was there she brought her little girls to womanhood. Good-looking, harum-scarum Dave Cable saw Frances Coleman one evening as he dropped in to purchase a newspaper. It was at the end of June, in 1876, and the country was in the throes of excitement over the first news of the Custer massacre on the Little Big Horn River.

Cable was deeply interested, for he had seen Custer fighting at the front in the sixties. Frances Coleman, the prettiest girl he had ever seen, sold him the newspaper. After that, he seldom went through Albany without visiting the little book shop.

Tempestuous, even arrogant in love, Cable, once convinced that he cared for her, lost no time in claiming her, whether or no. In less than three months after the Custer massacre they were married.

Defeated rivals unanimously and enviously observed that the handsomest fireman on the road had conquered the most outrageous little coquette between New York and Buffalo. As a matter of fact, she had loved him from the start; the others served as thorns with which she delightedly pricked his heart into subjection.

The young husband settled down, renounced all of his undesirable habits and became a new man with such surprising suddenness that his friends marvelled and--derided. A year of happiness followed. He grew accustomed to her frivolous ways, overlooked her merry whimsicalities and gave her the "full length of a free rope," as he called it. He was contented and consequently careless. She chafed under the indifference, and in her resentment believed the worst of him. Turmoil succeeded peace and contentment, and in the end, David Cable, driven to distraction, weakly abandoned the domestic battlefield and fled to the Far West, giving up home, good wages, and all for the sake of freedom, such as it was. He ignored her letters and entreaties, but in all those months that he was away from her he never ceased to regret the impulse that had defeated him. Nevertheless, he could not make up his mind to go back and resume the life of torture her jealousy had begotten.

Then, the unexpected happened. A letter was received containing the command to come home and care for his wife and baby. At once, David Cable called a halt in his demoralising career and saw the

situation plainly. He forgot that she had "nagged" him to the point where endurance rebelled; he forgot everything but the fact that he cared for her in spite of all. Sobered and conscience-stricken, he knew only that she was alone and toiling; that she had suffered uncomplainingly until the babe was some months old before appealing to him for help. In abject humiliation, he hastened back to New York, reproaching himself every mile of the way. Had he but known the true situation, he would have been spared the pangs of remorse, and this narrative never would have been written.

CHAPTER III

JAMES BANSEMER

In the City of New York there was practising, at that time, a lawyer by the name of Bansemer. His office, on the topmost floor of a dingy building in the lower section of the city, was not inviting. On leaving the elevator, one wound about through narrow halls and finally peered, with more or less uncertainty and misgiving, at the half-obliterated sign which said that James Bansemer held forth on the other side of the glass panel.

It was whispered in certain circles and openly avowed in others that Bansemer's business was not the kind which elevates the law; in plain words, his methods were construed to debase the good and honest statutes of the land. Once inside the door of his office--and a heavy spring always closed it behind one--there was quick evidence that the lawyer lamentably disregarded the virtues of prosperity, no matter how they had been courted and won. Although his transactions in and out of the courts of that great city bore the mark of dishonour, he was known to have made money during the ten years of his career as a member of the bar. Possibly he kept his office shabby and unclean that it might be in touch with the transactions which had their morbid birth inside the grimy walls. There was no spot or corner in the two small rooms that comprised his "chambers" to which he could point with pride. The floors were littered with papers; the walls were greasy and bedecked with malodorous notations, documents and pictures; the windows were smoky and useless; the clerk's desk bore every suggestion of dissoluteness.

But little less appalling to one's aesthetic sense was the clerk himself. Squatting behind his wretched desk, Elias Droom peered across the litter of papers and books with snaky but polite eyes, almost as inviting as the spider who, with wily but insidious decorum, draws the guileless into his web.

If one passed muster in the estimation of the incomprehensible Droom, he was permitted, in due season, to pass through a second oppressive-looking door and into the private office of Mr. James Bansemer, attorney-at-law and solicitor. It may be remarked at

this early stage that, no matter how long or how well one may have known Droom, one seldom lingered to engage in commonplaces with him. His was the most repellent personality imaginable. When he smiled, one was conscious of a shock to the nervous system; when he so far forgot himself as to laugh aloud, there was a distinct illustration of the word "crunching"; when he spoke, one was almost sorry that he had ears.

Bansemer knew but little of this freakish individual's history; no one else had the temerity to inquire into his past--or to separate it from his future, for that matter. Once, Bansemer ironically asked him why he had never married. It was a full minute before the other lifted his eyes from the sheet of legal cap, and by that time he was in full control of his passion.

"Look at me! Would any woman marry a thing like me?"

This was said with such terrible earnestness that Bansemer took care never to broach the subject again. He saw that Droom's heart was not all steel and brass.

Droom was middle-aged. His lank body and cadaverous face were constructed on principles not generally accredited to nature as it applies to men. When erect, his body swayed as if it were a stubborn reed determined to maintain its dignity in the face of the wind; he did not walk, he glided. His long square chin, rarely clean-shaven, protruded far beyond its natural orbit; indeed, the attitude of the chin gave one an insight to the greedy character of the man. At first glance, one felt that Droom was reaching forth with his lower jaw to give greeting with his teeth, instead of his hand.

His neck was long and thin, and his turndown collar was at least two sizes too large. The nose was hooked and of abnormal length, the tip coming well down over the short, upper lip and broad mouth. His eyes were light blue, and so intense that he was never known to blink the lashes. Topping them were deep, wavering, black eyebrows that met above the nose, forming an ominous, cloudy line across the base of his thin, high forehead. The crown of his head, covered by long, scant strands of black hair, was of the type known as "retreating and pointed." The forehead ran upward and back from the brows almost to a point, and down from the pinnacle hung the veil of hair, just as if he had draped it there with the same care he might have used in placing his best hat upon a peg. His back was stooped, and the high, narrow shoulders were hunched forward eagerly. Long arms and ridiculously thin legs, with big hands and feet, tell the story of his extremities. When he was on his feet Droom was more than six feet tall; as he sat in the low-backed, office chair he looked to be less than five feet, over all. What became of that lank expanse of bone and cuticle when he sat down was one of the mysteries that not even James Bansemer could fathom.

The men had been classmates in an obscure law school down in Pennsylvania. Bansemer was good-looking, forceful and young; while Droom was distinctly his opposite. Where he came from no one knew and no one cared. He was past thirty-five when he entered the school--at least twelve years the senior of Bansemer.

His appearance and attire proclaimed him to be from the country; but his sophistry, his knowledge of the world and his wonderful

insight into human nature contradicted his looks immeasurably. A conflict or two convinced his fellow students that he was more than a match for them in stealth and cunning, if not in dress and deportment.

Elias Droom had not succeeded as a lawyer. He repelled people, growing more and more bitter against the world as his struggles became harder. What little money he had accumulated--Heaven alone knew how: he came by it--dwindled to nothing, and he was in actual squalor when, later, Bansemer found him in an attic in Baltimore. Even as he engaged the half-starved wretch to become his confidential clerk the lawyer shuddered and almost repented of his action.

But Elias Droom was worth his weight in gold to James Bansemer from that day forth. His employer's sole aim in life was to get rich and thereby to achieve power. His ambition was laudable, if one accepts the creed of morals, but his methods were not so praise-worthy. After a year of two of starvation struggles to get on with the legitimate, he packed up his scruples and laid them away--temporarily, he said. He resorted to sharp practice, knavery, and all the forms of legal blackmail; it was not long before his bank account began to swell. His business thrived. He was so clever that not one of his shady proceedings reacted. It is safe to venture that ninety-nine per cent, of the people who were bilked through his manipulations promised, in the heat of virtuous wrath, to expose him, but he had learned to smile in security. He knew that exposure for him meant humiliation for the instigator, and he continued to rest easy while he worked hard.

"You're getting rich at this sort of thing," observed Droom one day, after the lawyer had closed a particularly nauseous deal to his own satisfaction, "but what are you going to do when the tide turns?"

Bansemer, irritated on perceiving that the other was engaged in his exasperating habit of rubbing his hands together, did not answer, but merely thundered out: "Will you stop that!"

There was a faint suggestion of the possibility of a transition of the hands to claws, as Droom abruptly desisted, but smilingly went on:

"Some day, the other shark will get the better of you and you'll have nothing to fall back on. You've been building on mighty slim foundations. There isn't a sign of support if the worst comes to the worst," he chuckled.

"It's a large world, Droom," said his employer easily.

"And small also, according to another saying," supplemented Droom. "When a man's down, everybody kicks him--I'm afraid you could not survive the kicking."

Droom grinned so diabolically as again he resumed the rubbing of his hands that the other turned away with an oath and closed the door to the inside office. Bansemer was alone and where Droom's eyes could not see him, but something told him that the grin hung outside the door for many minutes, as if waiting for a chance to pop in and tantalise him.

Bansemer was a good-looking man of the coarser mould--the kind of man that merits a second look in passing, and the second look is not always in his favour. He was thirty-five years of age, but looked older. His face was hard and deeply marked with the lines of intensity. The black eyes were fascinating in their brilliancy, but there was a cruel, savage light in their depths. The nose and mouth were clean-cut and pitiless in their very symmetry. Shortly after leaving college to hang out his shingle, he had married the daughter of a minister. For two years her sweet influence kept his efforts along the righteous path, but he writhed beneath the yoke of poverty. His pride suffered because he was unable to provide her with more of the luxuries of life; in his selfish way, he loved her. Failure to advance made him surly and ill-tempered, despite her amiable efforts to lighten the shadows around their little home. When the baby boy was born to them, and she suffered more and more from the unkindness of privation, James Bansemer, by nature an aggressor, threw off restraint and plunged into the traffic that soon made him infamously successful. She died, however, before the taint of his duplicity touched her, and he, even in his grief, felt thankful that she never was to know the truth.

At this time Bansemer lived in comfort at one of the middle-class boarding houses uptown, and the boy was just leaving the kindergarten for a private school. Bansemer's calloused heart had one tender chamber, and in it dwelt the little lad with the fair hair and grey eyes of the woman who had died.

Late one November afternoon just before Bansemer put on his light topcoat to leave the office for the day, Droom tapped on the glass panel of the door to his private office. Usually, the clerk communicated with him by signal--a floor button by which he could acquaint his master with much that he ought to know, and the visitor in the outer office would be none the wiser. The occasions were rare when he went so far as to tap on the door. Bansemer was puzzled, and stealthily listened for sounds from the other side. Suddenly, there came to his ears the voices of women, mingled with Broom's suppressed but always raucous tones.

Bansemer opened the door; looking into the outer office, he saw Droom swaying before two women, rubbing his hands and smiling. One of the women carried a small babe in her arms. Neither she nor her companion seemed quite at ease in the presence of the lank guardian of the outer office.

CHAPTER IV

THE FOUNDLING

"Lady to see you!" announced Droom. The shrewd, fearless genius of

the inner room glanced up quickly and met the prolonged, uncanny gaze of his clerk; unwillingly, his eyes fell.

"Confound it, Lias! will you ever quit looking at me like that! There's something positively creepy in that stare of yours!"

"Lady to see you!" repeated the clerk, shifting about uneasily, and then gliding away to take his customary look at the long row of books in the wall cases. He had performed this act a dozen times a day for more than five years; the habit had become so strong that chains could not have restrained him. It was what he considered a graceful way of dropping out of notice, at the same time giving the impression that he was constantly busy.

"Are you Mr. Bansemer?" asked the woman with the babe in her arms, as he crossed into the outer office.

For a moment Bansemer purposely remained absorbed in the contemplation of his finger nails; then he shot a sudden comprehensive glance which took in the young woman, her burden and all the supposed conditions. There was no doubt in his mind that here was another "paternity case," as he catalogued them in his big, black book.

"I am," he replied shortly, for he usually made short, quick work of such cases. There was not much money in them at best. They spring from the lower and poorer classes. The rich ones who are at fault in such matters never permit them to go to the point where a lawyer is consulted. "Would you mind coming in to-morrow? I'm just leaving for the day."

"It will take but a few minutes, sir, and it would be very hard for me to get away again to-morrow," said the young woman nervously. "I'm a governess in a family 'way uptown and my days are not very free."

"Is this your baby?" asked Bansemer, more interested. The word governess appealed to him; it meant that she had to do with wealthy people, at least.

"No--that is--well, not exactly," she replied confusedly. The lawyer looked at her so sharply that she flinched under his gaze. A kidnapper, thought he, with the quick cunning of one who deals in stratagems. Instinctively he looked about as if to make sure that there were no unnecessary witnesses to share the secret.

"Come into this room," said he suddenly. "Both of you. See that we are not disturbed," he added, to Droom. "I think I can give you a few minutes, madam, and perhaps some very good advice. Be seated," he went on, closing the door after them. His eyes rested on Broom's face for an instant as the door closed, and he saw a particularly irritating grin struggling on his thin lips. "Now, what is it? Be as brief as possible, please. I'm in quite a hurry."

It occurred to him at this juncture that the young woman was not particularly distressed. Instead, her rather pretty face was full of eagerness and there was a certain lightness in her manner that puzzled him for the moment. Her companion was the older of the two and quite as prepossessing. Both were neatly dressed and both looked as though they were or had been bread-winners. If they had

a secret, it was now quite evident to this shrewd, quick thinker that it was not a dark one. In truth, he was beginning to feel that something mischievous lurked in the attitude of the two visitors.

"I want to ask how a person has to proceed to adopt a baby," was the blunt and surprising remark that came from the one who held the infant. Bansemer felt himself getting angry.

"Who wants to adopt it?" he asked shortly.

"I do, of course," she answered, so readily that the lawyer stared. He scanned her from head to foot, critically; her face reddened perceptibly. It surprised him to find that she was more than merely good-looking; she was positively attractive!

"Are you a married woman?" he demanded.

"Yes," she answered, with a furtive glance at her companion. "This is my sister," she added.

"I see. Where is your husband?"

"He is at home--or rather, at his mother's home. We are living there now."

"I thought you said you were a governess?"

"That doesn't prevent me from having a home, does it?" she explained easily. "I'm not a nurse, you know."

"This isn't your child, then?" he asked impatiently.

"I don't know whose child it is." There was a new softness in her voice that made him look hard at her while she passed a hand tenderly over the sleeping babe. "She comes from a foundling's home, sir."

"You cannot adopt a child unless supported by some authority," he said. "How does she happen to be in your possession; and what papers have you from the foundling's home to show that the authorities are willing that you should have her? There is a lot of red tape about such matters, madam."

"I thought perhaps you could manage it for me, Mr. Bansemer," she said, plaintively. "They say you never fail at anything you undertake." He was not sure there was a compliment in her remark, so he treated it with indifference.

"I'm afraid I can't help you." The tone was final.

"Can't you tell me how I'll have to proceed? I must adopt the child, sir, one way or another." Her manner was more subdued and there was a touch of supplication in her voice.

"Oh, you go into the proper court and make application, that's all," he volunteered carelessly. "The judge will do the rest. Does your husband approve of the plans?"

"He doesn't know anything about it?"

"What's that?"

"I can't tell him; it would spoil everything."

"My dear madam, I don't believe I understand you quite clearly. You want to adopt the child and keep the matter dark so far as your husband is concerned? May I inquire the reason?" Bansemer, naturally, was interested by this time.

"If you have time to listen, I'd like to tell you how it all comes about. It won't take long. I want someone to tell me just what to do and I'll pay for the advice, if it isn't too expensive. I'm very poor, Mr. Bansemer; perhaps you won't care to help me after you know that I can't afford to pay very much."

"We'll see about that later," he said brusquely; "go ahead with the story."

The young woman hesitated, glanced nervously at her sister as if for support, and finally faced the expectant lawyer with a flash of determination in her dark eyes. As she proceeded, Bansemer silently and somewhat disdainfully made a study of the speaker. He concluded that she was scarcely of common origin and was the possessor of a superficial education that had been enlarged by conceitedness; furthermore, she was a person of selfish instincts, but without the usual cruel impulses. There was little if any sign of true refinement in the features, and yet, there was a strange strength of purpose that puzzled him. As her story progressed, he solved the puzzle. She had the strength to carry out a purpose that might further her own personal interests; but not the will to endure sacrifice for the sake of another. Her sister was larger and possessed a reserve that might have been mistaken for deepness. He felt that she was hardly in sympathy with the motives of the younger, more volatile woman.

"My husband is a railroad engineer and is ten years older than I," the narrator said in the beginning. "I wasn't quite nineteen when we were married--two years ago. For some time, we got along all right; then we began to quarrel. He commenced to---"

"Mr. Bansemer is in a hurry, Fan," broke in the older sister, sharply; and then, repeating the lawyer's words: "Be as brief as possible."

There was a world of reproach in the look which greeted the speaker. Evidently, it was a grievous disappointment not to be allowed to linger over the details.

"Well," she continued half pettishly; "it all ended by his leaving home, job and everything. I had told him that I was going to apply for a divorce. For three months I never heard from him."

"Did you apply for a divorce?" asked the lawyer, stifling a yawn.

"No, sir, I did not, although he did nothing towards my support." The woman could not resist a slightly coquettish attempt to enlist Bansemer's sympathy. "I obtained work at St. Luke's Hospital for Foundlings, and after that, as a governess. But, once a week I went back to the asylum to see the little ones. One day, they brought

in a beautifully dressed baby--a girl. She was found on a doorstep, and in the basket was a note asking that she be well cared for; with it, was a hundred dollar bill. The moment I saw the little thing, I fell in love with her. I made application and they gave me the child with the understanding that I was to adopt it. You see, I was lonely--I had been living alone for nine or ten months. The authorities knew nothing of my trouble with Mr. Cable--that's my husband, David Cable. The child was about a month old when I took her to his mother, whom I hadn't seen in months. I told Mrs. Cable that she was mine. The dear old lady believed me; half the battle was won." She paused out of breath, her face full of excitement.

"And then?" he asked, once more interested.

"We both wrote to David asking him to come home to his wife and baby." She looked away guiltily. For a full minute, Bansemer did not speak.

"The result?" he demanded.

"He came back last month."

"Does he know the truth?"

"No, and with God's help, he never shall! It's my only salvation!" she exclaimed emotionally. "He thinks she is his baby and--and---" The tears were on her cheeks, now. "I worship him, Mr. Bansemer! Oh, how good and sweet he has been to me since he came back! Now, don't you see why I must adopt this child, and why he must never know? If he learned that I had deceived him in this way, he would hate me to my dying day."

The infant was awake and staring at him with wide, blue eyes.

"And you want me to handle this matter so that your husband will be none the wiser?"

"Oh, Mr. Bansemer," she cried; "it means everything to me! All depends on this baby. I must adopt her, or the asylum people won't let me keep her. Can't it be done so quickly that he'll never find it out?"

"How many people know that the child is not yours?"

"My sister and the authorities at the asylum; not another soul."

"It is possible to arrange the adoption, Mrs. Cable, but I can't guarantee that Mr. Cable will not find it out. The records will show the fact, you know. There is but one way to avoid discovery."

"And that, please?"

"Leave New York and make your home in some distant city. That's the safe way. If you remain here, there is always a chance that he may find out. I see the position you're in and I'll help you. It can be done quite regularly and there is only one thing you'll have to fear--you own tongue," he concluded, pointedly.

"I hate New York, Mr. Bansemer. David likes the West and I'll go

anywhere on earth, if it will keep him from finding out. Oh, if you knew how he adores her!" she cried, regret and ecstasy mingling in her voice. "I'd give my soul if she were only mine!" Bansemer's heart was too roughly calloused to be touched by the wistful longing in these words.

Before the end of the week the adoption of the foundling babe was a matter of record; and the unsuspecting David Cable was awaiting a reply from the train-master of a big Western railroad, to whom, at the earnest, even eager, solicitation of his wife, he had applied for work. Elias Droom made a note of the fee in the daybook at the office, but asked no questions. Bansemer had told him nothing of the transaction, but he was confident that the unspeakable Droom knew all about it, even though he had not been nearer than the outer office during any of the consultations.

CHAPTER V

THE BANSEMER CRASH

Twenty long years had passed since David and Frances Cable took their hasty departure--virtually fleeing from New York City, their migrations finally ending in that thriving Western city--Denver. Then, the grime of the engine was on Cable's hands and deep beneath his skin; the roar of iron and steel and the rush of wind was ever in his ears; the quest of danger in his eye; but there was love, pride and a new ambition in his heart. Now, in 1898, David Cable's hands were white and strong; the grime was gone; the engineer's cap had given way to the silk tile of the magnate; and the shovel was a memory.

But his case was not unique in that day and age of pluck and luck. Many another man had gone from the bottom to the top with the speed and security of the elevator car in the lofty "sky-scrapers." In the heartless revolution of a few years, he became the successor of his Western benefactor. The turn that had been kind to him, was unkind to his friend and predecessor; the path that led upward for David Cable, ran the other way for the train-master, who years afterward died in his greasy overalls and the close-fitting cap of an engineer. One night Cable read the news of the wreck with all the joy gone from his heart.

From the cheap, squalid section of town known as "railroad end," Cable's rising influence carried him to the well-earned luxury. The lines of care and toil mellowed in the face of his pretty wife, as the years rolled by; her comely figure shed the cheap raiment of "hard, old days," and took on the plumage of prosperity. Trouble, resentment, and worry disappeared as if by magic, smoothed out by the satiny touch of comfort's fingers. She went upward much faster than her husband, for her ambitions were less exacting. She longed

to shine socially--he loathed the thought of it. But Cable was proud of his wife. He enjoyed the transition that lifted her up with steady strength to the plane which fitted her best--as he regarded it. She had stuck by him nobly and uncomplainingly through the vicissitudes; it delighted him to give her the pleasures.

Frances Cable was proud; but she had not been too proud to stand beside the man with the greasy overalls and to bend her fine, young strength to work in unison with his. Together, facing the task, cheerfully, they had battled and won.

There were days when it was hard to smile; but the next day always brought with it a fresh sign of hope. The rough, hard, days in the Far West culminated in his elevation to the office of General Manager of the great railroad system, whose headquarters and home were in the city of Chicago. Attaining this high place two years prior to the opening of this narrative, he was regarded now as one of the brainiest railroad men and slated to be president of the road at the next meeting.

Barely past fifty years of age, David Cable was in the prime of life and usefulness. Age and prosperity had improved him greatly. The iron grey of his hair, the keen brightness of his face, the erect, and soldierly carriage of his person made him a striking figure. His wife, ten years his junior, was one of the most attractive women in Chicago. Her girlish beauty had refined under the blasts of adversity; years had not been unkind to her. In a way, she was the leader of a certain set, but her social ambitions were not content. There was a higher altitude in fashion's realm. Money, influence and perseverance were her allies; social despotism her only adversary.

The tall, beautiful and accomplished daughter of the Cables was worshipped by her father with all the warmth and ardour of his soul. Times there were when he looked in wonder upon this arbiter of not a few manly destinies; and for his life could not help asking himself how the Creator had given him such a being for a child, commenting on the fact that she bore resemblance to neither parent.

For years, Mrs. Cable had lived in no little terror of some day being found out. As the child grew to womanhood, the fears gradually diminished and a sense of security that would not be disturbed replaced them. Then, just as she was reaching out for the chief prizes of her ambition, she came face to face with a man, whose visage she never had forgotten--Elias Droom! And Frances Cable looked again into the old and terrifying shadows!

It was late in the afternoon, and she was crossing the sidewalk to her carriage waiting near Field's, when a man brushed against her. She was conscious of a strange oppressiveness. Before she turned to look at him she knew that a pair of staring eyes were upon her face. Something seemed to have closed relentlessly upon her heart.

One glance was sufficient. The tall, angular form stood almost over her; the two, wide, blue eyes looked down in feigned surprise; the never-to-be-forgotten voice greeted her, hoarsely:

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Cable! And how is the baby?"

"The baby!" she faltered. Struggle against it as she would, a sort of fascination drew her gaze toward the remarkable face of the old clerk. "Why--why--she's very well, thank you," she finally stammered. Her face was as white as a ghost; with a shudder she started to pass him. Droom, blocked the way.

"She was such a pretty little thing, I remember;" and then, insinuatingly: "Where is her father, now?"

"He--Mr. Cable," answered Mrs. Cable, feeling very much as a bird feels when it is charmed by a snake, "why, he's at home, of course."

"Indeed!" was all that Elias Droom said; for she had fled to escape the grin that writhed in and out among the wrinkles of his face.

As her carriage struggled through crowded Washington Street, an irresistible something compelled Frances Cable to glance back. Droom stood on the curb, his eyes following her almost hungrily. Half an hour later, when she reached home, she was in a state of collapse. Although there was no physical proof of the fact, she was positive that Elias Droom had followed her to the very doorstep.

In suspense and dread, she waited for days before there was a second manifestation of Droom. There was rarely a day when she did not expect her husband to stand before her and ask her to explain the story that had been carried to him by a demon in the form of man.

But Droom did not go to David Cable. He went to James Bansemer with the news.

James Bansemer's law and loan offices were not far from the river and, it is sufficient to say, not much farther from State Street. He who knows Chicago well cannot miss the location more than three blocks, either way, if he takes City Hall as a focal point. The office building in which they were located is not a pretentious structure, but its tenants were then and still are regarded as desirable. It may be well to announce that Bansemer, on reaching Chicago, was clever enough to turn over a new leaf and begin work on a clear, white page, but it is scarcely necessary to add that the black, besmirched lines on the opposite side of the sheet could be traced through every entry that went down on the fresh white surface. Bansemer was just as nefarious in his transactions, but he was a thousandfold more cautious. Droom sarcastically reminded him that he had a reputation to protect, in his new field and, besides, as his son was "going in society" through the influence of a coterie of Yale men, it would be worse than criminal to deteriorate.

Bansemer loathed Droom, but he also feared him. He was the only living creature that inspired fear in the heart of this bold schemer. It is true that he feared the effect an exposure might have on the mind of his stalwart son, the boy with his mother's eyes; but he had succeeded so well in blinding the youth in the years gone by, that the prospects of discovery now seemed too remote for concern. The erstwhile New York "shark" was now an eel, wily and elusive, but he was an eel with a shark's teeth and a shark's voraciousness. He had grown old in the study of this particular branch of natural history. Bansemer was fifty-five years old in this year of 1898. He was thinner than in the old New York days, but the bull-like

vigour had given way to the wiry strength of the leopard. The once black hair was almost white, and grew low and thick on his forehead. Immaculately dressed, ever straight and aggressive in carriage, he soon became a figure of whom all eyes took notice, even in the most crowded of Chicago thoroughfares.

Graydon Bansemer, on leaving Yale with a diploma and some of the honours of his class, urged his father to take him into his office, and ultimately to make him a partner in the business. James Bansemer never forgot the malicious grin that crossed the face of Elias Droom when the young fellow made the proposition not more than a fortnight before the Bansemer establishment picked itself up and hastily deserted New York. That grin spoke plainer than all the words in language. Take him into the office? Make this honest, grey-eyed boy a partner? It was no wonder that Droom grinned and it is no wonder that he forgot to cover his mouth with his huge hand, as was his custom.

The proposition, while sincere and earnest, was too impossible for words. For once in his life, James Bansemer was at a loss for subterfuge. He stammered, flushed and writhed in the effort to show the young man that the step would be unprofitable, and he was sorely conscious that he had not convinced the eager applicant. He even urged him to abandon the thought of becoming a lawyer, and was ably seconded by Elias Droom, whose opinion of the law, as he had come to know it, was far from flattering.

Just at this time Bansemer was engaged in the most daring as well as the most prodigious "deal" of his long career. With luck, it was bound to enrich him to the extent of \$50,000. The plans had been so well prepared and the execution had been so faultless that there seemed to be no possibility of failure. To take his fair-minded son--with the mother's eyes--into the game would be suicidal. The young fellow would turn from him forever. Bansemer never went so far as to wonder whence came the honest blood in the boy's veins, nor to speculate on the origin of the unquestioned integrity. He had but to recall the woman who bore him, the woman whose love was the only good thing he ever knew, the wife he had worshipped while he sinned.

For years and years he had plied his unwholesome trade in reputations, sometimes evading exposure by the narrowest of margins, and he had come to believe that he was secure for all time to come. But it was the "big job" that brought disaster. Just when it looked as though success was assured, the crash came. He barely had time to cover his tracks, throw the figurative pepper into the eyes of his enemies, and get away from the scene of danger. But, he had been clever and resourceful enough to avoid the penalty that looked inevitable and came off with colours trailing but uncaptured.

Perhaps no other man could have escaped; but James Bansemer was cleverest when in a corner. He backed away, held them at bay until he could recover his breath, and then defied them to their teeth. Despite their proof, he baffled them, and virtue was not its own reward--at least in this instance.

In leaving New York, he hoped that Elias Droom--who knew too much--might refuse to go into the new territory with him, but the gaunt, old clerk took an unnatural and malevolent delight in clinging to his

employer. He declined to give up his place in the office, and, although he hated James Bansemer, he came like an accusing shadow into the new offices near the Chicago River, and there he toiled, grinned and scowled with the same old faithfulness.

CHAPTER VI

IN SIGHT OF THE FANGS

At first, it was hard for James Bansemer to believe that his henchman had not been mistaken. Droom's description of the lady certainly did not correspond to what his memory recalled. Investigation, however, assured him that the Cables in the mansion near the lake were the people he had known in New York. Bansemer took no one into his confidence, not even Droom. Once convinced that the erstwhile fireman was now the rich and powerful magnate, he set to work upon the machinery which was to extract personal gain from the secret in his possession. He soon learned that the child was a young woman of considerable standing in society, but there was no way for him to ascertain whether Frances Cable had told the truth to her husband in those dreary Far West days.

Bansemer was rich enough, but avarice had become a habit. The flight from New York had deprived him of but little in worldly goods. His ill-gotten gains came with him; and investments were just as easy and just as safe in Chicago as in New York. Now, he saw a chance to wring a handsome sum from the rich woman whose only possession had been love when he first knew her. If the secret of Jane's origin still remained locked up in her heart, the effort would be an easy one. He learned enough of David Cable, however, to know that if he shared the secret, the plan would be profitless and dangerous.

It was this uncertainty that kept him from calling at the Cable home; likewise, from writing a note which might prove a most disastrous folly. Time and circumstance could be his only friends, and he was accustomed to the whims of both. He read of the dinners and entertainments given by the Cables, and smiled grimly. Time had worked wonders for them! Scandal, he knew, could undo all that ambition and pride had wrought. He could well afford to wait.

However, he did not have long to wait, for his opportunity came one night in Hooley's Theatre. Graydon and he occupied seats in the orchestra, near the stage and not far from the lower right-hand boxes. It was during the busy Christmas holidays, but the "star" was of sufficient consequence to pack the house. The audience was no end of a fashionable one. Time and again, some strange influence drew his gaze to the gay party in one of the lower boxes. The face of the woman nearest to him was not visible; but the two girls who sat forward, turned occasionally to look over the audience; and he saw that they were pretty, one exceptionally so. One of the men

was grey-haired and strong-featured; the others were quite too insignificant to be of interest to him. The woman whose back he could see did not look out over the audience. Her indifference was so marked that it seemed deliberate.

At last, he felt that her eyes were upon him; he turned quickly. True enough, for with lips slightly parted, her whole attitude suggestive of intense restraint, Mrs. Cable was staring helplessly into the eyes of the man who could destroy her with a word.

The one thing that flashed through Bansemer's brain was the realisation that she was far more beautiful than he had expected her to be. There was a truly aristocratic loveliness in the rather piquant face, and she undeniably possessed "manner." Maturity had improved her vastly, he confessed with strange exultation; age had been kinder than youth. He forgot the play, seldom taking his eyes from the back which again had been turned to him. Calculating, he reached the conclusion that she was not more than forty years of age. More than once he made some remark to his son, only to surprise that young man glancing surreptitiously at the face of the more beautiful of the two girls. Even in this early stage, James Bansemer began to gloat over the beauty of this new-found, old acquaintance.

In the lobby of the theatre, as they were leaving, he deliberately doffed his hat and extended a pleasant hand to the wife of David Cable. She turned deathly pale and there was a startled, piteous look in her eyes that convinced him beyond all shadow of a doubt. There was nothing for her to do but introduce him to her husband. Two minutes later Graydon Bansemer and Jane Cable, strangers until then, were asking each other how they liked the play, and Fate was at work.

A few weeks after this scene at the theatre young Mr. Bansemer dashed across the hall from the elevator and entered his father's office just as Elias Droom was closing up.

"Where's the governor, Mr. Droom?" he asked, deliberately brushing past the old clerk in the outer office.

"Left some time ago," replied Droom, somewhat ungraciously, his blue eyes staring past the young man with a steadiness that suggested reproach because he was out of the direct line of vision. "It is nearly six o'clock--he's never here after five."

"I know that he--I asked you if you knew of his whereabouts. Do you--or not?" The self-confident, athletic youth did not stand in physical awe of the clerk.

"No," was the simple and sufficient answer.

"Well then--I'm off," said Graydon a trifle less airily.

Droom's overcoat was on and buttoned up to his chin; his long feet were encased in rubbers of enormous size and uncertain age. There must have been no blood in the veins of this grim old man, for the weather was far from cold and the streets were surprisingly dry for Chicago.

"I am closing the office for the day," said Droom. For no apparent

reason a smile spread over the lower part of his face and Graydon, bold as he was, turned his eyes away.

"I thought I'd stop in and pick up the governor for a ride home in my motor," said he, turning to the door.

"Yours is one of the first out here, I suppose," came from the thin lips of the old clerk.

Graydon laughed.

"Possibly. The company charges a nickel a ride--half a dime--Going down, sir?" Graydon had rung for the elevator and was waiting in front of the grating.

A look containing a curious compound of affectionate reproach and a certain senile gratification at being made the object of the boy's condescending raillery crossed Droom's countenance. Without, however, answering his question, he slowly and carefully closed the door, tried it vigorously, and joined Bansemer at the shaft. With Droom, words were unnecessary when actions could speak for themselves.

"Still living over in Wells Street, Mr. Droom?" went on Graydon, thoroughly at home with the man whom he had feared and despised by stages from childhood up.

"It's good enough for me," said Droom shortly. "Tisn't Michigan Avenue, the Drive or Lincoln Park Boulevard, but it's just as swell as I am--or ever hope to be."

"There's nothing against Wells Street but--it got ashamed of itself when it crossed the river."

"They call it Fifth Avenue," sneered Droom, "but it isn't THE Avenue, is it?" Bansemer was surprised to oote a tone of affectionate pride in the question.

"No indeed!"

"Oh, there's only one, Mr. Graydon," said the old clerk, quite warmly; "our own Fifth Avenue."

"I had no idea you cared so much for swagger things, Mr. Droom," observed the other, genuinely surprised.

"Even Broadway is heaven to me," said Droom, some of the rasp gone from his voice. "Good-bye; I go this way," he said when they reached the sidewalk a little later. The young man watched his gaunt figure as it slouched away in the semi-darkness.

"By George, the old chap is actually homesick!" muttered he. "I didn't think it was in him."

Droom had rooms over a millinery shop in Wells Street. There was a bedroom at the back and a "living-room" in front, overlooking the street from the third story of the building. Of the bedchamber there is but little to say, except that it contained a bed, a washstand, a mirror, two straight-backed chairs and a clothes-press. Droom went out for his bath--every Saturday night. The "living-room,"

however, was queer in more ways than one. In one corner, on a chest of drawers, stood his oil stove, while in the opposite corner, a big sheet-iron heater made itself conspicuous. Firewood was piled behind the stove winter and summer, Droom lamenting that one could not safely discriminate between the seasons in Chicago. The chest of drawers contained his stock of provisions, his cooking and table utensils, his medicine and a small assortment of carpenter's tools. He had no use for an icebox.

A bookcase, old enough to warm the heart of the most ardent antiquarian, held his small and unusual collection of books. Standing side by side, on the same shelf, were French romances, unexpurgated, and the Holy Bible, much bethumbed and pencilled. There were schoolbooks alongside of sentimental love tales, Greek lexicons and quaint old fairy stories, law books and works on criminology; books on botany, geology, anatomy, and physics. In all, perhaps, there were two hundred volumes. A life of Napoleon revealed signs of almost constant usage. There were three portraits of the Corsican on the dingy green walls.

The strange character of the man was best shown by the pictures that adorned--or rather disfigured the walls. Vulgar photographs and prints were to be seen on all sides. Mingled with these cheap creations were excellent copies of famous Madonnas, quaint Scriptural drawings, engravings of the Saviour, and an allegorical coloured print which emphasised the joys of heaven. There was also a badly drawn but idealised portrait of Droom, done in crayon at the age of twenty. This portrait was one of his prized possessions. He loved it best because it was a bust and did not expose his longitudinal defects. If Droom ever had entertained a feminine visitor in his apartments, there is no record of the fact. But few men had seen the interior of his home, and they had gone away with distressed, perplexed sensibilities.

He cooked his own meals on the oil stove, and, alone, ate them from the little table that stood near the heater. Occasionally, he went out to a near-by eating house for a lonely feast. His rooms usually reeked with the odour of boiled coffee, burnt cabbage and grease, pungent chemicals and long-suffering bed linen. Of his "front" room, it may be said that it was kitchen, dining-room, parlour, library, workshop, laboratory and conservatory. Four flower-pots in which as many geraniums existed with difficulty, despite Droom's constant and unswerving care, occupied a conspicuous place on the window-sills overlooking the street. He watched over them with all the tender solicitude of a lover, surprising as it may appear when one pauses to consider the vicious exterior of the man.

Droom was frugal. He was, in truth, a miser. If anyone had asked him what he expected to do with the money he was putting away in the bank, he could not have answered, calculating as he was by nature. He had no relative to whom he would leave it and he had no inclination to give up the habit of active employment. His salary was small, but he managed to save more than half of it--for a "rainy day," as he said. He did his reading and experimenting by kerosene light, and went to bed by candle light, saving a few pennies a week in that way. The windows in his apartment were washed not oftener than once a year. He was seldom obliged to look through them during the day, and their only duty at night was to provide ventilation--and even that was characteristically meagre.

He was a man of habit--not habits. A pipe at night was his only form of dissipation. It was not too far for him to walk home from the office of evenings, and he invariably did so unless the weather was extremely unpleasant. So methodical was he that he never had walked over any other bridge than the one in Wells Street, coming and going.

Past sixty-five years of age. Droom's hair still was black and snaky; his teeth were as yellow and jagged as they were in the seventies, and his eyes were as blue and ugly as ever. He had not aged with James Bansemer. In truth, he looked but little older than when we made his acquaintance. The outside world knew no more of Droom's private transactions than it knew of Bansemer's. Up in the horrid little apartment in Wells Street the queer old man could do as he willed, unobserved and unannoyed. He could pursue his experiments with strange chemicals, he could construct odd devices with his kit of tools, and he could let off an endless amount of inventive energy that no one knew he possessed.

When he left Graydon Bansemer on the sidewalk in front of the office building, he swung off with his long strides towards the Wells Street bridge. His brain had laid aside everything that had occupied its attention during office hours and had given itself over to the project that hastened his steps homeward. His supper that night was a small one and hurriedly eaten in order that he might get to work on his new device. Droom grinned and cackled to himself all alone up there in the lamplight, for he was perfecting an "invention" by which the honest citizen could successfully put to rout the "hold-up" man that has made Chicago famous.

Elias Droom's inventive genius unfailingly led him toward devices that could inflict pain and discomfort. His plan to get the better of the wretched, hard-working hold-up man was unique, if not entirely practical. He was constructing the models for two little bulbs, made of rubber and lined with a material that would resist the effects of an acid, no matter how powerful. On one end of each bulb, which was capable of holding at least an ounce of liquid, there was a thin syringe attachment, also proof against acids. These little bulbs were made so that they could be held in the palm of the hand. By squeezing them suddenly a liquid could be shot from the tube with considerable force.

The bulbs were to contain vitriol.

When the hold-up man gave the command to "hold up your hands," the victim had only to squeeze the bulb as the hands went up, and, if accurately aimed, the miscreant would get the stream of the deadly vitriolic fluid in his eyes and--here endeth the first lesson. Experience alone could do the rest.

Young Bansemer hurried to their apartments on the North Side. He found his father dressed and ready to go out to dinner.

"Well, how was everything to-day?" asked James Bansemer from his easy chair in the library. Graydon threw his hat and gloves on the table.

"Terribly dull market, governor," he said. "It's been that way for

a week. How are you feeling?"

"Fit to dine with a queen," answered the older man, with a smile. "How soon can you dress for dinner, Gray?"

"That depends on who is giving the dinner."

"Some people you like. I found the note here when I came in a little after five. We have an hour in which to get over there. Can you be ready?"

"Do you go security for the affair?" asked Graydon.

"Certainly. You have been there, my boy, and I've not heard you complain."

"You mean over at---"

"Yes, that's where I mean," said the other, breaking in quietly.

"I think I can be ready in ten minutes, father."

While he was dressing, his father sat alone and stared reflectively at the small blue gas blaze in the grate. A dark, grim smile unconsciously came over his face, the inspiration of a triumphant joy. Twice he read the dainty note that met him on his return from the office.

"What changes time can make in woman!" he mused; "and what changes a woman can make in time! For nearly a year I've waited for this note. I knew it would come--it was bound to come. Graydon has had everything up to this time, while I have waited patiently in the background. Now, it is my turn."

"All right, father," called Graydon from the hall. "The cab is at the door."

Together they went down the steps, arm in arm, strong figures.

"To Mr. David Cable's," ordered Bansemer, the father, complacently, as he stepped into the carriage after his son.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. CABLE ENTERTAINS

James Bansemer had not recklessly rushed into Mrs. Cable's presence with threats of exposure; but on the contrary, he had calmly, craftily waited. It suited his purpose to let her wonder, dread and finally develop the trust that her secret was safe with him. Occasionally,

he had visited the Cable box in the theatre; not infrequently he had dined with them in the downtown cafes and at the homes of mutual acquaintances; but this was the first time that James Bansemer had enjoyed the hospitality of Frances Cable's home. His son, on the best of terms with their daughter, was a frequent visitor there.

There was a rare bump of progressiveness in the character of Graydon Bansemer. He was good-looking enough beyond doubt, and there was a vast degree of personal magnetism about him. It seemed but natural that he should readily establish himself as a friend and a favourite of the fair Miss Cable. For some time, James Bansemer had watched his son's progress with the Cable family, not once allowing his personal interest to manifest itself. It was but a question of time until Mrs. Cable's suspense and anxiety would bring her to him, one way or another. Every word that fell from the lips of his son regarding the Cables held his attention, and it was not long before he saw the family history as clearly as though it were an open book--and he knew far more than the open book revealed.

Frances Cable was not deluded by his silence and aloofness; but she was unable to devise means to circumvent him. Constant fear of his power to crush lurked near her day and night. Conscious of her weakness, but eager to have done with the strife, sometimes she longed for the enemy to advance. At first, she distrusted and despised the son, but his very fairness battered down the barriers of prejudice, and real admiration succeeded. Her husband liked him immensely, and Jane was his ablest ally. David Cable regarded him as one of the brightest, young men on the Stock Exchange, and predicted that some day he would be an influential member of the great brokerage firm for which he now acted as confidential clerk. Mr. Clegg, the senior member of the firm of Clegg, Groll & Davidson, his employers, personally had commended young Bansemer to Cable, and he was properly impressed.

Graydon's devotion to Jane did not go unnoticed. This very condition should have assured Mrs. Cable that James Bansemer had kept her secret zealously. There was nothing to indicate that the young man knew the story of the foundling.

It was not until some weeks after the chance meeting in Hooley's Theatre that Mrs. Cable came into direct contact with James Bansemer's designs. She had met him at two or three formal affairs, but their conversations had been of the most conventional character; on the other hand, her husband had lunched and dined at the club with the lawyer. At first, she dreaded the outcome of these meetings, but as Cable's attitude towards her remained unchanged, she began to realise that Bansemer, whatever his purpose, was loyal.

They met at last, quite informally, at Mrs. Clegg's dinner, a small and congenial affair. When the men came into the drawing-room, after the cigars, Mrs. Cable, with not a little trepidation, motioned to Mr. Bansemer to draw up his chair beside her.

"I have been looking forward with pleasure to this opportunity, Mr. Bansemer," she said, in a courteously acidulated way. "It has been so long in coming."

"Better late than never," he returned, with marked emphasis. Fortunately, for her, the challenging significance of his words was

quickly nullified by the smile with which she was almost instantly favoured. "Twenty years, I believe--it certainly came very near being 'never,'" he went on, abruptly changing from harsh to the sweetest of tones. "No one could believe that you--you're simply wonderful!" and added, pointedly, "But your daughter is even more beautiful, if such is possible, than her--her mother."

Apparently, the innuendo passed unnoticed; in reality, it required all her courage to appear calm.

"How very nice of you," she said softly; and looking him full in the face: "Her mother thanks you for the compliment."

It was a brave little speech; such bravery would have softened a man of another mould--changed his purpose. Not so with Bansemer. A sinister gleam came into his eyes and his attack became more brutally direct.

"But the husband--has he never mistrusted?"

The blow told, though her reply was given with rippling laughter and for the benefit of any chance listeners.

"For shame, Mr. Bansemer!" she cried lightly; "after flattering me so delightfully, you're surely not going to spoil it all?"

Despite his growing annoyance, admiration shone clearly from Bansemer's eyes. His memory carried him, back some twenty years to the scene in his office. Was it possible, he was thinking, that the charming woman before him exercising so cleverly all the arts of society, as if born to the purple, and the light-headed, frivolous, little wife of the Central's engineer were one and the same person? The metamorphosis seemed incredible.

Unwittingly, his manner lost some of its aggressiveness; and the woman perceiving the altered conditions, quick to take advantage, resolved to learn, if possible his intentions. Presently, going right to the point, she asked:

"Is that extraordinary looking creature you had in your office still with you, Mr. Bansemer?"

"Extraordinary!" He laughed loudly. "He is certainly that, and more. Indeed, the English language does not supply us with an adjective that adequately describes the man."

The people nearest to them, by this time, had moved away to another part of the large drawing-room; practically, the couple were by themselves. She had been thinking, for a moment, reasoning with a woman's logic that it was always well to know one's enemy. When she next spoke, it was almost in a whisper.

"How much does that terrible man know?"

"He is not supposed to know anything;" and then, with an enigmatical smile, promptly admitted: "However, I'm afraid that he does."

"You have told him? And yet, you promised nobody should know. How could---"

"My dear Mrs. Cable, he was not told; if he has found out--I could not prevent his discovering the truth through his own efforts," he interrupted in a tone more assuaging than convincing to her; and then, hitching his chair closer, and lowering his voice a note, he continued: "The papers had to be taken out--but you must not worry about him--you can depend on me."

"Promise me that you will make him--I am so fearful of that awful---" she broke off abruptly. Her fears were proving too much for her, and she was in imminent danger of a complete breakdown; all the veneer with which she had bravely commenced the interview had disappeared.

Bansemer endeavoured to soothe her with promises; but the poor woman saw only his teeth in the reassuring smile that he presented to her, together with the warnings that they were likely to be observed. With the hardest kind of an effort, she succeeded in pulling herself together sufficiently to bid good-night to her hostess.

When Mrs. Cable reached home that night, it was a full realisation that she was irrevocably committed into the custody of these cold-blooded men.

They met again and again at the homes of mutual friends, and she had come to loathe the pressure of his hand when it clasped hers. The undeniable caress in his low, suggestive voice disturbed her; his manner was unmistakable. One night he held her hand long and firmly in his, and while she shrank helplessly before him he even tenderly asked why she had not invited him into her home. It was what she had expected and feared. Her cup of bitterness was filling rapidly--too rapidly. His invitation to dinner a fortnight later, followed.

Jane Cable was radiant as she entered the drawing-room shortly after the arrival of the two Bansemers.

"It's quite like a family party! How splendid!" she said to Graydon with a quick glance in the direction of James Bansemer and David Cable, who stood conversing together, and withdrawing her soft, white hand, which she had put forth to meet his in friendly clasp. "It's too good to be true!" she went on in a happy, spontaneous, almost confiding manner.

The two fathers looked on in amused silence, the one full of admiration and pride for the clean, vigorous manhood of his son awaiting to receive welcome from the adorable Jane; the other, long since conscious of the splendid beauty of his daughter, mentally declaring that she never had appeared so well as when standing beside this gallant figure.

Other guests arrived before Mrs. Cable made her appearance in the drawing-room. She had taken more time than usual with her toilet. It was impossible for her to hide the fact that the strain was telling on her perceptibly. The face that looked back into her eyes from the mirror on her dressing-table was not the fresh, warm one that had needed so little care a few short months before. There was a heaviness about the eyes and there were strange, persistent

lines gathering under the soft, white tissues of her skin. But when she at last stepped into the presence of her guests, with ample apologies for her tardiness, she was the picture of life and nerve. So much for the excellent resources of her will.

Bansemmer was the last to present himself for her welcome, lingering in the background until the others had passed.

"I'm so glad you could come. Indeed, it's a pleasure to---" She spoke clearly and distinctly as she extended her hand; but as she looked squarely into his eyes she thought him the ugliest man she ever had seen. Every other woman in the party was saying to herself that James Bansemmer was strikingly handsome.

"Most pleasures come late in life to some of us," he returned, gallantly, and even Graydon Bansemmer wished that he could have said it.

"Your father is a perfect dear," Jane said to him, softly. "It was not what he said just then that pleased me, but what he left unsaid."

"Father's no end of a good fellow, Jane. I'm glad you admire him."

"You are not a bit like him," she said reflectively.

"Thanks," he exclaimed. "You are not very flattering."

"But you are a different sort of a good fellow, that's what I mean. Don't be absurd," she cried in some little confusion.

"I'm like my mother, they say, though I don't remember her at all."

"Oh, how terrible it must be never to have known one's mother," said she tenderly.

"Or one's father," added James Bansemmer, who was passing at that instant with Mrs. Cable. "Please include the father, Miss Cable," he pleaded with mock seriousness. Turning to Mrs. Cable, who had stopped beside him, he added: "You, the most charming of mothers, will defend the fathers, won't you?"

"With all my heart," she answered so steadily that he was surprised.

"I will include the father, Mr. Bansemmer," said Jane, "if it is guaranteed that he possibly could be as nice and dear as one's mother. In that case, I think it would be--oh, dreadfully terrible never to have known him."

"And to think, Miss Cable, of the unfortunates who have known neither father nor mother," said Bansemmer, senior, slowly, relentlessly. "How much they have missed of life and love!"

"That can be offset somewhat by the thought of the poor parents who never have known a son or a daughter," said Jane.

"How can they be parents, then?" demanded Bobby Rigby, coming up in time.

"Go away, Bobby," she said scornfully.

"That's a nice way to treat logic," he grumbled, ambling on in quest of Miss Clegg.

"The debate will become serious if you continue," said Mrs. Cable lightly. "Come along, Mr. Bansemer; Mrs. Craven is waiting."

When they were across the room and alone, she turned a white face to him and remonstrated bitterly: "Oh, that was cowardly of you after your promise to me!"

"I forgot myself," he said quietly. "Don't believe me to be utterly heartless." His hand touched her arm. Instantly her assumed calm gave way to her deep agitation, and with a swift change of manner, she turned on him, her passion alight.

"You---!" she stammered; then her fears found voice. "What do you mean?" she demanded in smothered, alarmed tones.

He desisted savagely and shrank away, the colour flaming into his disgusted, saturnine face. He did not speak to her again until he said good-bye long afterward.

As he had expected, his place at the dinner-table was some distance from hers. He was across the table from Jane and Graydon, and several seats removed from David Cable. He smiled grimly and knowingly when he saw that he had been cut off cleverly from the Cables.

"To-morrow night, then, Jane!" said Graydon at parting. No one was near enough to catch the tender eagerness in his voice, nor to see the happy flush in her cheek as she called after him:

"To-morrow night!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE TELEGRAM

Bobby Rigby and Graydon Bansemer were bosom friends in Chicago; they had been classmates at Yale. It had been a question of money with Bobby from the beginning. According to his own admission, his money was a source of great annoyance to him. He was not out of debt but once, and then, before he fully realised it. So unusual was the condition, that he could not sleep; the first thing he did in the morning was to borrow right and left for fear another attack of insomnia might interfere with his training for the football eleven.

Robertson Ray Rigby, immortalised as Bobby, had gone in for athletics, where he learned to think and act quickly. He was called one of the

lightest, but headiest quarterbacks in the East. No gridiron idol ever escaped his "Jimmy," or "Topsy," or "Pop," or "Johnny." When finally, he hung out his shingle in Chicago: "Robertson R. Rigby, Attorney-at-Law," he lost his identity even among his classmates. It was weeks before the fact became generally known that it was Bobby who waited for clients behind the deceptive shingle.

The indulgent aunt who had supplied him with funds in college was rich in business blocks and apartment buildings; and now, Mr. Robertson R. Rigby was her man of affairs. When he went in for business, the old push of the football field did not desert him. He was very much alive and very vigorous, and it did not take him long to "learn the signals."

With his aunt's unflinching prosperity, his own ready wit and unbridled versatility, he was not long in establishing himself safely in his profession and in society. Everybody liked him, though no one took him seriously except when they came to transact business with him. Then, the wittiness of the drawing-room turned into shrewdness as it crossed the office threshold.

The day after the Cable dinner, Bobby yawned and stretched through his morning mail. He had slept but little the night before, and all on account of a certain, or rather, uncertain Miss Clegg. That petite and aggravating young woman had been especially exasperating at the Cable dinner. Mr. Rigby, superbly confident of his standing with her, encountered difficulties which put him very much out of temper. For the first time, there was an apparent rift in her constancy; never before had she shown such signs of fluctuating. He could not understand it--in fact, he dared not understand it. "She was a most annoying young person," said Mr. Rigby to himself wrathfully, more than once after he went to bed that night. Anyhow, he could not see what there was about Howard Medford for any girl to countenance, much less to admire. Mr. Medford certainly had ruined the Cable dinner-party for Mr. Rigby, and he was full of resentment.

"Miss Keating!" called Mr. Rigby for the third time; "may I interrupt your conversation with Mr. Deever long enough to ask a question that has been on my mind for twenty minutes?"

Mr. Deever was the raw, young gentleman who read law in the office of Judge Smith, next door. Bobby maintained that if he read law at all, it was at night, for he was too busy with other occupations during the day.

Miss Keating, startled, turned roundabout promptly.

"Yes, sir," at last, came from the pert, young woman near the window.

"I guess I'll be going," said Mr. Deever resentfully, rising slowly from the side of her desk on which he had been lounging.

"Wait a minute, Eddie," protested Miss Keating; "what's your hurry?" and then, she almost snapped out: "What is it, Mr. Rigby?"

"I merely wanted to ask if you have sufficient time to let me dictate a few, short letters that ought to go out to-day," said Bobby, sarcastically; and then added with mock apology: "Don't move,

Mr. Deever; if you're not in Miss Keating's way, you're certainly not in mine."

"A great joshier!" that young woman was heard to comment, admiringly.

"You may wake up some morning to find that I'm not," said Bobby, soberly. Whereupon, Miss Keating rose and strode to the other end of the room and took her place beside Bobby's desk.

Bobby dictated half a dozen inconsequential letters before coming to the one which troubled him most. For many minutes he stared reflectively at the typewritten message from New York. Miss Keating frowned severely and tapped her little foot somewhat impatiently on the floor; but Bobby would not be hurried. His reflections were too serious. This letter from New York had come with a force sufficient to drive out even the indignant thoughts concerning one Miss Clegg. For the life of him, Bobby Rigby could not immediately frame a reply to the startling missive. Eddie Deever stirred restlessly on the window ledge.

"Don't hurry, Eddie!" called Miss Keating, distinctly and insinuatingly.

"Oh, I guess I'll be going!" he called back, beginning to roll a cigarette. "I have some reading to do to-day." Mr. Deever was tall, awkward and homely, and a lot of other things that would have discouraged a less self-satisfied "lady's man." Judge Smith said he was hopeless, but that he might do better after he was twenty-one.

"What are you reading now, Eddie?" asked Miss Keating, complacently eyeing Mr. Rigby. "Raffles?"

"Law, you idiot!" said Eddie, scornfully, going out of the door.

"Oh! Well, the law is never in a hurry, don't you know? It's like justice--the slowest thing in town!" she called after him as his footsteps died away.

"Ready?" said Bobby, resolutely. "Take this, please; and slowly and carefully he proceeded to dictate:

"MR. DENIS HARBERT, "NEW YORK,

"DEAR DENIS: I cannot tell you how much your letter surprised me. What you say seems preposterous. There must be a mistake. It cannot be this man. I know him quite well, and seems as straight as a string and a gentleman, too. His son, you know as well as I. There isn't a better fellow in the world! Mr. B. has a fairly good business here; his transactions open and aboveboard. I'm sure I have never heard a word said against him or his methods. You are mistaken, that's all there is about it.

"You might investigate a little further and, assuring yourself, do all in your power to check such stories as you relate. Of course, I'll do as you suggest; but I'm positive I can find nothing discreditable in his dealings here.

"Keep me posted on everything.

"As ever, yours,"

Miss Keating's anxiety was aroused. After a very long silence, she took the reins into her own hands. "Is Mr. Briggs in trouble?" she asked at a venture. Mr. Briggs was the only client she could think of, whose name began with a B.

"Briggs? What Briggs?" asked Bobby, relighting his pipe for the fourth time.

"Why, our Mr. Briggs," answered Miss Keating, curtly.

"I'm sure I don't know, Miss Keating. Has he been around lately?"

"I thought you were referring to him in that letter," she said succinctly.

"Oh, dear me, no. Another party altogether, Miss Keating. Isn't the typewriter in working order this morning?" he asked, eyeing her machine innocently. She miffed and started to reply, but thought better of it. Then she began pounding the keys briskly.

"It works like a charm," she shot back, genially.

The letter that caused Bobby such perturbation came in the morning mail. His friend had laid bare some of the old stories concerning James Bansemer, and cautioned him not to become involved in transactions with the former New Yorker. Harbert's statements were positive in character, and he seemed to know his case thoroughly well. While the charges as they came to Rigby were general, Harbert had said that he was quite ready to be specific.

All day long, the letter hung like a cloud over young Mr. Rigby. He was to have lunched with Graydon, and was much relieved when young Bansemer telephoned that he could not join him. Rigby found himself in a very uncomfortable position. If the stories from New York were true, even though he knew none of the inside facts, Graydon's father was pretty much of a scalawag, to say the least. He was not well acquainted with the lawyer, but he now recalled that he never had liked the man. Bansemer had impressed him from the beginning as heartless, designing, utterly unlike his clean-hearted son.

Bobby loved Graydon Bansemer in the way that one man loves a true friend. He was certain that the son knew nothing of those shady transactions--if they really existed as Harbert painted them--but an exposure of the father would be a blow from which he could not recover.

It came at last to Rigby that he was not the only one in Chicago who held the secret. Other members of the bar had been warned long before the news came to him, and it was morally certain that if the facts were as bad as intimated, the police also were in possession of them.

At the same time, Rigby felt a certain moral responsibility involving himself. Bansemer, at any time, might apply his methods to people who were near and dear to him. The new intimacy with the Cables came to Bobby's mind. And then, there were Clegg, Groll, the Semesons and others who might easily fall into the snare if James Bansemer

set it for them.

Appreciating his responsibility in the matter, now that he was prepared to hear the worst of James Bansemer, Rigby's heart stood almost still. It meant that some day he might have to expose Graydon Bansemer's father; it meant that he might have to cruelly hurt his friend; it meant that he might lose a friendship that had been one of his best treasures since the good, old college days. The mere fact that he would be compelled to watch and mistrust James Bansemer seemed like darkest treachery to Graydon, even though the son should not become aware of the situation. Later, in the afternoon, Bobby went, guiltily, into a telegraph office and sent away a carefully worded dispatch. The answer came to him at the club, that evening, while he played billiards with young Bansemer, who, even then was eager to be off to keep the promised appointment with pretty Miss Cable.

The telegram which he opened while Graydon impatiently chalked his cue and waited for him to play was brief and convincing. It read:

"Watch him, by all means. He is not safe, my word for it. There is no mistake."

CHAPTER IX

THE PROPOSAL

The little room off the library was Jane's "den." Her father had a better name for it. He called it her "web," but only in secret conference. Graydon Bansemer lounged there in blissful contemplation of a roseate fate, all the more enjoyable because his very ease was the counterpoise of doubt and uncertainty. No word of love had passed between the mistress of the web and her loyal victim; but eyes and blood had translated the mysterious, voiceless language of the heart into the simplest of sentences. They loved and they knew it.

After leaving Rigby at the club Graydon drove to the North Side, thrilled to the marrow with the prophecies of the night. His heart was in that little room off the library--and had been there for months. It was the abode of his thoughts. The stars out above the cold, glittering lake danced merrily for him as he whirled up the Drive; the white carpet of February crinkled and creaked with the chill of the air, but his heart was hot and safe and sure. He knew that she knew what he was coming for that night. The first kiss!

Jane's face was warm, her eyes had the tender glow of joy expectant, her voice was soft with the promise of coming surrender. Their hands met and clasped as she stood to welcome him in the red, seductive dimness of the little throne room. His tall frame quivered; his

lean, powerful, young face betrayed the hunger of his heart; his voice turned husky. It was not as he had planned. Her beauty--her mere presence--swept him past the preliminary fears and doubts. His handclasp tightened and his face drew resistlessly to hers. Then their hands went suddenly cold.

"You know, don't you, Jane, darling?" he murmured.

"Yes," she answered after a moment, softly, securely. He crushed her in his strong arms; all the world seemed to have closed in about her. Her eyes, suffused with happiness, looked sweetly into his until she closed them with the coming of the first kiss. "I love you--oh, I love you!" she whispered.

"I worship you, Jane!" he responded. "I have always worshipped you!"

It was all so natural, so normal. The love that had been silent from the first had spoken, that was all--had put into words its untold story.

"Jane, I am the proudest being in the world!" he said, neither knew how long afterward, for neither thought of time. They were sitting on the couch in the corner, their turbulent hearts at rest. "To think, after all, that such a beautiful being as you can be mine forever! It's--why, it's inconceivable!"

"You were sure of me all the time, Graydon," she remonstrated. "I tried to hide it, but I couldn't. You must have thought me a perfect fool all these months."

"You are very much mistaken, if you please. You did hide it so successfully at times, that I was sick with uncertainty."

"Well, it's all over now," she smiled, and he sighed with a great relief.

"All over but the--the wedding," he said.

"Oh, that's a long way off. Let's not worry over that, Graydon."

"A long way off? Nonsense! I won't wait."

"Won't?"

"I should have said can't. Let's see; this is February. March, dearest?"

"Graydon, you are so much younger than I thought. A girl simply cannot be hurried through a--an engagement. Next winter."

"Next what? That's nearly a year, Jane. It's absurd! I'm ready."

"I know. It's mighty noble of you, too. But I just can't, dearest. No one ever does."

"Don't--don't you think I'm prepared to take care of you?" he said, straightening up a bit.

She looked at his strong figure and into his earnest eyes and laughed, so adorably, that his resentment was only passing.

"I can't give you a home like this," he explained; "but you know I'll give you the best I have all my life."

"You can't help succeeding, Graydon," she said earnestly. "Everyone says that of you. I'm not afraid. I'm not thinking of that. It isn't the house I care for. It's the home. You must let me choose the day."

"I suppose it's customary," he said at last. "June is the month for brides, let me remind you."

"Before you came this evening I had decided on January next, but now I am willing to---"

"Oh, you decided before I came, eh?" laughingly.

"Certainly," she said unblushingly. "Just as you had decided on the early spring. But, listen, dear, I am willing to say September of this year."

"One, two, three--seven months. They seem like years, Jane. You won't say June?"

"Please, please let me have some of the perquisites," she pleaded. "It hasn't seemed at all like a proposal. I've really been cheated of that, you must remember, dear. Let me say, at least, as they all do, that I'll give you an answer in three days."

"Granted. I'll admit it wasn't the sort of proposal one reads about in novels---"

"But it was precisely as they are in real life, I'm sure. No one has a stereotyped proposal any more. The men always take it for granted and begin planning things before a girl can say no."

"Ah, I see it has happened to you," he said, jealous at once.

"Well, isn't that the way men do nowadays?" she demanded.

"A fellow has to feel reasonably sure, I dare say, before he takes a chance. No one wants to be refused, you know," he admitted. "Oh, by the way, I brought this--er--this ring up with me, Jane."

"You darling!" she cried, as the ring slipped down over her finger. And then, for the next hour, they planned and the future seemed a thousand-fold brighter than the present, glorious as it was.

"You can't help succeeding," she repeated, "the same as your father has. Isn't he wonderful? Oh, Graydon, I'm so proud of you!" she cried, enthusiastically.

"I can never be the man that the governor is," said Graydon, loyally. "I couldn't be as big as father if I lived to be a hundred and twenty-six. He's the best ever! He's done everything for me, Jane," the son went on, warmly. "Why, he even left dear, old New York and came to Chicago for my sake, dear. It's the place for

a young man, he says; and he gave up a great practice so that we might be here together. Of course, HE could succeed anywhere. Wasn't it bully of him to come to Chicago just--just for me?"

"Yes. Oh, if you'll only be as good-looking as he is when you are fifty-five," she said, so plaintively that he laughed aloud. "You'll probably be very fat and very bald by that time."

"And very healthy, if that can make it seem more horrible to you," he added. For some time he sat pondering while she stared reflectively into the fire opposite. Then squaring his shoulders as if preparing for a trying task, he announced firmly: "I suppose I'd just as well see your father to-night, dearest. He likes me, I'm sure, and I--I don't think he'll refuse to let me have you. Do you?"

"My dad's just as fair as yours, Gray," she said with a smile. "He's upstairs in his den. I'll go to mother. I know she'll be happy--oh, so happy."

Bansemer found David Cable in his room upstairs--his smoking and thinking room, as he called it.

"Come in, Graydon; don't stop to knock. How are you? Cigarette? Take a cigar, then. Bad night outside, isn't it?"

"Is it? I hadn't--er--noticed," said Graydon, dropping into a chair and nervously nipping the end from a cigar. "Have you been downtown?"

"Yes. Just got in a few minutes ago. The road expects to do a lot of work West this year, and I've been talking with the ways and means gentlemen--a polite and parliamentary way to put it."

"I suppose we'll all be congratulating you after the annual election, Mr. Cable."

"Oh, that's just talk, my boy. Winemann is the logical man for president. But where is Jane?"

"She's--ah--downstairs, I think," said the tall young man, puffing vigorously. "I came up--er--to see you about Jane, Mr. Cable. I have asked her to be my wife, sir."

For a full minute the keen eyes of the older man, sharpened by strife and experience, looked straight into the earnest grey eyes of the young man who now stood across the room with his hand on the mantelpiece. Cable's cigar was held poised in his fingers, halfway to his lips. Graydon Bansemer felt that the man aged a year in that brief moment.

"You know, Graydon, I love Jane myself," said Cable at last, arising slowly. His voice shook.

"I know, Mr. Cable. She is everything to you. And yet I have come to ask you to give her to me."

"It isn't that I have not suspected--aye, known--what the outcome would be," said the other mechanically. "She will marry, I know. It is right that she should. It is right that she should marry you, my boy. You--you DO love her?" He asked the question almost fiercely.

"With all my soul, Mr. Cable. She loves me. I don't know how to convince you that my whole life will be given to her happiness. I am sure I can---"

"I know. It's all right, my boy. It--it costs a good deal to let her go, but I'd rather give her to you than to any man I've ever known. I believe in you."

"Thank you, Mr. Cable," said Graydon Bansemer. Two strong hands clasped each other and there was no mistaking the integrity of the grasp.

"But this is a matter in which Jane's mother is far more deeply concerned than I," added the older man. "She likes you, my boy--I know that to be true, but we must both abide by her wishes. If she has not retired..."

"Jane is with her, Mr. Cable. She knows by this time."

"She is coming." Mrs. Cable's light footsteps were heard crossing the hall, and an instant later Bansemer was holding open the den door for her to enter. He had a fleeting glimpse of Jane as that tall young woman turned down the stairway.

Frances Cable's face was white and drawn, and her eyes were wet. Her husband started forward as she extended her hand to him. He clasped them in his own and looked down into her face with the deepest tenderness and wistfulness in his own. Her body swayed suddenly and his expression changed to one of surprise and alarm.

"Don't--don't mind, dear," he said hoarsely. "It had to come. Sit down, do. There! Good Lord, Frances, if you cry now I'll--I'll go all to smash!" He sat down abruptly on the arm of the big leather chair into which she had sunk limply. Something seemed to choke him and his fingers went nervously to his collar. Before them stood the straight, strong figure of the man who was to have Jane forever.

Neither of them--nor Jane--knew what Frances Cable had suffered during the last hour. She accidentally had heard the words which passed between the lovers in the den downstairs. She was prepared when Jane came to her with the news later on, but that preparation had cost her more than any of them ever could know.

Lying back in a chair, after she had almost crept to her room, she stared white-faced and frightened at the ceiling until it became peopled with her wretched thoughts. All along she had seen what was coming. The end was inevitable. Love as it grew for them had known no regard for her misery. She could not have prevented its growth; she could not now frustrate its culmination. And yet, as she sat there and stared into the past and the future, she knew that it was left for her to drink of the cup which they were filling--the cup of their joy and of her bitterness.

Fear of exposure at the hand of Graydon Bansemer's father had kept her purposely blind to the inevitable. Her woman's intuition long since had convinced her that Graydon was not like his father. She knew him to be honourable, noble, fair and worthy. Long and often had she wondered at James Bansemer's design in permitting his son

to go to the extreme point in relation with Jane. As she sat there and suffered, it came to her that the man perhaps had a purpose after all--an unfathomable, selfish design which none could forestall. She knew him for all that he was. In that knowledge she felt a slight, timid sense of power. He stood for honour, so far as his son was concerned. In fair play, she could expose him if he sought to expose her.

But all conjectures, all fears, paled into insignificance with the one great terror: what would James Bansemer do in the end? What would he do at the last minute to prevent the marriage of his son and this probable child of love? What was to be his tribute to the final scene in the drama?

She knew that he was tightening his obnoxious coils about her all the time. Even now she could feel his hand upon her arm, could hear his sibilant whisper, could see his intense eyes full of suggestion and threat. Now she found herself face to face with the crisis of all these years. Her only hope lay in the thought that neither could afford the scandal of an open declaration. Bansemer was merciless and he was no fool.

Knowing Graydon to be the son of a scoundrel, she could, under ordinary circumstances, have forbidden her daughter to marry him. In this instance she could not say him nay. The venom of James Bansemer in that event would have no measure of pity. In her heart, she prayed that death might come to her aid in the destruction of James Bansemer.

It was not until she heard Graydon coming up the stairs that the solution flashed into her brain. If Jane became the wife of this cherished son, James Bansemer's power was gone! His lips would be sealed forever. She laughed aloud in the frenzy of hope. She laughed to think what a fool she would have been to forbid the marriage. The marriage? Her salvation! Jane found her almost hysterical, trembling like a leaf. She was obliged to confess that she had heard part of their conversation below, in order to account for her manner. When Jane confided to her that she had promised to marry Graydon in September--or June--she urged her to avoid a long engagement. She could say no more than that.

Now she sat limp before the two men, a wan smile straying from one to the other, exhausted by her suppressed emotions. Suddenly, without a word, she held out her hand to Graydon. In her deepest soul, she loved this manly, strong-hearted young fellow. She knew, after all, he was worthy of the best woman in the land.

"You know?" cried Graydon, clasping her hand, his eyes glistening. "Jane has told you? And you--you think me worthy?"

"Yes, Graydon--you are worthy." She looked long into his eyes, searching for a trace of the malevolence that glowed in those of his father. They were fair and honest and sweet, and she smiled to herself. She wondered what his mother had been like.

"Then I may have her?" he cried. She looked up at her husband and he nodded his head.

"Our little girl," he murmured. It all came back to her like

a flash. Her deception, her imposition, her years of stealth--and she shuddered. Her hand trembled and her eyes grew wide with repugnance as they turned again upon Graydon Bansemer. Both men drew back in amazement.

"Oh, no--it cannot, cannot be!" she moaned, without taking her eyes from Graydon's face. In the same instant she recovered herself and craved his pardon. "I am distressed--it is so hard to give her up. Graydon," she panted, smiling again. The thought had come suddenly to her that James Bansemer had a very strong purpose in letting his son marry Jane Cable. She never had ceased to believe that Bansemer knew the parents of the child she had adopted. It had dawned upon her in the flash of that moment that the marriage might mean a great deal to this calculating father. "David, won't you leave us for a few minutes? There is something I want to say to Graydon."

David Cable hesitated for an instant and then slowly left the room, closing the door behind him. He was strangely puzzled over that momentary exposition of emotion on the part of his wife. He was a man of the world and he knew its vices from the dregs up, but it was many days before the startling suspicion struck in to explain her uncalled-for display of feeling. It did not strike in until after he noticed that James Bansemer was paying marked attention to his wife.

Left alone with Graydon, Mrs. Cable nervously hurried to the point. She was determined to satisfy herself that the son did not share her secret with his father.

"Does your father know that you want to marry Jane?" she asked.

"Of course--er--I mean, he suspects, Mrs. Cable. He has teased me not a little, you know. I'm going to tell him to-night."

"He has not known Jane very long, you know."

"Long enough to admire her above all others. He has often told me that she is the finest girl he's ever met. Oh, I'm sure father will be pleased, Mrs. Cable."

"I met your father in New York, of course--years ago. I presume he has told you."

"I think not. Oh, yes, I believe he did tell me after we met you at Hooley's that night. He had never seen Mr. Cable."

"Nor Jane, I dare say."

"Oh, no. I knew Jane long before dad ever laid eyes on her." The look in his eyes satisfied her over all that he knew nothing more.

"You love her enough to sacrifice anything on earth for her?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes, Mrs. Cable," he answered simply.

"You would renounce all else in the world for her sake?"

"I believe that's part of the service," he said, with a smile. "Jane

is worth all of that, and more. She shall be first in my heart, in my mind, for all time, if that is what you mean, Mrs. Cable. Believe me, I mean that."

"Mr. Bansemer says that you are like your mother," she mused, wistfully.

"That's why he loves me, he also says. I'm sorry I'm not like father," he said earnestly. "He's great!" She turned her face away so that he might not see the look in her eyes. "I think Jane is like---" he paused in confusion. "Like her father," he concluded. She arose abruptly and took his hand in hers.

"Go to her, Graydon," she said. "Tell her that Mr. Cable and I want you to be our son. Good-night and God bless you." She preceded him to the stairway and again shook hands with him. David Cable was ascending.

"Graydon," said the latter, pausing halfway up as the other came down, "you were ready to congratulate me in advance on the prospect of becoming president of the P., L. & A. Do you know that I was once an ordinary fireman?"

"Certainly, Mr. Cable. The rise of David Cable is known to everyone."

"That's all. I just wanted to be sure. Jane was not born with a silver spoon, you know."

"And yet she is Jane Cable," said the young man proudly. Then he hurried on down to the expectant, throbbing Jane.

Frances Cable sat at her *escritoire* for an hour, her brain working with feverish energy. She was seeking out the right step to take in advance of James Bansemer. Her husband sat alone in his den and smoked long after she had taken her step and retired to rest--but not to sleep. On her desk lay half a dozen invitations, two of them from the exclusive set to whose inner circles her ambitious, vigorous aspirations were forcing her. She pushed them aside and with narrowed eyes wrote to James Bansemer--wrote the note of the diplomat who seeks to forestall:

"DEAR ME. BANSEMER: Doubtless Graydon will have told you his good news before this reaches you, but Mr. Cable and I feel that we cannot permit the hour to pass without assuring you of our own happiness and of our complete approval. Will you dine with us this evening--en famille--at seven-thirty?"

"FRANCES CABLE."

David Cable read the note and sent it early the next morning by special messenger to James Bansemer. The engagement of Jane Cable and Graydon Bansemer was announced in the evening papers.

THE FOUR INITIALS

The offices of James Bansemer were two floors above those of Robertson Ray Rigby in the U__ Building. The morning after Graydon Bansemer's important visit to the home of the Cables, Eddie Deever lounged into Rigby's presence. He seemed relieved to find that the stenographer was ill and would not be down that day. The lanky youngster studiously inspected the array of law books in the cases for some time, occasionally casting a sly glance at Bobby. At last he ventured a remark somewhat out of the ordinary--for him:

"That old man up in Bansemer's office gets on my nerves," said he, settling his long frame in a chair and breaking in upon Rigby's attention so suddenly that the lawyer was startled into a quick look of interest.

"Old Droom? What do you know about him?"

"Nothing in particular, of course. Only he sort of jars me when he talks." Rigby saw that the young man had something on his mind.

"I did not know that you were personal friends," ventured Rigby.

"Friends?" snorted Eddie. "Holy Mackerel! He scares the life out of me. I know him in a business way, that's all. He came down here three weeks ago and borrowed some books for Bansemer. I had to go up and get 'em yesterday. I was smoking a cigarette. When I asked the old guy for the books he said I'd go to hell if I smoked. I thought I'd be funny, so I said back to him: 'I'll smoke if I go to hell, so what's the diff?' It went all right with him, too. He laughed--you ought to see him laugh!--and told me to sit down while he looked up the books. I was there half an hour and he talked all the time. By jing! He makes your blood run cold. He up and said there was no such place as hell. "Why not?" says I. "Because," says he, "God, with all His infinite power, could not conceive of a space huge enough to hold all the hypocrites and sinners." Then he grinned and said he had set aside in his will the sum of a hundred dollars to build a church for the honest man. "That will be a pretty small church," says I. "It will be a small congregation, my son," says he. "What few real honest men we have will hesitate to attend for fear of being ostracised by society." "Gee whiz, Mr. Droom, that's pretty hard on society," says I, laughing. "Oh, for that matter, I have already delivered my eulogy on society," says he. "But it ain't dead," says I. "Oh, yes; it's so rotten it must surely be dead," says he in the nastiest way I ever heard. He's a fearful old man, Mr. Rigby. He made a mean remark about that Mrs. David Cable."

"What did he say?" quickly demanded Bobby.

"He said he'd been reading in the papers about how she was breaking into society. "She's joined the Episcopal church," says he, sarcastic-like. "Well, there's nothing wrong in that," says I. "I know, but she attends," says he, just as if she shouldn't. "She wouldn't attend if the women in that church wore Salvation Army

clothes and played tambourines, let me tell you. None of 'em would. I knew her in New York years ago. She wasn't fashionable then. Now she's so swell that she'll soon be asking Cable to build a mansion at Rose Lawn Cemetery, because all of the fashionables go there.' Pretty raw, eh, Mr. Rigby?"

"Oh, he's an old blatherskite, Eddie. They talk that way when they get old and grouchy. So he knew Mrs. Cable in New York, eh? What else did he say about her?"

"Nothing much. Oh, yes, he did say--in that nasty way of his--that he saw her on the street the other day chatting with one of the richest swells in Chicago. He didn't say who he was except that he was the man who once made his wife sit up all night in the day coach while he slept in the only berth to be had on the train. Do you know who that could be?"

"I'm afraid Droom was romancing," said Bobby, with a smile.

"Say, Mr. Rigby," said Eddie earnestly, "what sort of business does Mr. Bansemer handle?" Rigby had difficulty in controlling his expression. "I was wondering, because while I was there yesterday a girl I know came out of the back room where she had been talking to Bansemer. She's no good."

"Very likely she was consulting him about something," said Rigby quietly.

"She soaked a friend of mine for a thousand when she was singing in the chorus in one of the theatres here."

"Do you know her well?"

"I--er--did see something of her at one time. Say, don't mention it to Rosie, will you? She's not strong for chorus girls," said Eddie anxiously. "A few days ago I saw a woman come out of his office, heavily veiled. She was crying, because I could hear the sobs. I don't go much on Bansemer, Mr. Rigby. Darn him, he called me a pup one day when I took a message up for Judge Smith."

"See here, Eddie," said Rigby, leaning forward suddenly, "I've heard two or three queer things about Bansemer. I want you to tell me all you hear from Droom and all that you see. Don't you think you could cultivate Droom's acquaintance a bit? Keep this very quiet--not a word to anybody. It may mean something in the end."

"Gee whiz!" murmured Eddie, his eyes wide with interest. From that day on he and Bobby Rigby were allies--even conspirators.

Later in the day Rigby had a telephone message from Graydon Bansemer, suggesting that they lunch together. All he would say over the wire was that he would some day soon expect Rigby to perform a happy service for him. Bobby understood and was troubled. He suspected that Graydon had asked Jane Cable to marry him and that she had consented. He loved Graydon Bansemer, but for the first time in their acquaintance he found himself wondering if the son were not playing into the father's hands in this most desirable matrimonial venture. With a shudder of repugnance he put the thought from him, loyal to that good friend and comrade.

James Bansemer came into his office late that morning. He had not seen Graydon the night before, but at breakfast the young man announced his good fortune and asked for his blessing. To the son's surprise, the elder man did not at once express his approval. For a long time he sat silent and preoccupied to all appearance, narrowly studying his son's face until the young man was constrained to laugh in his nervousness.

"You love her--you are very sure?" asked the father at last.

"Better than my life," cried Graydon warmly.

"She has good blood in her," said Bansemer, senior, slowly, almost absently.

"I should say so. Her father is a wonderful man."

"Yes, I daresay," agreed the other without taking his eyes from the son's face.

"But you don't say whether you approve or disapprove," complained Graydon.

"Would it change matters if I disapproved?"

"Not in the least, father. I love her. I'd hate to displease you in--"

"Then, of course, I approve," said the other, with his warmest smile. "Jane is a beauty and--I am proud of her."

"She is too good for me," lamented Graydon happily.

"I can't very well contradict her future husband," said the lawyer. There was a hungry look in his eyes as he glanced from time to time at the face of the boy who had his mother's unforgettable eyes.

A messenger brought Mrs. Cable's note to Bansemer soon after his arrival at the office. He and Elias Droom were in the back office when the boy came. They had been discussing the contents of a letter that came in the early mail. The lawyer accepted the note and dismissed the boy with the curt remark that he would telephone an answer in person.

"It looks to me as though this is going to be a rather ticklish affair," Droom resumed after the boy had closed the outer door behind him. Bansemer's mind was on Mrs. Cable's note; a queer smile hung on his lips.

"I'm rather touched by her astuteness," he said. "She's cleverer than I thought. Oh," suddenly remembering that it was not Mrs. Cable's letter they were discussing, "you always see the dreary side of things, Elias."

"I haven't forgotten New York," said the clerk drily.

"Ah, but Chicago isn't New York, you know."

"Well, I was just reminding you. This man is going to fight back, that is plain."

"That's what Mrs. Norwood promised to do, also, Elias. But she was like a lamb in the end."

"I wouldn't be very proud of that affair, if I were you."

"See here, Droom, you're getting a trifle too familiar of late. I don't like it," said Bansemer sharply.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Bansemer," said Droom, scraping his foot across the floor and looking straight past his master's head. "It's for the good of the cause, that's all. It wouldn't do, on Graydon's account, for you to be driven from Chicago at this time. You see, he thinks you are beyond reproach."

"Curse your impudence, Droom, I won't be spoken to in that way," exclaimed Bansemer, white with sudden rage and loathing.

"Am I to expect my discharge, sir?" asked Droom, rubbing his hands abjectly, but looking squarely into Bansemer's eyes for the first time in their acquaintance. Bansemer glared back for an instant and then shrugged his shoulders with a nervous laugh.

"We shan't quarrel, Elias," he said. "Speaking of Graydon, he is to be married before long."

"I trust he is to do well, sir. Graydon is a fine boy."

"He is to marry David Cable's daughter."

"Indeed? I did not know that David Cable had a daughter."

"You know whom I mean--Jane Cable." He turned rather restlessly, conscious that Droom's eyes were following him to the window. He glanced again at Mrs. Cable's note and waited.

"I suppose you are pleased," said Droom, after a long pause.

"Certainly. Jane is a splendid girl. She's beautiful, accomplished and--well, she's thoroughbred," said Bansemer steadily, turning to face the old man.

"It is not necessary to remind you that she is a child of love," said Droom, "That's the genteel way to put it."

"It's not like you to be genteel, Elias. Still," and he sat down and leaned forward eagerly, "she has good blood from both sides."

"Yes--the so-called best."

"You speak as if you know the truth."

"I think--yes, I'm sure I know. I have known for twenty years, Mr. Bansemer. I had the same means as you of finding out whose child she was."

"That's more than Mrs. Cable knows."

"She did not take the trouble to investigate. It's too late now."

"I don't believe you really know the names of her father and mother," said Bansemer shrewdly. "You are trying to trick me into telling you what I DO know."

"There are portraits of her ancestors hanging in Fifth Avenue," said Droom promptly. "Here," and he picked up a pencil, "I'll write the initials of the two persons responsible for her existence. You do the same and we'll see that they tally." He quickly scratched four letters on a pad of paper. Bansemer hesitated and then slowly wrote the initials on the back of an envelope. Without a word they exchanged the papers. After a moment they both smiled in relief. Neither had been tricked. The initials were identical.

"I imagine the ancestors hanging in Fifth Avenue would be amazed if they knew the story of Jane," said Droom, with a chuckle.

"I doubt it, Droom. Ancestors have stories, too, and they hide them."

"Well, she isn't the only girl who doesn't know."

"I dare say. It isn't a wise world."

"It's a lucky one. That's why it assumes to be decent."

"You are quite a cynic, Elias."

"By the way, now that your son is to marry her, I'd like to know just what your game is."

Bansemer turned on him like a tiger, his steely eyes blazing.

"Game? There is no game, damn you. Listen to me, Droom; we'll settle this now. I'm a bad man, but I've tried to be a good father. People have called me heartless. So be it. But I love that boy of mine. What little heart I have belongs to him. There can be no game where he is concerned. Some day, perhaps, he'll find out the kind of a man I've been to others, but can always remember that I was fair and honest with him. He'll despise my methods and he'll spurn my money, but he'll have to love me. Jane Cable is not the girl I would have chosen for him, but she is good and true and he loves her."

For the first time in his life Elias Droom shrank beneath the eyes of his master. He hated James Bansemer from the bottom, of his wretched soul, but he could not but feel, at this moment, a touch of admiration.

Through all the years of their association Elias Droom had hated Bansemer because he was qualified to be the master, because he was successful and forceful, because he had loved and been loved, because they had been classmates but not equals. In the bitterness of his heart he had lain awake on countless nights praying--but not to his God--that the time would come when he could stand ascendant over this steely master. Only his unswerving loyalty to a duty once assumed kept him from crushing Bansemer with exposure years

before. But Droom was not a traitor. He remained standing, lifting his eyes after a brief, shifting study of his bony hands.

"You have nothing to fear from me," he said. "Your boy is the only being in the world that I care for. He hates me. Everybody hates me. But it doesn't matter. I asked what your game was because we know Jane's father and mother. That's all. Mrs. David Cable, I presume, can be preyed upon with safety."

"Mrs. Cable has much to lose," significantly.

"And how much to pay?" with a meaning look.

"That is her affair, Droom."

"I wouldn't press her too hard," cautioned Droom. "She's a woman."

"Never fear. I'm going there for dinner to-night. It's a family affair. By the way, here's a letter from a distinguished political leader. He suggests that I act on the city central committee for the coming year. You've heard of him, I daresay. He says it will mean a great deal to me here in Chicago."

"You are not going into politics?" scornfully.

"Elias, I'm pretty bad, but I'm not bad enough for local politics."

They heard someone at the outer door at that moment, and Droom glided forth from the inner room to greet the visitor. It was Eddie Deever.

"Say, Mr. Droom, do you suppose Mr. Bansemer would object if I sat down here for a few minutes to look over his books on Famous Crimes in History? Old Smith hasn't got 'em."

"Go ahead," said Droom, taking his seat at the desk. "You are a great reader, I perceive. A literary person like you ought to live in Boston. Everybody reads in Boston."

"Boston?" sniffed Eddie, pulling a book from the shelf. "They're still reading the Old Testament there."

CHAPTER XI

AN EVENING WITH DROOM

Several weeks later Eddie Deever announced, quite breathlessly, to Rigby that he was going over to visit Droom in his Wells Street rooms. The two had found a joint affinity in Napoleon, although it became necessary for the law student to sit up late at night, neglecting other literature, in order to establish anything like

an adequate acquaintance with the lamented Corsican.

Rigby was now morally certain that James Bansemer was all that Harbert had painted. To his surprise, however, the man was not openly suspected by other members of the bar. He had been accepted as a man of power and ability. Certainly he was too clever to expose himself and too wary to leave peepholes for others engaged in that business. Rigby was debating the wisdom of going to Bansemer with his accusations and the secret advice to leave the city before anything happened that might throw shame upon Graydon. The courage to do the thing alone was lacking.

Graydon was full of his happiness. He had asked Rigby to act as his "best man" in September, and Bobby had promised. On occasions when the two young men discussed the coming event with Jane and Miss Clegg, Rigby's preoccupied air was strangely in contrast with the animation of the others. Graydon accused his liver and advised him to go to French Lick. Far from that, the old quarterback was gradually preparing himself to go to James Bansemer. To himself he was saying, as he put off the disagreeable task from day to day: "He'll kick me out of the office and that's all the reward I'll get for my pains. Graydon will hate me in the end."

James Bansemer had proposed a trip to Europe as a wedding journey, a present from himself, but Graydon declined. He would not take an extensive leave of absence from the office of Clegg, Groll & Davidson at this stage of his career.

The morning after his visit to the abode of Elias Droom, Eddie Deever strolled into the office of Bobby Rigby. He looked as though he had spent a sleepless night. Mr. Rigby was out, but Miss Keating was "at home." She was scathingly polite to her delinquent admirer. Eddie's visits of late to the office had not been of a social character. He devoted much of his time to low-toned conversations with Rigby; few were the occasions when he lounged affably upon her typewriting desk as of yore.

"You look as if you'd had a night of it," remarked Rosie. Eddie yawned obligingly. "Don't sit on my desk. Can't you see those letters?"

"Gee, you're getting touchy of late. I'll move the letters."

"No, you won't," she objected. "Besides, it doesn't look well. What if someone should come in--suddenly?"

"Well, it wouldn't be the first time I got out suddenly, would it?" He retained his seat on the desk. "Say, where's Rigby?"

"You mean MR. Rigby? He's out."

"Gee, you're also snippy. Well, give him my regards. So long."

He was unwinding his long legs preparatory to a descent from his perch.

"Don't rush," she said quickly. He rewound his legs and yawned. "Goodness, you're not affected with insomnia, are you?"

"I've got it the worst way. I got awake at eight o'clock this

morning and I couldn't go to sleep again to save my soul. It's an awful disease. Will Rigby be back soon?"

"It won't matter. He's engaged," she snapped, cracking away at her machine.

"I've heard there was some prospect. She's a fine looker."

"Rubber-neck!"

"Say, Rosie, I'm going to ask a girl to go to the theatre with me," said Eddie complacently.

"Indeed! Well, ask her. I don't care."

"To-morrow night. Will you go?"

"Who? Me?"

"Sure. I--I wouldn't take anybody else, you know."

"What theatre?" she asked with her rarest smile.

At that instant Rigby came in. Without a word Eddie popped up, a bit red in the face, and followed the lawyer into the private room, closing the door behind him. Rosie's ears went very pink and she pounded the keys so viciously that the machine trembled on the verge of collapse.

"Gee, Mr. Rigby, that old Droom's a holy terror. He kept me there till after one o'clock. But I'm going back again soon some night. He's got an awful joint. But that isn't what I wanted to see you about. I ran across May Rosabel, that chorus girl I was telling you about. Saw her downtown in a restaurant at one this morning. She wanted to buy the drinks and said she had more money than a rabbit. There was a gang with her. I got her to one side and she said an uncle had just died and left her a fortune. She wouldn't say how much, but it must have been quite a bunch. I know all of her uncles. She's got three. They work out at Pullman, Mr. Rigby, and they couldn't leave thirty cents between them if they all died at once."

After hearing this, Rigby decided to confront Bansemer at once. It did not occur to him until later that the easiest and most effective way to drive Bansemer from Chicago without scandal was through Elias Droom. When the thought came to him, however, he rejoiced. The new plan was to sow the seeds of apprehension with Droom; Bansemer would not be long in reaping their harvest--of dismay. Ten apparently innocent words from Eddie Deever would open Droom's eyes to the dangers ahead.

Young Mr. Deever met with harsh disappointment when he came forth to renew his conversation with Rosie Keating. She was chatting at the telephone, her face wreathed in smiles.

"Thank you," she was saying, "it will be so nice. I was afraid I had an engagement for to-morrow night, but I haven't. Everybody says it's a perfectly lovely play. I'm crazy to see it. What? About seven-thirty. It takes nearly half an hour down on the Clark Street

cable. Slowest old thing ever. All right. Good-bye." Then she hung up the receiver and turned upon Eddie, who stood aghast near the desk. "Oh, I thought you'd gone."

"Say, what was that you were saying over the 'phone? Didn't I ask you--"

"I'm going to the theatre with Mr. Kempshall. Why?"

"WHY? Why, you know I asked you to--"

"You didn't specify, Eddie, that's all. I'll go some other night with you. Good-bye." Clackety-clack went the machine, throwing insult into his very face as it were. He tramped out of the office in high dudgeon.

"Confound this detective business, anyhow," he might have been heard to remark. Three nights later, however, he took Rosie to the play, and on the fourth night he was Droom's guest again in the rooms across the river. He was well prepared to begin the campaign of insinuation which was to affect Bansemer in the end. Sitting stiff and uncomfortable in the dingy living-room overlooking Wells Street, he watched with awe the master of the place at work on the finishing touches of a new "invention," the uses of which he did not offer to explain.

He was without a coat and his shirt sleeves were rolled far above the elbows, displaying long, sinewy arms, hairy and not unlike those of the orang-outang Eddie had seen in Lincoln Park.

"I've got a new way of inflicting the death penalty," the gaunt old man said, slipping into a heavy, quilted dressing-gown. "These rascals don't mind hanging or the penitentiary. But if they thought their bodies would be everlastingly destroyed by quicklime, they'd hesitate before killing their fellow-men."

"But they already bury them in quicklime in England," said Eddie loftily.

"Yes, but not until after they're dead," said Droom with a cackle. He grinned broadly at the sight of the youth's horror-struck face. "Go ahead and smoke, my boy. I'll light my pipe. Make yourself at home. I keep the window closed to keep out the sound of those Wells Street cars. It's good of you to come over here and cheer up an old man's evenings. I'm--I'm not used to it," he said with a wistful touch which was lost to Eddie.

"You ought to have a wife and a lot of children, Mr. Droom," said Eddie with characteristic thoughtlessness. Droom stirred the fire and scowled. "Were you ever married?"

"No. I don't believe in marriage," said Droom sullenly.

"Gee! Why not?"

"Why should I? It's the way I was brought up."

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes. My father was a Catholic priest."

"But, Great Scott, Catholics believe in marriage."

"They don't believe in their priests marrying."

"Well, they DON'T marry, do they?"

"No, they don't," answered Droom with a laugh that sounded like a snarl. It took Eddie two days to comprehend. "I saw the girl to-day that young Graydon Bansemer is to marry--Miss Cable."

"Say, she's swell, isn't she?" said Eddie. The old man slunk into his chair.

"She's very pretty. Mr. Graydon introduced me to her."

"Gee!" was all Eddie could say.

"They were crossing Wells Street down below here on the way home from a nickel-plater's in Indiana Street. I saw her years ago, but she didn't remember me. I didn't expect it, however."

"I--how could she have forgotten you?"

"Oh, she'd have forgotten her mother at that age. She was but three months old. I don't think she liked me to-day. I'm not what you call a ladies' man," grinned Elias, puffing at his pipe as he picked up the volumes on Napoleon. Eddie laughed politely but uncomfortably.

"How old are you, Mr. Droom?"

"I'm as old as Methuselah."

"Aw, go 'way!"

"When he was a boy," laughed Elias, enjoying his quip immensely. "Miss Cable seems to be very fond of Graydon. That will last for a couple of years and then she'll probably be like two-thirds of the rest of 'em. Other men will be paying attention to her and she looking for admiration everywhere. You'd be surprised to know how much of that is going on in Chicago. Women can't seem to be satisfied with one husband. They must have another one or two--usually somebody else's."

"You talk like a society man, Mr. Droom." "Well, I've met a few society men--professionally. And women, too, for that matter. Look out for a sensational divorce case within the next few weeks. It's bound to come unless things change. Terribly nasty affair."

"Is Mr. Bansemer interested?" asked Eddie, holding tight to his chair.

"Oh, no. We don't go in for that sort of thing." "I wonder if Mr. Bansemer knows about the mistake that came near happening to him a week or two ago. I got hold of it through a boy that works in the United States Marshal's office," said Eddie, cold as ice now that he was making the test. Droom turned upon him quickly.

"What mistake? What do you mean?" "It would have been a rich joke on Mr. Bansemer. Seems that some lawyer is likely to be charged with blackmail, and they got Mr. Bansemer's name mixed up in it some way. Of course, nothing came of it, but--I just wondered if anybody had told him of the close call he'd had."

Droom stared straight beyond the young liar and was silent for a full minute. Then he deliberately opened the book on his knee and began to turn the pages.

"That WOULD have been a joke on Mr. Bansemer," he said indifferently.

"I don't think he would have enjoyed it, do you?"

"No one enjoys jokes from the United States Marshal's office," said Droom grimly. "By the way, who is the lawyer that really was wanted?"

"I never heard. I believe it was dropped. The young fellow I know said he couldn't talk about it, so I didn't ask. Say, who was that swell woman I saw coming out of your office to-day? I was up at Mr. Hornbrook's."

Droom hesitated a moment. He seemed to be weighing everything he said.

"I suspect it was young Bansemer's future mother-in-law," he said. "Mrs. David Cable was there this afternoon about three."

"Gee," laughed Eddie. "Does she need a lawyer?"

"Mr. Bansemer transacted business for her some time ago. A very small matter, if I remember correctly. Here, listen to this. Now here's a little incident I found this evening that interests me immensely. It proves to my mind one of two points I hold in regard to Marshal Ney. Listen," and he read at length from his book, a dry, sepulchral monotone that grated on the ear until it became almost unendurable.

The little clock on the mantelpiece clanged ten before they laid aside Napoleon and began to talk about something that interested Eddie Deever far more than all else--Elias Droom himself and such of his experiences as he cared to relate. The old man told stories about the dark sides of New York life, tales of murder, thievery, rascality high and low, and he told them with blood-curdling directness. The Walker wife-murder; the inside facts of the De Pugh divorce scandal; the Harvey family's skeleton--all food for the dime-novel producer. Eddie revelled in these recitals even while he shuddered at the way in which the old man gave them.

"Ah, this is a wicked old world," said Droom, refilling his pipe and showing his teeth as he puffed. "That's why I have those pictures of the Madonna on the wall--to keep me from forgetting that there are beautiful things in the world in spite of its ugliness and hypocrisy. I haven't much--"

He stopped short and listened intently. The sounds of footsteps on the stairs outside came to his ears. They clumped upward, paused

for a moment down the little hall and then approached Droom's doorway. Host and guest looked at the clock instinctively. Eddie heard Droom's breath as it came faster between puffs at his pipe. Then there was a resounding rap at the panel of the door. Eddie Deever never forgot the look that swept over the old man's face--the look of wonder, dread, desperation. It passed in an instant, and he arose unsteadily, undecidedly, to admit the late caller. His long frame seemed to shake like a reed as he stood cautiously inside the bolted door and called out:

"Who's there?"

"Messenger," was the muffled response. Droom hesitated a moment, looking first at Eddie and then toward the window. Slowly he unbolted the door. A small A. D. T. boy stood beyond.

"What is it?" almost gasped Elias Droom, drawing the boy into the room.

"Mr. Droom? No answer, sir. Sign here." The boy, snow-covered, drew a letter from his pocket and handed it to Droom.

"Where from?" demanded the old clerk, the paper rattling in his fingers.

"I don't know. I'm from Chicago Avenue," said the boy, with proper impudence. He took one look at Droom's face as the man handed the slip back to him and then hurried downstairs, far less impudent at heart than he had been.

Droom recognised the handwriting on the envelope as James Bansemer's. It was the first time his employer had communicated with him in this manner. He tore open the envelope and anxiously read the brief missive.

"I've got to go to the office," he said, surprise still lingering in his face. "It's important business--a consultation with--er--with an Eastern client."

"Gee, it's tough to turn out this kind of a night. I'm going your way, Mr. Droom. Come on, I'll take the car down with you."

"I--I won't be ready for some time."

"Oh, well, I'll say good-night, then."

Eddie Deever departed, chuckling to himself as he made his way to the U---- Building, determined to learn what he could of this unusual summons.

But Droom was too crafty. Bansemer's letter had asked him to come to Rector's restaurant and not to the U---- Building. The command was imperative.

Bansemer had been spending the evening at the home of David Cable.

CHAPTER XII

JAMES BANSEMER CALLS

Following close upon Mrs. Cable's visit to his office in the afternoon, Bansemer presented himself at her home in the evening, urbane, courtly, but characteristically aggressive. Her action in bearding him in his den was not surprising, even though it might have been considered unusual. He had been well aware for some time that she was sorely uneasy and that it was only a question of time when she would make the expected advances. Since the announcement of Jane's engagement Bansemer had been punctiliously considerate; and yet, underneath his faultless exterior, Mrs. Cable felt that she could recognise the deadly poise of other intentions. She lived in fear that they would spring upon her as if from the dark and that she would be powerless to combat them. Something stronger than words or even intuition told her that James Bansemer was not to be turned aside by sentiment.

Driven at last to the point where she felt that she must know his intentions, she boldly ventured into his consultation room, a trembling but determined creature whose flesh quivered with chill despite the furs that foiled the wintry winds. Elias Droom passed her on into the private room with a polite grin that set her teeth on edge.

She left the building fifteen minutes later, nursing a wild but forlorn hope that James Bansemer meant no evil, after all. Without hesitation she told him plainly that she came to learn the precise nature of his attitude toward herself and the girl. Bansemer's resentment appeared too real to have been simulated. He was almost harsh in his response to the inference. In the end, however, he was a little less than tender in his efforts to convince her that she had cruelly misjudged him. She went away with a chill in her heart dislodged, but not dissolved. When he asked if she and Mr. Cable would be at home that night for a game of cards, she felt obliged to urge him to come. It was not until she was in the carriage below that she remembered that David Cable was to attend a big banquet at the Auditorium that night, and that Jane would be at the theatre with friends.

Bansemer smiled serenely as he escorted her to the door. "We will not permit anything to happen which might bring misery to the two beings so dear to us," he assured her at parting.

Shortly after eight he entered the Cable home. He had gone to Chicago Avenue beforehand to send a telegram East. From the corner of Clark Street, he walked across town toward the lake, facing the bitter gale with poor grace. In Washington Place he passed two men going from their cab into the Union Club. He did not look at them nor did he see that they turned and stared after him as he buffeted his way across Dearborn Avenue. One of the men was Bobby Rigby; the other, Denis Harbert of New York.

"It's the same Bansemer," said Harbert as they entered the club.
"I'd know him in a million."

At the Cables' a servant, on opening the door, announced that Mr. Cable was not at home.

"Is Mrs. Cable at home?" asked Mr. Bansemer, making no effort to find his cardcase.

"Yes, sir," responded the servant after a moment's hesitation. Bansemer passed through the vestibule.

"Say Mr. Bansemer, if you please."

He removed his coat and was standing comfortably in front of the blazing logs in the library when she came down.

"I thought the night was too dreadful for anyone to venture out unless--" she was saying as she gave him her hand.

"A night indoors and alone is a thousandfold more dreadful than one outdoors in quest of good company," interrupted Bansemer. He drew up chairs in front of the fireplace and stood by waiting for her to be seated.

"I had forgotten that Mr. Cable was to attend a banquet at the Auditorium," she explained nervously, confident, however, that he felt she had not forgotten.

"To be sure," he said. "This is the night of the banquet. I was not invited."

"I tried to telephone to ask you to come to-morrow night. The storm has played havoc with the wires. It is impossible to get connection with anyone." A servant appeared in the doorway.

"You are wanted at the telephone, Mrs. Cable, Shall I say you will come?"

Flushing to the roots of her hair, the mistress of the house excused herself and left the room. Bansemer leaned back in his chair and smiled. She returned a few minutes later with a fluttering apology.

"What a terrible night it must be for those poor linemen," she said. "I remember what it meant to be a railroad lineman in the West years ago. The blizzards out there are a great deal more severe than those we have here, Mr. Bansemer. Just think of the poor fellows who are repairing the lines to-night. Doesn't it seem heartless?"

"It does, indeed. And yet, I daresay you've been scolding them bitterly all evening. One seldom thinks it worth while to be merciful when the telephone refuses to obey. It's only a true philanthropist who can forgive the telephone. However, I am grateful to the blizzard and happy. Fair weather would have deprived me of pleasure."

"I am sorry Mr. Cable is not at home," she said quickly.

"I doubt if I shall miss him greatly," said he.

"He expects to leave early--he isn't well," she hastened to say. "Don't you want to smoke?"

"A cigarette, if you don't mind. By the way, where is my future daughter-in-law? Surely I may see her to-night."

"She is at the theatre--with the Fernmores. Graydon is one of the party. Didn't you know?" she asked suddenly.

"I do remember it now. He left the apartment quite early. Then I have Fernmore to thank for--we are alone." He leaned forward in his chair and flicked the cigarette ashes into the fire, his black eyes looking into hers with unmistakable intentness.

"You assured me to-day that you would be fair," she said with strange calmness, meeting his gaze unflinchingly.

"I am fair. What more can you ask?" with a light laugh.

"Why did you say to-day that I had nothing to fear from you?" she demanded.

"You have nothing to fear. Why should you fear me? For twenty years your face has not been out of my memory. Why should I seek to hurt you, then? Why should I not rejoice in the tie that binds our interests--our lives, for that matter? Come, I ask if I am not fair?"

Her face became pale, her heart cold. She understood. The mask was off. He veiled his threat in the simplest words possible; the purpose looked through with greedy disdain for grace.

"I can offer no more than I offered to-day," she said.

"Do you suppose I would accept money in payment for my son's peace of mind?" declared Bansemer, with finely assumed scorn. "You offered me ten thousand dollars. You will never know how that hurt me, coming from you. Money? What is money to me in an affair like this? I care more for one tender touch of your fingers than all the money in the world! You--and you alone, can mould every impulse in me. For half my life I have been hated. No one has given me a grain of love. I must have it. For years you have not been out of my mind--I have not been out of yours."

"Stop!" she cried angrily. "You have no right to say such things to me. You have been in my mind all these years, but oh, how I have hated you!"

Like a flash, his manner changed. He had her in his power, and it was not in his nature to permit his subjects to dictate to him. Craft and coercion always had been his allies; craft could not win a woman's heart, but coercion might crush it into submission. It was not like James Bansemer to play a waiting game after it had been fairly started.

"Now listen to me," he said distinctly. "You cannot afford to talk like that. You cannot afford to make an enemy of me. I mean what I--"

"What would you do?" she cried. "You have promised that nothing shall happen to mar the lives of our children. You have given me your pledge. Is it worthless? Is it--"

"I wouldn't speak so loud if I were you," said he slowly. "The walls have ears. You have much to lose if ears other than those in the wall should hear what could be said. It would mean disaster. I know, at least, that you do not love David Cable--"

"What! I--I worship my husband," she cried, her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving. "I love him better than anything else in all the world. How dare you say that to me!"

"Control yourself," he cautioned calmly. "Permit me to say you love the position he has given you. You love the pedestal on which you stand so insecurely. You would rather hear his curse than to see the hand of social ostracism raised against you. Wait! A word from me and not only David Cable, but the whole world would turn against you."

"I have committed no crime," she flared back at him, "I have deceived my husband, but I have not dishonoured him. Tell the world everything, if you will."

"It would be a luscious tale," he said with an evil laugh. "The world, which is wicked, might forget the fact that Jane is not David's daughter; but David would not forget that she is yours."

"What do you mean?" starting from her chair.

"I think you understand," he said deliberately.

"My God, she is NOT my child!" she cried in horror. "You know she isn't. You know the entire story. You--"

"I only know that you brought her to me and that I did you a service. Don't ask me to be brutal and say more." She sank back and glared at him like a helpless, wounded thing, the full force of his threat rushing in upon her.

"You--you COULDN'T do THAT," she whispered tremulously.

"I could, but I don't see why I should," he said, leaning closer to her shrinking figure.

"You know it isn't true," faintly.

"I only know that I am trying to save you from calamity."

"Oh, what a beast you are!" she cried, springing to her feet. "Go! I defy you! Do and say what you will. Only go!"

He rose calmly, a satisfied smile on his face.

"I shall, of course, first of all, forbid my son to marry the young woman. It will be necessary for me to explain the reason to Mr. Cable. I am sorry to have distressed you. Really, I had expected

quite a different evening, after your invitation. You can't blame me for misunderstanding your motive in asking me to come here when you expected to be utterly alone." His laugh was a sneer.

"Poor--poor little Jane!" murmured the harassed woman, clasping her hands over her eyes; then suddenly she cried out: "What a devil you are to barter with your son's happiness!"

"I'll not mince matters," he said harshly. "You and I must understand each other. To be perfectly frank, everything rests with you. Call me a beast if you like. As a beast I can destroy you, and I will."

"You forget that I can go to my husband and tell him everything. He will hate me, but he will believe me," she said, facing him once more.

"The world will believe me," he scoffed.

"Not after I tell the world that you tried to blackmail me--that you have demanded fifty thousand dollars."

"But I haven't made such a demand."

"I can SWEAR that you have," she cried triumphantly. He glared at her for a moment, his past coming up from behind with a rush that left him nothing to stand on.

"I am willing to run the risk of scandal, if you are, my dear," he said after a moment, his hands clenched behind him. "It will be very costly. You have much to lose."

"I think," she said shrewdly, guessing his weakness even as he saw it, "that we can talk sensibly of the situation from now on. I am not afraid of you."

He looked at her steadily for a moment, reading her thoughts, seeing her trembling heart. Then he said drily:

"I'll do nothing for a week, and then you'll send for me."

The door in the vestibule opened suddenly and someone--aye, more than one--came in from the outside. Mrs. Cable started to her feet and turned toward the library door. Bansemer was standing close by her side. He turned to move away as David Cable stepped to the door to look in. Cable's coat collar was about his ears and he was removing his gloves. For a moment he stood motionless, gazing upon the occupants of the room.

Then, for the first time, there flashed before him the sharp point of steel which was to pierce his brain later on with deadly suspicion and doubt. There was no mistaking the confusion of Mrs. Cable and her visitor. It was manifest that they had not expected him to appear so unexpectedly. He remembered now that on two other occasions he had found Bansemer at his house, and alone with Mrs. Cable, but he had not regarded it as extraordinary. But there was a startled look in her eyes to-night, an indecision in her greeting that caused him to knit his brows and lift his hand unconsciously to his temple before speaking. He heard Bansemer say that he was just going, but that he would stay for a short chat about the banquet.

Mrs. Cable turned to stir the fire with the poker, an unusual act on her part he was not slow to observe. The seed was sown.

"I brought Bobby over from the club with me--and a friend, Frances," he said, after asking Bansemer to sit down for a while. His keen eyes noted that her hand shook as she put the poker back into its place. As he walked into the hall to throw aside his coat, Frances Cable turned to Bansemer with a significant look, shaking her head in mute appeal for silence.

Bobby Rigby came into the room, followed by a tall stranger, whom he presented to Mrs. Cable. Bansemer, standing near the library table, caught a glimpse of the stranger's face as he took Mrs. Cable's hand. He started violently, unable at first to believe his eyes. A chill ran through his frame and his expression changed from wonder to consternation.

"Mr. Bansemer, my friend, Mr. Harbert."

"I have met Mr. Bansemer," said Harbert, with a cold stare straight into the other's eyes. They were on opposite sides of the table.

"In New York," said Bansemer firmly, his eyes unflinching in their return. He noticed that Harbert's look was uncompromisingly antagonistic, but that was to be expected. It troubled him, however, to see something like unfriendliness in Rigby's greeting.

Harbert was the man who had fought him to rout in New York. This keen, aggressive young barrister had driven him into a corner from which he escaped only by merest chance. He knew James Bansemer for what he was. It had not been his fault that the man crawled through a small avenue of technicalities and avoided the punishment that had seemed so certain. He had waged war bitterly against the blackmailer, and he missed complete victory by a hair's breadth.

Feeling the strain of the situation, Rigby talked with earnest volubility. He led the conversation into many lines--the war in the Philippines, the banquet, the play which Jane and Graydon were seeing. The thought of the play brought a shade of despair to his brow--pretty Miss Clegg was in the party with that "mucker" Medford.

James Bansemer had been cold with speculation every instant of the time; had felt that Harbert's condemning gaze had never left him. Apparently listening to the others, he found himself wondering what Harbert's trip to Chicago signified. Gradually it dawned upon him that his old-time foe was not through with his fighting. The look in Rigby's eyes meant something, after all--and Rigby was Graydon's best friend! Harbert was in Chicago to act--and to act first! This thought shot into the man's brain like burning metal. It set every nerve afire. His nemesis had already begun his work. Before he left the Cable home that night he would be asking his host and hostess what they knew of one James Bansemer's past.

As Bansemer arose to say good-night to the others, Harbert's eyes met his with deadly directness.

"Where are your offices, Mr. Bansemer?" asked the New Yorker. There was something significant in the question.

"Mr. Rigby and I have offices in the same building," he replied.
"Will you come in and see me?"

"I shall try," said the other.

To have saved his life, Bansemer could not meet David Cable's questioning eyes as he shook hands with him. Cable's hands were like ice.

Outside the house, in the whirling gale, the tall lawyer breathed easier, but not securely. His brain was clogged with doubts, fears, prophecies--all whirling like mad around the ominous figure of Denis Harbert.

Suddenly, he stopped stockstill, the bitter scowl deepening in his eyes. With an oath he turned abruptly and hurried in the opposite direction. The time had come to make ready for battle. A few minutes later, he was writing the note which created so much commotion in the home of Elias Droom.

CHAPTER XIII

JANE SEES WITH NEW EYES

It was not until the hurrying Bansemer entered the door of Rector's that the apprehension of having committed a senseless blunder came to him.

"Good heavens!" he muttered, stopping short. "What a fool I'm getting to be--meeting old Elias, in a place like this! The theatre crowds--everybody in town will be here by eleven! Curse me, for a hopeless ass! I must get him away at once!"

Grumbling at himself, he passed into the restaurant. Gabe offered him the choice of various tables; he selected one which commanded a view of the entrances and ordered a perfunctory "Scotch." Nervous and anxious, he was more troubled than he cared to admit even to himself. Fortunately, there were not many people in the cafe; and his gaze, wandering about the place, soon halted before the small alcove in the east end containing a table with wine glasses, in waiting, set for a large party. The clock, back of the cigarstand, said it was five minutes after eleven. Bansemer impatiently watched the two doors leading to the street, and was beginning to wonder whether the message had reached the old clerk, when presently, the uncouth shape of Droom, appeared slinking through the so-called ladies' entrance, with the shrinking attitude of one unaccustomed to fashionable restaurants and doubtful of his reception. Bansemer motioned to him.

"Just as soon as I can get my check," he was saying, at the same

time, beckoning to a waiter; "we'll move out of this. It will be crowded in--I never thought, a stall at Chapin & Gore's will be better. Here, waiter! My check! I'm in a hurry!--the devil!"

As the exclamation burst from his lips, there came down the narrow steps and through a door quickly thrown open by a waiter, a number of gay, fashionably dressed people, all smiling and trembling with the cold. Immediately, this party attracted the attention of the room. Waiters rushed hither and thither relieving the ladies of their costly lace and fur wraps, and the men of their heavy overcoats. Of the expected theatre-comers, these were the first to arrive; but presently others followed, and soon the quiet cafe of the early evening became transformed into one of bustle and excitement by the eager, animated throng. With dismay Bansemer noticed that those to whom his attention had been attracted were blocking his way to the doors; escape was out of the question. Reluctantly, he returned to his seat and ordered the clerk to take the one opposite him. Then, scanning the party making its passage to the alcove, he perceived three or four men whom he knew, and presently, to his surprise and consternation--his son. The recognition was mutual, Graydon making his way around a small table in order to affectionately greet him. As he approached, his eyes fastened themselves on his father's companion. With amazement, he recognised the queer figure of the lanky, gangling Droom; but too kind-hearted and well-bred to allow his features in the slightest degree to express the astonishment which he felt at sight of such a comic incongruity, the young man voiced a few kindly words to the old man, while from the table in the alcove, where the smart, little supper party were seating themselves, Miss Cable was smiling her cheery recognition to her prospective father-in-law; then Graydon made his way back to his seat by her side.

"Why did you come here?" asked Droom, feeling somewhat akin to the proverbial fish out of water.

"Because I thought--I thought you couldn't find any other place," replied Bansemer, confusedly.

The unexpected arrival of his son and party had disturbed his usual coolness; but with his order for supper his equilibrium returned, and he went on to explain:

"I supposed you knew only two streets in town--Wells and South Water."

"Humph! I know every street in town," Droom resented, drawing himself up in his chair; and then bluntly: "What's happened?"

"Not so loud! Harbert's here, but---"

"Oho! Here?"

"In Chicago, yes--we'll talk about it later."

The present genial environment and convivial atmosphere were producing a most inspiring effect on the lawyer. The delightful consciousness that the people with whom his son was supping were of the smartest set in town for the moment had banished all fears of exposure. From time to time he glanced proudly across to the

alcove table where the men were engaged in unfolding their napkins and toying with their glasses, in lively anticipation of the enjoyment to come; while the women, with the hope of eliciting admiration for their hands and the sparkle of their rings, were taking off their gloves and spreading out their fingers on the table cloth.

"Graydon seems to be right in the swim, eh, Droom?" he said. The irony of it all appealed strongly to his sense of humour. "I don't suppose you know those swells?" he added, patronisingly. Droom was listening intently to the bursts of merriment which were enlivening the restaurant. Like a small boy at a circus who fears that something will happen that he will not see, he was continually turning his head and letting his eyes travel critically over the company at the neighbouring table.

At this speech of Bansemer's the eyes of the old clerk returned; they expressed no little resentment at the inference.

"Certainly, I do;" and leaning over the table and covertly indicating with his long, bony finger the man at the head of the table, he answered succinctly: "That's Fernmore--he's--"

A particularly loud burst of laughter cut him short. At the adjoining tables conversation had abruptly ceased; heads were turned and inquisitive eyes were fastened on the brilliant coterie at the alcove table.

Few men in Chicago were better known or better liked than the stout, florid complexioned, jovial-looking Billy Fernmore, the host of this entertainment. His social adventures and the headlong follies in which his fun-loving proclivities invariably enmeshed him were only surpassed by his fondness for ridding himself of his unlimited wealth.

To his inherited five millions marriage had added the colossal fortune of a beautiful heiress, whose extravagances aggregated less than his own solely through the limitations of her sex. Yet, were it not for the self-imposed handicap of adhering strictly to the somewhat old-fashioned precept that jewels should be acquired only through affectionate beneficence, Mrs. Fernmore might have succeeded in surpassing the princely prodigalities of her lord and master.

"It was this way," Billy was saying, in his own inimitable manner, and awake to the realisation of having a "good one" to tell; "a few days ago the lady of my house took wings for New York--a little spree of her own, you understand. And, for Billy Fernmore, I kept out of mischief, for a time, fairly well. After waiting days, lamb-like, for her return, restlessness--;" and here Fernmore's shameless affectation of the neglected husband became so irresistibly funny that it provoked prolonged laughter from his listeners, even Droom showing his yellow snags and stretching his mouth to the fullest extent of the law, as he joined in the general chorus; "restlessness gave way to recklessness, and in desperation I invited a half dozen of the oldest and most distinguished widowers in town to dine with me, at the hotel, where they were informed they were to be honoured by the presence of a bevy of the season's prettiest debutantes. My stars, but they were a fine collection of old innocents!" Fernmore threw himself back in his chair and roared at the recollection.

"Billy's a wonder when he's wound up!" Medford's whispered aside to the lady on his right met with a simple nod of the head; for despite Miss Clegg's well-feigned interest in Mr. Medford when Rigby was present, on other occasions there was no pretence of enjoyment of his society.

"Among those present--to use the correct phrase," said Billy, after having refreshed himself with sufficient champagne to proceed; "were two retired merchants, a venerable logician, a doddering banker, and a half-blind college professor. Of course, I had to make some excuse for Mrs. Fernmore's absence. For the life of me I cannot now remember what yarn I told them; but they were too anxious to be presented to the gay, young women not to swallow it--whole. The old boys fairly swamped the girls with their senile attentions. It was a lively supper party--my word! And they went home unanimously declaring that the debutantes of the present day discounted, at least in dash and go, the charmers of fifty years ago."

Amidst the confusion of peals of merriment which greeted the genial raconteur, Miss Cable, to whom the story did not especially appeal, whispered in awed tones:

"Graydon, who on earth is that queer, spectacular looking man with your father?"

"Oh, that's Droom--isn't he a character? He's been with the governor since I was a child. In those days his looks used to frighten me almost to death. I fancy he's had a sad life, don't you know."

"There is something positively awful in his face," returned the girl, as her eyes faltered and dropped to her plate on unexpectedly meeting those of the subject of her remark.

"Sh-h!" came from Medford; and then: "Come, Billy--what's the point--or the moral, as they say in novels?"

"Fernmore is a rattling good chap, at heart," Graydon was saying to Jane; "but I can't stand that Med--"

"Yes, yes, go on, Mr. Fernmore," broke in several voices in eager expectancy.

"The moral?" Billy's eyes were twinkling. "The joke, rather, is on me. When Mrs. Fernmore reached home I thought it wise to say nothing about the affair; but I had completely underestimated the persistency of these rejuvenated venerables. They were not satisfied--wanted to know more about the girls; and the next day in deep but joyous simplicity, half a dozen old men asked their married daughters and close friends at the clubs what family of Brown a certain debutante belonged to; who was the father of Miss Jones; and how long had the family of Miss Robinson lived in the city, together with a lot of amazing questions. And failing to derive even the remotest satisfaction from the Social Register, the women members of their families besieged my innocent wife with more or less shocked inquiries as to an entertainment of mine at which their aged relations were present. Well, the game was up! I owned up--confessed to the girls being actresses and begged for mercy."

"And I forgave him," supplemented Mrs. Fernmore, smilingly. "Boys will be boys."

"Whew!" whistled Billy, in conclusion. "It was no end of a lark! I would not have missed it for the world; but the old chaps will never, never forgive me."

As the gentleman finished, Bansemer was looking at Droom with amusement. The old clerk was shaking his head in a manner that signified disapproval.

"How's that for doings in swagger society, eh, Droom? If anyone but Billy Fernmore had done that, he would have been ostracised forever. Nothing like millions--"

"I don't believe true aristocrats would do that," interrupted Droom, half angrily.

"These are the aristocrats--money aristocrats; the others have lost the name--forgotten. Come, let's go over yonder--we can talk there."

Bansemer called for the bill and settled it; then slowly rising, ostentatiously waved his adieus to the alcove and deserted the scene for Chapin & Gore's Droom meekly followed him employer.

For some time, neither spoke. In their stall, each was busy with his own thoughts and speculations.

"I think I've made a mess of it with Mr. Cable," began Bansemer. "She---"

"I wouldn't mention names," cautioned Droom, with a look at the top of the partition.

"She's very likely to fight back, after all."

"What was your demand?"

"Money," said Bansemer, quietly.

"Humph!" was Broom's way of saying he lied.

"Harbert has a purpose in coming here, Elias. We must prepare for him."

"We are as well prepared as we can expect to be. I guess it means that we'll have to get out of Chicago."

"Curse him!" snarled Bansemer. "I don't care a rap about myself; but it will be all up with Graydon if anything--er--unpleasant should happen to me," said Bansemer, with a wistful glance at his glass. Then, in subdued tones, he told of the meeting with Harbert. Droom agreed that the situation looked unpleasant, and all the more so in view of what Eddie Deever had mentioned in connection with the Marshal's office. He repeated the story as it had come from the babbling, youngster's lips, utterly deceived by the guileless emissary from the office downstairs.

"What do you expect to do?" he asked, studying the tense face of

his employer.

"I'm going to stand my ground," said Bansemer, steadily drumming on the table with his stiff fingers. "They can't prove anything, and the man who makes a charge against me will have to substantiate it. I'll not run a step."

"Then," said Droom, coarsely, "you must let Mrs. Cable alone. She is your danger signal. I tell you, Mr. Bansemer, she'll fight if you drive her into a corner. She's not a true aristocrat. She comes of a class that doesn't give up."

"Bah! She's like the rest. If Harbert doesn't get in his nasty work, she'll give in like all the others."

"I thought you said you'd do nothing to mai" the happiness of Graydon," sneered Droom.

"I don't intend to, you old fool. This affair is between Mrs. Cable and me. If she wins, I'll give up. But, understand me, I'm perfectly capable of knowing just when I'm beaten."

"I only know your financial valour," said Elias drily.

"That's all you're expected to know, sir."

"Then, we won't quarrel about it," said the other with his sweetest grin.

"Umph! Well, pleasantries aside, we must look ourselves over carefully before we see our New York friend. He must not find us with unclean linen. Elias, I'm worried, I'll confess, but I'm not afraid. Is there anything that we have bungled?"

"I have always been afraid of the chorus-girl business. I don't like chorus girls." Bansemer, at another time, would have smiled.

It was past midnight when the two left the stall and started in separate ways for their North Side homes. The master felt more secure than when he left the home of David Cable earlier in the night. Elias Droom said at parting:

"I don't like your attitude toward Mrs. C. It's not very manly to make war on a woman."

"My good Elias," said Bansemer, complacently surveying himself in the small mirror across the stall, "all men make war on women, one way or another."

He did not see Droom's ugly scowl as he preceded that worthy through the doorway.

The next morning Bansemer walked down the Drive. It was a bright, crisp day and the snow had been swept from the sidewalks. He felt that a visit from Harbert during the day was not unlikely and he wanted to be fresh and clear-headed. Halfway down he met Jane Cable coming from the home of a friend. He never had seen her looking so beautiful, so full of the joy of living. Her friendly, sparkling smile sent a momentary pang of shame into his calloused heart,

but it passed with the buoyant justification of his decision to do nothing in the end that might mar his son's happiness.

She was walking to town and assured him that she rejoiced in his distinguished company. They discussed the play and the supper party.

"Now that I'm engaged to Graydon, I'm positively beginning to grow sick of people," Miss Cable declared and as they all declare at that age and stage.

"Well, you'll soon recover," he smiled. "Marriage is the convalescence of a love affair, you know."

"Oh, but most of the men one meets are so hopelessly silly-tiresome," she went on. "It's strange, too. Nearly all of them have gone to college-Yale, or Harvard."

"My dear Jane, they are the unfortunate sons of the rich. You can't blame them. All Yale and Harvard men are not tiresome. You should not forget that a large sprinkling of the young men you meet at the pink teas were sent to Yale or Harvard for the sole purpose of becoming Yale and Harvard men-nothing more. Their mothers never expected them to be anything else. The poor man sends his son to be educated; the rich man usually does it to get the boy away from home, so that he won't have to look at him all the time. I'm happy to say that I was quite poor when Graydon got his diploma."

"Oh, Graydon isn't at all like the others. He is a man," cried Jane, her eyes dancing.

"I don't mean to say that all rich men's sons are failures. Some of them are really worth while. Give credit unlimited to the rich man's son who goes to college and succeeds in life in spite of his environment. I must not forget that Graydon's chief ambition at one time was to hunt Indians."

"He couldn't have got that from his mother," said she accusingly. Bansemer looked at her sharply. He had half expected, on meeting her, to observe the first sign that the Cable family had discussed him well but not favourably. Her very brightness convinced him that she, at least, had not been, taken into the consultation.

"I am afraid it came from his horrid father. But Graydon is a good boy. He couldn't long follow the impulses of his father. I dare say he could be a sinner if he tried, too. I' hate an imbecile. An imbecile to my mind is the fellow without the capacity to err intentionally. God takes care of the fellow who errs ignorantly. Give me the fellow who is bright enough to do the bad things which might admit him to purgatory in good standing, and I'll trust him to do the good things that will let him into heaven. I often wonder where these chaps go after they die--I mean the Yale and Harvard chaps who bore you. It takes a clever chap to have any standing at all in purgatory. Where do they go, Jane? You are wise for your years and sex. There surely must be a place for the plain asses?"

"Oh," said she, "I suppose they have a separate heaven, just as the dogs have."

"No doubt you're right," he agreed, smiling, "but think how bright

the dogs are as a rule."

"Bobby Rigby says a dog is worth more than his master. People will steal a dog, he says."

"I saw him at your house last night. Did you meet Mr. Harbert?"

"No. Mother said he came in with Bobby."

"How is Mrs. Cable this morning? I think she--er--complained of a sick headache last night?"

"She has such a frightful headache that she couldn't get up this morning."

"Indeed? Will you carry my respects and sympathy to her?"

"Thank you, yes. But why don't you come in and see us, Mr. Bansemer?"

"In a day or so, gladly."

Bansemer was not approached by Harbert that day nor the next--nor any other day soon, in fact. It was not until after the third day had expired that he heard from Mrs. Cable. Her silence was gratifying and significant; it meant that she was struggling with herself--that she had taken no one as yet into her confidence. He was too wary to feel secure in his position, however. He abandoned every case that could not be tried in the cleanest light and he destroyed his footprints in those of the past more completely than ever. David Cable was disposed to be agreeable when they met, and Rigby's manner had lost the touch of aloofness. Altogether the situation did not look so dark as it had on the night of the blizzard.

He guessed at Mrs. Cable's frame of mind during the three days just past by the tenor of her message over the telephone. She did no more than to ask him to drop in before five for a cup of tea; but he saw beyond the depth of her invitation.

He went and had a few minutes alone with her because he was shrewd enough to drop in before five. No one else came until after that hour had struck. He was studiously reserved and considerate. There was nothing in his manner to indicate that he was there as anything more than the most casual sipper of the beverage that society brews. It was left for her to make the advances.

"We must come to an understanding," she said abruptly. "I cannot endure the suspense, the uncertainty--"

Bansemer raised his brows with grave condescension.

"Then you have not confessed to Mr. Cable?" he asked, with perfect unconcern. "Do you know, I was rather hoping that you would have saved me the trouble of doing so."

"It means so much to--"

"Ah, I see you find it hard to lose the ground you have gained socially." He stirred his tea steadily.

"It isn't that--I don't care for that. It's for Jane and David. I can only offer to buy your silence; nothing more," she said with hurried words. "I own shares in the railroad; they're worth twenty thousand dollars. Will you take them?"

"My dear," he said, leaning quite close to her, "I am not seeking to blackmail you as you seem to imagine. I have only tried to tell you that I love you."

"Oh," she exclaimed, with a shudder of disgust. His face was quite close to hers; she could feel his warm breath on her cheek and she drew away quickly. His hand hovered close to hers as it lay in her lap.

There was an eye-witness to this single picture in the brief scene. Jane had started downstairs. From the upper steps she could look into the drawing-room below. She could not help seeing Bansemer's fervent attitude; she heard nothing that he said. The girl paused in surprise; a feeling as of dread--she could not explain--crept over her. A chill struck into her heart.

It was as if she had awakened from a sweet sleep to look out upon a bleak, horrid morning.

Involuntarily she shrank back, quite beyond the actual vision but not free from it. She stood straight and tense and silent at the top of the stairs, her hand clasping the rail. She could hear her heart throb plainly. There was no mistaking the picture as it had burst upon her unsuspecting eyes. With a quivering smile she tried to throw it from her. But cold and damning there arose to support her apprehensions the horrid stories of Mrs. Blanckton and her affair with Rellick. With her own eyes she had seen Rellick talking to Mrs. Blanckton just as Bansemer was talking to her mother in the dim doom below. The Blanckton scandal, as everyone knew, was one of the most infamous the city had known. Jane, with other girls, had been shocked by the boldness of the intrigue; she had loathed Rellick for his unprincipled love-making; she had despised and denounced Mrs. Blanckton. Here now was her own mother listening just as Mrs. Blanckton had listened; here was James Bansemer talking just as Rellick had talked. A great fear, a dark uncertainty, welled up in her heart.

It was not until the butler admitted other callers that she found the courage to turn her eyes toward the drawing-room. She was never to forget the dread that grew with the thought of what she might have seen had she remained a voluntary witness during the minutes which followed her first look below. That single vision effected a sharp, complete change in Jane Cable's life. From that moment she never saw the world as it had appeared to her before.

Although she succeeded in, hiding the fact, it was difficult to approach and greet James Bansemer with the naturalness of the unsuspecting. His manner was beyond reproach, and yet, for the first time, she saw the real light in his black eyes. She talked to him as if nothing had happened to make her distrustful, but no self-control in the world could have checked the growth of that remorseless thing called suspicion. For her own sake, for her mother's, for Graydon's, she tried to put it down. Instead, it grew greater and stronger as she looked into his eyes, for in them she

saw the light that heretofore had escaped her notice.

And this was the father of the man whom she was to marry, the one whom she loved with all her heart and soul! This, the man who would degrade her own mother! Her mother--she looked at her with a new question in her eyes. She looked for the thing which had marked Mrs. Blanckton. It was not there, and she rejoiced in that discovery. Her mother did not possess the bold, daring, defiant air of the other woman. Hers was tender, sweet, even subdued; the girl clutched hopefully at this sign and began to build upon it.

Half a dozen people came and went. James Bansemer was the last to leave. He met the girl's tense, inquiring look from time to time, but he could not have felt its meaning. There was nothing in her voice which might have warned him, although it sounded strained and without warmth on her own ears. In spite of herself she wondered how he would act in saying good-bye to her mother. Although she tried with all the might of her will to look away, she could not take her eyes from the pair as Bansemer arose to depart.

His manner was most circumspect. The handclasp was brief, even formal and there was no look in his eyes to indicate the presence of anything but the most casual emotions. After his departure, Mrs. Cable turned to Jane and complained of a frightful headache and went to her room to lie down for a while before dinner. Jane's gaze followed her steadily as she ascended the stairs. Then she walked to the window and looked out upon the street, a hundred perplexities in her mind.

Her father was standing in the middle of the sidewalk, looking down the darkening street. His cab was turning the corner below, showing that he had been standing there for longer than a minute. She watched him with interest. What had happened in the street to hold his interest so closely? It was Jane who opened the door and let him in. As she kissed his cold cheek she noticed the frown on his brow and caught the strange gleam in his eyes. His greeting was less warm than usual, and he went to his room upstairs without removing his hat or coat below. But not before he sent a quick, keen glance about the drawing-room to find if James Bansemer had been the single visitor of the afternoon.

"Where is your mother?" he asked from the stairs, without looking back.

"She has just gone to her room," Jane replied, a chill shooting through her veins. Some strange, unnatural impulse compelled her to add, as if the explanation were just and necessary: "We have had a lot of people in drinking tea, and mother has a headache."

She watched him ascend the steps and turn into his smoking-room. The door closed sharply and a wave of inexplicable relief rushed over her. Her hands were cold. She went to the fireplace and held them out to the blaze. Her ears were alert for sounds from above--alert with a strange fear which choked her with its persistence. She dreaded the opening of her father's door and his footsteps as they crossed to her mother's room. She waited for these sounds, minute after minute, but they did not come. The fire would not give warmth to her hands; the chill seemed to spread. In her new consciousness she felt that a tragedy was just begun.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CANKER

Cable saw Bansemer leave the house as he drove up to the curb in front. The lawyer did not look back, but turned the nearest corner as if eager to disappear from sight as quickly as possible.

Closing the door of his smoking-room behind him, David Cable dropped wearily into a chair without removing his hat or coat. His blood was running cold through his veins, his jaw was set and his eyes had the appearance of one who has been dazed by a blow. For many minutes he sat and stared at the andirons in the ember-lit grate. From time to time he swallowed painfully and his jaw twitched. Things began growing black and green before his eyes; he started up with an oath.

He was consumed by the fires of jealousy and suspicion. The doubt that had found lodging in his mind so recently now became a cruel certainty. Into his grim heart sprang the rage of the man who finds himself deceived, despised, dishonoured. He was seeing with his own eyes, no doubt, just what others had seen for months--had seen and had pitied or scorned him as the unfortunate dupe. With the thought of it he actually ground his teeth; tears of rage and mortification sprang to his eyes. He recalled his own feelings in instances where shame had fallen upon other men; he recalled his own easy indifference and the temptation to laugh at the plight of the poor devils. It had never entered his mind that some day he might be the object of like consideration in others more or less fortunate, according to THEIR friends.

By the time dinner was announced he had succeeded in restoring himself to a state of comparative calmness. He did not dress for dinner, as was his custom, nor did he stop to ask Frances Cable if she were ready to go down. He heard Jane playing the piano as he descended. She nodded to him, but did not stop and he paused near the fireplace to look at her strangely. Somewhere back in his brain there was struggling, unknown to him, the old-time thought that this child bore him no likeness whatsoever. He only knew he was crushing down the fear that evil or slander or pain might come to her, if he were rash yet just. He was wondering if he could face his wife without betraying himself.

Jane played softly, lifelessly. She, on the other hand, was wondering what Graydon would think or say, if she spoke to him of what she had seen. She wondered if he would blame her mother as she was beginning to blame his father.

"Mother won't be down to dinner," she finally said.

"Is she ill?" he asked after a moment.

"She is lying down. Margaret will take some tea up to her."

Father and daughter had but little to say to each other during the meal. Their efforts at conversation were perfunctory, commonplace, an unusual state of affairs of which neither took notice.

"You look tired, father. Has it been a hard day?"

"A rather trying one, Jane. We're having some trouble with the blizzards out West. Tying up everything that we are rushing to the Philippines."

"Is it settled that you are to be made president?"

"It looks like it." There followed a long silence. "By the way, I have good news for you. Mr. Clegg told me to-day that they are going to take Graydon into the firm. Isn't it great? Really, it is quite remarkable. You are not the only person, it seems, who thinks a lot of that boy."

"A partner? Really? Oh, isn't it glorious? I knew he could--I told him he'd be a partner before long." She waited a moment and then added: "His father was here to-day for a cup of tea." Cable caught the slightly altered tone and looked up. She was trifling with her fork, palpably preoccupied.

"I'm--I'm sorry I missed him," said he, watching her closely.

"You like him very much, don't you, father?"

"Certainly--and I'm sure your mother does." The fork shook in her fingers and then dropped upon the plate. She looked up in confusion. Cable's eyes were bent upon her intently and she had never seen so queer a light in them. Scarcely more than the fraction of a second passed before he lowered his gaze, but the mysterious telegraphy of the mind had shot the message of comprehension from one to the other. He saw with horror that the girl at least suspected the true situation. A moment later he arose abruptly and announced that he would run up to see her mother before settling down to some important work in his den.

"Graydon is coming over to-night," she said. "We'll be very quiet and try not to disturb you. Don't work too hard, daddy dear."

Upstairs Frances Cable was battling with herself in supreme despair. Confession was on her lips a dozen times, but courage failed her. When she heard his footsteps in the hallway she was ready to cry out the truth to him and end the suspense. As he opened the door to enter, the spirit of fairness turned frail and fled before the appeal of procrastination. Wait! Wait! Wait! cried the powerful weakness in her heart, and it conquered. She could not tell him then. To-morrow--the next day, yes, but not then. It was too much to demand of herself, after all.

He came in, but left a few minutes later. She was strangely unresponsive to his tender inquiries. Her thoughts were of another,

was his quick conclusion as he fled from her presence before the harsh accusations could break from his eyes.

In his den once more, with the door closed, he gave himself up completely to black thoughts. He recalled his words to her, uttered years ago, half in jest and half in earnest; he had horrified her beyond expression by telling her how he would punish a wife if he were the husband she deceived. With a grim, lurid smile he remembered the penalty. He had said he would not kill; he would disfigure the woman frightfully and permit her to live as a moral example to other wives. Slitting her mouth from ear to ear or cutting off her nose--these were two of the penalties he would inflict. He now felt less brutal. He might kill, but he would not disfigure. For an hour he sat and wondered what had been the feelings of his old friend George Driscoll just before he deliberately slew his faithless wife. He remembered saying to other friends at the time that Driscoll had "done right."

This night of black shadows--he did not sleep at all--was really the beginning of the end. He forgot the presidency that was to be handed out to him; he forgot everything but the horrid canker that gnawed into his heart and brain.

Day and night he writhed in silent agony, a prey to the savage jealousy that grew and grew until it absorbed all other emotions. Scandal, divorce, dishonour, murder swept before the mind of this man who had been of the people and who could not condone. The people kill.

For a week he waited and watched and suffered. What he knew of men told him that they do not devote themselves to the wives of others with honourable motives behind them. He convinced himself that he knew the world; he had seen so much of it. The man aged years in that single week of jealousy and suspense. His face went haggard, his eyes took on a strange gleam, his manner was that of a man in grave trouble.

Day after day this piteous, frenzied man who swayed thousands with his hand stooped to deal with the smallest movements of one man and one woman. Despite his most intense desire to drive himself into other and higher channels, he found himself skulking and spying and conniving with but one low end in view.

He employed every acute sense in the effort to justify his suspicions. Time and again he went home at unusual hours, fearing all the while that he might incur the pain of finding Bansemer there. He even visited the man in his office, always rejoicing in the fact that he found him there at the time. He watched the mail in the morning; he planned to go out of nights and then hurried home deliberately but unexpectedly. Through it all he said no word to Frances Cable or Jane. He asked no questions, but he was being beaten down by apprehensions all the while.

His wife's manner convinced him that all was not well with her. She avoided being alone with him, keeping close to her room; he detected a hundred pretexts by which she managed to escape his simplest advances.

At last, overwrought by the strain, he began to resort to

cunning--this man who was big enough to have gone from the engine cab to the president's office. It required hours of struggle with his fairer, nobler nature to bring himself low enough to do trickery, but the natal influence mastered. He despised himself for the trick, but he WOULD KNOW THE TRUTH.

The late afternoon mail one day brought to Mrs. Cable a brief letter, typewritten both inside and out. David Cable saw her open and read the missive and he saw her trembling hand go to her throat and then to her temple. Her back was towards him. He could not see her face until she turned, a full minute later. Then it was calm and undisturbed, but her eyes were brilliant. He ground his teeth and tore upstairs without a word. David Cable had stooped low enough to write this letter and he was paying for it.

He knew the contents far better than she knew them. The letter purported to be an urgent appeal from James Bansemer, asking her to meet him at eight o'clock that night. It said: "I must see you to-night. Leave your home at 8:00 o'clock for a short call on Mrs. W--, just around the corner. I will meet you across the Drive, near the sea wall. It is quite dark there. J."

David Cable did not know that earlier in the afternoon James Bansemer had called her up by 'phone to say that he intended to speak to his son the following day, unless word came to him from her; nor, could he have possibly known that she was now determined to tell the whole story to her husband and to trust to his mercy. He only knew that he had written the letter and that he had told her of his intention to go downtown immediately after dinner.

CHAPTER XV

THE TRAGEDY AT THE SEA WALL

The dark, muffled figure of a man leaned against a section of the old wall that edged the lake--the figure of a man who prayed with all his soul that his vigil might be in vain. If she came, all was over.

He was not armed. He had thrown his revolver away a week before. His only desire now was to learn the extent of her duplicity. If she obeyed the call of the letter then there could be no doubt that she was coming at the call of the lover. His hands twitched and he shivered as if with a dreadful chill. His heart was shouting a warning to her, but his head was urging her to come and have done with it all.

He was there early--long before the hour named in the decoy. His eyes never left the sidewalk that ran past his own home, but a short distance from the Drive. They stared without blinking across that

dark border, through the circle of light from the arc lamp and far into the shadows of blackness beyond. It was very dark where he stood. The lake had battered through the sea wall for many rods at this particular point and no one ventured out beyond the bridle path for fear of slipping down into the cavities that had been washed out by the waves. His station was on the edge of the piles of stone and cement that had been tossed up to await the pleasure of the park commissioners.

For a while, he tried to take Jane's future into consideration, but it was impossible to substitute anything before his own wrongs. David Cable was not the kind of man who would go on living with a faithless wife for the sake of appearances. He was not an apologist. Time and circumstance and the power of true love would adjust the affair of Jane and Graydon Bansemer. This was HIS affair. Time could not adjust it for him.

At last he saw a woman's figure hurrying down the street. The wild, eager hope that the light from the electric lamp would prove it to be other than that of his wife was quickly dispelled. His worst fears were true, His Frances--his wife of more than a score of years, his pretty sweetheart through all those days, was false to him! As he fell back against the wall something seemed to snap in his breast; a groan of misery arose to his lips.

With eyes which saw red with rage and anguish, he watched the hesitating approach of the woman. She stopped at the corner and looked up and down the Drive, peering intently into the dark shadows by the lake. The sky was overcast; no stars peeped through its blackness. With uncertain, halting steps she crossed the boulevard, still glancing about as if in search of someone. He moved forward unconsciously, almost blindly, and she caught a glimpse of his tall, dark figure. He was not unlike Bansemer in height and carriage. As she drew near, his legs trembled and tears of despair flooded his eyes.

A savage desire to grasp her by the throat and hurl her into the waters beyond the break came over him with irresistible power. Then came the pitiable collapse which conquered the murderous impulses and left him weak and broken for the moment. With a sob he turned and leaned upon the wall, his back to her, his face buried in his tense arms--crushed, despised, dishonoured! Kill her? The horror of it swept his brain clear for an instant. Kill his pretty Frances? Kill Jane's mother? How could he think of it?

It was a long time before the wretched man knew that she was standing close behind him and was speaking to him. The sound of her voice came through the noise of his pounding heart as if it were far away and gentle. But what was it that she was saying? Her voice was angry, suppressed, condemning.

"You may take it or refuse it, just as you please," were the first words his turbulent senses distinguished. "I can pay no more than that for your silence. The other is impossible. I will not discuss it again with you." She paused as if waiting for him to respond.

"To-night I shall tell my husband everything--the whole story. I cannot endure the suspense any longer. I will not live in fear of you another hour. My only reason for coming out here to-night is to

plead with you to spare your son and Jane. I am not asking anything for myself. It would break Jane's heart if Graydon should refuse to marry her. You must have a heart somewhere in that--" But the words became jumbled in the ears of her listener. From time to time his mind grasped such sentences as these, paralysing in their bitterness: "I have the letters of adoption.... David will not believe what you say.... He loves me and he loves Jane.... I am willing to pay all that I have to keep it from Graydon and Jane.... But I intend to tell my husband. I will not deceive him any longer.... He will understand even though he should hate me for it. He will love Jane although she is not his own child."

David Cable seemed frozen to the spot. His brain was clearing; he was grasping the full importance of every sentence that rushed from her impassioned lips. The last appalling words fell like the blow of a club in the hands of a powerful man. He was dazed, stunned, senseless. It seemed to him that his breath had ceased to come and that his whole body had turned to stone. His wide staring eyes saw nothing ahead of him.

"Well, what have you to say?" she was demanding. "Why have you asked me to come out here? You have my final answer. What have you to say? Are you going to tell Graydon that Jane is not our child? I must know."

"Not our child?" came from the palsied lips of David Cable, so low and lifeless that the sound was lost in the swish of the water below. The intermittent red signal in the lighthouse far out in the lake blinked back at him, but to him it was a steady, vivid glare.

"Do you hear me? I have lied to my husband for the last time!" There was almost a tone of victory in the voice, now. "Do you hear me? You don't dare! David will not believe you--he will believe my--"

A terrible oath choked back the hopeful words in the woman's throat. Murder had come back into the man's heart.

"You lie!"

"David!"

"Yes, it's David! Liar! Whose child is she? Tell me?"

"David! David! For God's sake, hear me! There was no wrong, I swear it!"

"She's not my child and there's no wrong!" The sardonic laugh that followed was that of a raging maniac. "You've fooled me, you fiend! You devil!"

At that word and with one look at her husband's terribly distorted features, Frances Cable shrank back with a single terrified cry, turned from him and fled madly for her life. With the spring of the wild beast, Cable rushed after her, cursing her with every breath. In a few yards he had almost reached her, his hands outstretched to grasp her neck. But, at that instant, the frightened woman's strength suddenly gave way; her knees received the fall of the limp body. For a second she seemed huddled in a posture of prayer, then

toppled over, slipped easily forward through a fissure in the wall and plunged headforemost into the chugging waters below.

In the lives even of the best of men there are moments when the human instincts are annihilated and supplanted by those of the beast. Likewise, have there been instances in which the bravest have been tried in the furnace and found wanting, while conversely, the supposedly cowards have proved to be heroes. Therefore, since no two situations can occur at a different time and yet have precisely similar conditions, it behooves us to forbear judging, lest we be judged, and to approach the following incident in this man's career as if we ourselves dwelt under a covering of glass.

From the time of his marriage up to this moment no man could have fought better the bitter struggle of life than David Cable; yet, now, in this hour--his hour of travail and temptation, he piteously succumbed. Cowardice, the most despicable of all emotions, held him in her grasp.

He sank exhausted against the wall, his eyes fixed upon the black hole through which his wife had disappeared; then, the stony glare changed suddenly to a look of realisation--horrible, stupefying. He crept to the edge and peered intently into the water, not six feet below, his eyes starting from his head.

Black, sobbing water, darkness impenetrable! The instinctive fear of apprehension caused him to look in every direction for possible eye-witnesses. Every drop of blood in his body seemed turned to ice with horror. Down there in that black, chill water lay the body of his wife, the woman he had loved through all these trying years, and he her murderer!

Terrified, trembling, panting, he tried to force himself into the water with the vague hope of saving her, after all; but even as he looked wildly about for help, a shout ready to spring from his dry throat, the natural dread of the accused facing his accuser took possession of him. Fear, abject fear, held him in grasp; he could not shout.

A man was running across the drive towards him--a long loping figure that covered the ground rapidly. With a last horrified look in the water, David Cable, craven for the moment, turned and fled through the night along the broken sea wall--fled aimlessly, his eyes unseeing, his feet possessed of wings. He knew not whither he ran, only that he was an assassin fleeing from the horrors behind.

Over the narrow strip of ground sped the long, eager figure that had darted from the shadow of the homes across the street. In hoarse, raucous tones he shouted after the fleeing man:

"Stop! Wait! Halt!"

He dashed up to the spot where he had seen two figures but a moment before, the full horror of what had happened striking him for the first time. The man was Elias Droom, and he had been an eye-witness to the dim, indistinct tragedy at the sea wall.

His presence is easily explained. He knew of Bansemer's telephone message to Mrs. Cable, together with his threat to expose her on

the following morning. It was only natural that she should make a final plea--that night, of course. The old clerk realised the danger of an encounter between his employer and his victim at a time so intense as this. He could not know that Bansemer would visit the Cable home that evening, but he suspected that such would be the case. It was his duty to prevent the meeting, if possible.

Bansemer would go too far, argued the old man; he must be stopped. That is why he lurked in the neighbourhood to turn Bansemer back before he could enter the home of David Cable.

He saw Mrs. Cable leave the house and go towards the lake. Following some distance behind he saw her cross the Drive and make her way to the sea wall. Slinking along in the shadow of the buildings, cursing his luck and Bansemer jointly, he saw the two forms come together out there by the lake.

"Too late, curse him for a fool," Droom had muttered to himself. "He ought to know this is bad business just now. She's come out to meet him, too. Worse. It's my duty to look out for him as long as he employs me. I'm doing my best and I can't help it if he betrays himself. I'd like to see him--but I can't go back on him while I'm taking money from him. Look at that!"

He chuckled softly as he saw the two figures approach each other. For all that he knew they might be contemplating a fond and loving embrace, and he was not undeceived until he saw one of the figures separate itself, run from the other and go plunging to the earth. As he started up in surprise, the other figure leaned forward and then straightened itself quickly. Droom did not hesitate. He dashed across the street, conscious that something dreadful had happened. His instant thought was that Bansemer had lost his temper and had struck the woman down.

The flight of the man was proof positive. He called him to stop, certain that it was Bansemer. The runner turned his face towards him for a moment. The light from the street may have deceived Elias Droom's eyes, but the face of the assailant was not that of James Bansemer. Droom stopped short and looked after the man, paralysed with amazement. Then he gave a snorting laugh at his own stupidity; of course, it was Bansemer. Who else could it be?

Arriving at the spot where he had last seen the couple, he was amazed to find no one there. He realised, with horror, that the woman must have been struck down; had fallen or had been thrown into the lake.

The gaunt old clerk groaned bitterly as he threw himself upon the wall and peered over into the water. He listened for the cries and struggles of the woman. Gradually his eyes solved the situation. He saw the row of piles beyond the break in the sea wall and the swishing pool inside. Every incoming wave sent a flood of water between the sturdy posts and into the cut of the wall.

Without a moment's hesitation he dropped into this seething prison, confident that the woman's body could be found there. A single glance had shown him that he could crawl upward through the break to safety and he knew that the water below was not dangerously deep.

A minute later he was scrambling out of this angry, icy water, up through the fissure, bearing in his long arms the inert form of Frances Cable. He had found her half-submerged in the pool, every sweep of the waves through the sieve-like posts covering her completely.

He dropped the body on the ground after reaching the level and took a quick shuddering glance about. Two men had stopped on the opposite of the Drive. He hesitated a second and then shouted to them. They stood stockstill in alarm. Before they could respond to his second shout, Elias Droom was tearing the woman's watch from her belt and the rings from her fingers. His strong, nervous hands found the necklace that she wore and it broke beneath their sudden jerk. Cunningly he tossed the necklace upon the ground and trampled it with his heel. The watch and rings went flying across the wall and far out into the lake.

"This woman has been slugged!" he shouted. He did not know how much of the tragedy these men had witnessed. Boldness was his cue for the moment; stealth could follow later. "She's been in the water. I'm afraid it's murder. The man who did it went that way. Yell for the police!"

If the assailant was James Bansemer, Droom was doing his duty by him. If it was another, he was doing his duty by society.

CHAPTER XVI

HOURS OF TERROR

Droom's intentions were clear. It was not a tender heart nor was it chivalry which prompted him to do the deed of valour just described. He had started out to do his duty by James Bansemer because he was in his hire; and he felt it still his duty to cover the tracks of his master as best he could. He knew that he was jeopardising his own safety; the obstinate cunning of his nature insisted that the man he had watched was Bansemer, although his brief glimpse of the fugitive's face discouraged that belief.

The gaunt clerk kept his chin well covered with his great muffler; the broad collar of his ulster was turned up about his face. The rapid plan that dashed into his mind comprehended but two things: the effort to restore life to Frances Cable and the hope of escaping without being recognised. He felt that she had not been in the water long enough to drown; every hope depended upon the force of the blow that he imagined had been delivered.

Chilled to the bone, his teeth chattering like castanets, the old man was stooping over the inanimate form on the ground when the

two men came up. In answer to their startled questions, he merely said that he had seen the struggle from across the street, but had been too late to prevent the tragedy.

"We must get her into one of these houses quick," he grunted. "Take hold of her, you. And YOU over there hurry and ring a doorbell. Get inside and 'phone for a doctor--a doctor first and then the police. We may be able to save her life."

The first of the rich men's homes denied them admission. The man of the house said he would not "stand for the notoriety." Droom, supporting the head of the wet, icy figure, made a remark which the man was never to forget. At the second house they were admitted.

In an instant all was confusion. A card game was broken up and guests of the house assisted their host and hostess in doing all manner of unnecessary things. Droom gave the commands which sooner or later resolved themselves into excited, wrathful demands upon the telephone operator, calls for a certain near-by doctor, calls for the police, calls for stimulants, maids, hot water bottles--everything.

"She's been robbed," said one of the men. "Her rings have been torn off. Look at the blood!"

"She's well-dressed, too," said another. "Say, her face looks familiar---"

To the amazement of everyone, the lips of the woman parted and a gasping, choking sound issued from between them, a slight shudder swept over her frame.

"She's alive!" exclaimed Droom. "Get these wet clothes off of her--quick!"

The men stood grouped in the hallway while the women tore the wet garments from the reviving victim and prepared a warm bed for her. Elias Droom was edging towards the door, bent on escape, when the awed, chattering voice of the young fellow who had assisted in carrying her to the house arrested him. A great sense of relief crept over him as he listened to the young man's story; his eyes blinked with satisfaction. He was forgetting his own remark of a minute ago that he was freezing and must get into some dry clothes at once. The young man was saying:

"It happened right out there by the sea wall--where the big break is. Harry and I were coming up the Drive and I called attention to a man running south along the wall. Just then, this gentleman ran over from this side of the street and, a minute or two later, we saw him jump into the break over there. Suicide, I thought, but he wasn't a minute coming up. There was the woman! He'd pulled her out! By thunder, it was the bravest thing I ever saw! He---"

And then it was that everybody began to shower praise upon the man who only had tried to do his duty by the one who hired him to do ugly, not gallant, deeds.

"Did you watch which way the robber ran?" demanded Droom eagerly.

"Lost him in the dark. He ran like fury. You must have scared him off," said the second young man. "I wish we could have seen his face. Did you see it?"

"Not distinctly," answered Droom. "He struck me as being a slim young fellow, that's all." Of one thing he was assured: the evidence of these two men would prove that he had acted as a valiant protector and not as a thug--a fear which had not left his mind until now. They had seen the fleeing assailant, but there was only one person who could identify him. That person was Frances Cable, the victim. If it was not James Bansemer, then who could it have been?

The door opened and an agitated young woman came out.

"It is Mrs. Cable," she cried in trembling tones.

The physician arrived at that moment, and a few minutes later came an officer who had been hailed from the doorway. While the policeman was listening to the voluble young eye-witnesses, Droom stood aloof, puzzling himself vainly in the effort to solve an inside mystery. He had been ready, a few minutes before, to curse himself for pulling the woman out of the water, but now, as the belief grew stronger within him that her assailant was not James Bansemer, his viewpoint changed. If such was the case, there would be no need to fear Mrs. Cable's story if she revived sufficiently to tell it. On the other hand, if it was Bansemer, he had rescued her to an ill purpose. He was conscious finally that someone was speaking to him.

"What do you know of this?" demanded the policeman. Droom repeated his brief story. "What is your name and where do you live?"

"My name is Elias Droom and I live over in Wells Street."

"Could you identify the man?"

"I don't think so."

"What were you doing over in this part of town?"

"Walking up to see the skaters on the park lagoon. But what's that get to do with it? You'd better be out looking for the thief instead of wasting time on me here," snarled Droom. The officer gasped and there is no telling what might have happened, if the captain and a swarm of bluecoats had not appeared on the scene at that moment. Two minutes later they were off scouring the lake front in search of the mysterious hold-up man. Two plain-clothes men remained to question the witnesses and to inspect the neighbourhood in which the crime was committed.

Word came from the inner room that Mrs. Cable was regaining consciousness.

"Does--can she throw any light on the affair?" asked Elias Droom.

"She has uttered no word except her husband's name. I think she is still calling upon him for help, poor thing," said the young woman who bore the news.

"Cable ought to be notified," said one of the men.

"Don't do it over the 'phone," said Droom quickly. "I'm going past his house. I'll stop in and tell him. Let me out, officer; I must get out of these wet garments. I'm an old man, you know."

The probable solution had come to Droom like a flash. As he hurried up the street his mind was full of the theory. He scarcely could wait for the door of David Cable's house to be opened in response to his vigorous ringing. The maid announced that Mr. and Mrs. Cable were out. It was enough for Droom. He put the puzzle together in that instant. David Cable's face was the one he had seen; not James Bansemer's. The maid set up a hysterical shrieking when he bluntly told her of the mishap to her mistress, but he did not wait to answer questions. He was off to find James Bansemer. The volcano he had been watching so long was about to burst, and he knew it.

Forgetting his wet garments, he entered a drug store and telephoned to Bansemer's home. His employer answered the call so readily that Droom knew he had not been far from the instrument that evening. There was a note of disappointment in his voice when Droom's hoarse tones replied to his polite: "Hello!"

"I'll be over in half an hour," said Droom. "Very important business. Is Graydon there?"

"He's just gone to Cable's. Someone telephoned for him a minute or so ago. What's wrong? Do you know?"

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes," was all that Droom would say.

Elias' memory could not carry him back to the time when he had hired a cab. A cab was one of the luxuries he had not cultivated. One can only imagine his surprise, then, when he found himself hailing a passing hansom; and greater the surprise he must have felt when he clambered in and ordered the driver to go in a gallop to a certain place in Wells Street. Ten minutes later he was attired in dry, warm clothes and in the cab again, bound for Bansemer's home. What he said to James Bansemer on that memorable occasion need not be repeated. It is only necessary to say that his host was bitterly impressed and willing to admit that the developments might prove serious. They could only speculate as to what had transpired between David Cable and his wife out there by the sea wall, but it was enough for them to know that a crisis was at hand.

"We'll see what the morning papers say about the affair," said Bansemer, uneasy and cold.

The morning papers were full of the sensational robbery, the prominence of the victim and the viciousness of the attack. Elias Droom read the accounts eagerly as he breakfasted in the dingy little restaurant near his home, bright and early. He grinned appreciably over the share of glory that fell to him; and he actually cackled over the new developments in the great mystery.

He had observed with relief that the name of James Bansemer was not mentioned. The reports from the bedside of the robber's victim were most optimistic. She was delirious from the effects of the shock, but no serious results were expected. The great headlines on the first page of the paper he was reading set his mind temporarily

at rest. There was no suggestion of truth in them.

The reader of this narrative, who knows the true facts in the case, is doubtless more interested in the movements and emotions of David Cable than in the surmises of others. It would be difficult, for a certainty, to ask one to put himself in Cable's place and to experience the sensations of that unhappy man as he fled along the dark shore of the lake. Perhaps much will be taken on faith if the writer simply says that the fugitive finally slunk from the weeds and refuse of what was then called "The District of Lake Michigan"--"Streeterville," in local parlance--to find himself panting and terror-struck in the bleak east end of Chicago Avenue. It was not until then that he secured control of his nerves and resorted to the stealth and cunning of the real criminal.

From that time until he stood shivering and white with dogged intention in a theatre foyer, bent upon establishing an alibi, his movements are scarcely worth the details. Between the acts he saw a dozen men whom he knew and he took drinks with several of them. His tremendous will power carried him through the ordeal in a way that could not have fallen to the good fortunes of the ordinary lawbreaker.

Every second of the time his thoughts were of the thing which was being buffeted by the icy waters of the lake. Where was that thing now? How far out into the lake had it been carried?

His body was covered with the cold perspiration of dread and horror. His soul was moaning; his whole being was aghast with the awfulness of the deed; he could have shrieked aloud in his madness. How he lived through the hour in that theatre he never could have told, nor could he believe that he was sitting there with all those frightful thoughts piling themselves upon him. Other people laughed and shouted with happiness; he stared and wept in his heart, and shivered and cringed and groaned within himself.

He had killed her! She had been true to him, and yet, he had taken her life--the life she had given him! He gave no thought to Jane, no thought to Bansemer; he thought only of himself as the slayer.

Would her body be recovered? What would be his excuse, what his punishment? The gallows? A thousand horrors ran riot in his brain, a thousand tremors with each.

But why dwell upon the feelings of this miserable wretch? Why say more of his terror, his misery, his remorse? He held himself in the seat until the middle of the last act of the play. At last, unable to restrain himself longer, he arose and almost ran from the theatre. That instinct which no slayer can control or explain, was overpowering him; it was the instinct which attracts the murderer to the spot where his crime was committed. No man can describe or define this resistless impulse, and yet all criminology records it, clear and unmistakable. It is no less than a form of curiosity. Driven by this irresistible force, David Cable, with bravado that cost him dearly, worked his uninterrupted way to the scene of his crime. By trolley car to Chicago Avenue and, then, like a homeless dog scenting his way fearfully, to a corner not far from the break in the wall.

His legs trembled and his eyes grew wide with dread. The swish of the water came to his ears and he stood still for many minutes, listening for a cry for help from off the shore, but none came; and again skulking alongside the houses of his friends, he covered the blocks that lay between him and the magnetic rift in the wall. Near the corner, he stopped with a start of alarm.

The figure of a man could be seen standing like a statue on the very spot where he had seen her disappear. While he stood there, his heart scarcely beating, the solitary figure was joined by two others. Cable shrank back into the dense shadows. Like a flash it occurred to him that they were searching for the body. A shriek of agony arose to his lips; but he checked it.

Far off on one of the crosstown streets a newsboy was calling an extra--hoarse, unintelligible shouts that froze his blood. He bent his ear to catch the far-away words of the boy: "All about de Nor' Side murder!" He cringed and shook under the raucous shout. He knew what it meant.

A policeman suddenly turned the corner and came toward him. The first impulse was to fly; the next was to stand and deliver himself. The resolution came with shocking unexpectedness. He would give himself up! He would admit that he had killed his wife! The words of anguish were on his lips when the policeman spoke.

"Is it you, Mr. Cable? How is she, sir?"

Cable did not hear the man, for, as he opened his lips to cry out his own guilt, a thought formed in his brain that almost staggered him with its cunning savagery. Why not let the penalty fall on James Bansemer? She had gone out to meet him! If she had not destroyed the note, it would hang James Bansemer, and James Bansemer was worse than a murderer. But even as this remarkable thought rushed into his brain, the last words of the officer began to drive it out.

"Is she going to pull through, sir?" was the next question--and he caught it vaguely.

"Pull through?" he mumbled inarticulately. He leaned against a great stone rail suddenly. Everything was leaping before his eyes.

"Good Lord, Mr. Cable--I--I forgot. Don't you know about it?" gasped the officer.

"Know what?" asked Cable, completely dazed.

"Go home at once, sir. I didn't mean to--oh, hurry, sir. Don't be worried. They say she'll be all right. Sure! She's been hurt a little, sir."

"My daughter?" demanded Cable, as keen as a razor in an instant. His heart was trying to jump from his body.

"Your wife, sir. Nothin' serious, sir. She was held up along here somewhere and robbed. They're sure to get the villain. She---"

But Cable was off like a deer for his home, racing as though on

air.

Nothing else mattered now. She was alive! He could have her with him again to love as he never had loved her before.

CHAPTER XVII

DAVID CABLE'S DEBTS

Two days passed before David Cable was permitted to see his wife. During those trying hours he lived an age of agony in suspense. She had been removed to her home late on the night of the "hold-up," as the newspapers felt justified in calling it. He did not go to his office the next day--nor the next--but haunted her door, sleepless, nervous, held close by dread. A dozen times, at least, he sought admittance to her room, but was always turned away, cursing the doctor and the nurses for their interference.

His worst fear, however, was that his wife would not forgive him. Not the dread of exposure, nor his own shame or remorse--not even the punishment that the law might inflict, could be compared to the fear of what might be her life-long hatred. He grew to feel that the doctor, the nurses, the servants looked upon him with strange, unfriendly though respectful eyes. In his heart he believed that his wife had cursed him in their presence, laying bare his part in the unhappy transaction.

At last the suspense became unbearable. He had noticed a slight change in Jane's manner and at once attributed it to something his wife had said, for Jane had been allowed in the sick-room. The discovery that she was not his child had not as yet struck deep into his understanding. In a vague sort of way he realised that she was different, now that he knew, but it was impossible for him to consider her in any other light than that of the years gone by. The time would come when the full realisation would cut into his heart more deeply than now, but at present a calamity of his own making was forcing all other troubles into the background. His greatest desire was to reach his wife's side, to know the worst that could come of his suit for forgiveness.

The evening of the second day he swore that he would see her--and alone. They admitted him and he entered trembling in every nerve. She was lying, white and haggard, in her bed, her back toward him. He paused for an instant and was certain that he saw her shudder violently. It was significant. She feared and loathed him.

"Is it you, David?" he heard her ask weakly. "At last! Oh, I was afraid that something had happened to you! That---"

He threw himself on his knees beside the bed and wept with all the

pent-up bitterness and misery that was in him--and still he was afraid to speak to her. Not a word left his lips until he felt her hand in his hair--a tender, timid hand. It was then that he began pouring forth his cry for forgiveness. With a groan, he checked her own appeal for mercy.

"We can talk about Jane another time, not now," he cried. "I must know that you forgive me--I don't care for anything--nothing else in the world."

When the nurse came in a few minutes later, he was sitting upon the edge of the bed holding her hands in his. Their faces were radiant.

"Please stay out," he said, almost gruffly.

"For just a little while," his wife added gently. The nurse hesitated a moment and then left the room.

Frances Cable told him Jane's history so far as it was known to her. He listened dully.

"She will never know her true parents," said she in the end.

"No, I suppose not," said he, looking out of the window.

"You understand, don't you, David, dear," she said feebly; "how I dreaded to have you learn the truth after all these years, and above all, how I hoped that Jane might never know. I tried every means in my power to buy James Bansemer's silence. It was not money that he wanted, it was..." she buried her head shamefully in her arms; after a moment, she went on: "He professes to love his son, but his is the love an animal gives the offspring it would destroy. And yet Graydon worships him."

"Are you quite sure that Graydon is as unsuspecting as you think?"

"In regard to his father?"

"In regard to Jane."

"Oh, I'm sure of it. He is not a party to his father's schemes. If James Bansemer has not already told Graydon, he never will. It is not his plan to do so; his only object has been to browbeat me into submission. David, it will all come out right in the end, won't it? You'll forgive me?"

"Yes, dear; but this man," and David Cable shook with emotion as he spoke, "will have to answer to me. There will be no more to fear," he said reassuringly; "I'll crush him as I would a snake."

"David, you must not---"

"Don't worry," he broke in; "I'll attend to him and see that no harm comes to anyone else. That man has no business among honest people."

"But, David, I was not honest with you," she confessed.

"That was a long time ago, and she's as much mine as she is yours."

So, what's the odds now? It's a facer, I'll admit, but it can't be helped." It was thus that the man whose anger, only a few hours before had led him almost to crime, now readily absolved her of any blame.

"Poor child, poor child!" she moaned; "it will break her heart. She is so proud and so happy."

"Yes, she's proud. There is good blood in her. I don't wonder now that I used to think she was such a marvel. She's--she's not just the same sort of stock that we are, take it as you will."

"She never must know the truth, David."

"She's bound to find it out, dear. We'd better tell her. It will be easier for her. Bansemer's fangs must be made harmless forever. He shan't bother her. She'd better hear the story from us and not from him."

"But Graydon? She'll lose him, David."

"I'm not so sure of it. She's worthy of any man's love and we must know that Graydon loves her. I'll trust to that. But, first of all, we must put it beyond the power of James Bansemer to injure her in any shape or form. Then, when I go after him--Graydon or no Graydon--he'll know that there is such a place as hell."

"Be rational, David. Let us take our time and think well, dear. I can't bear the thought of the story that will go out concerning me--how I deceived you about Jane for years and years. What will people think of me? What will they say?" she almost wailed.

"Frances," said he, his voice tense and earnest, "that is between you and me. I intend to say to the world, if occasion demands, that I have known from the first that Jane was not our child. That will be--"

"Oh, David, you CAN'T say that," she cried joyously.

"I shall say it, dear old partner. I shall say that you took her from the asylum with my consent. There is only James Bansemer to call me a liar, and he will not dare!"

"That old man Droom, David--his clerk. The man who saved me--he knows."

"He is in the boat with his master. He DID save you, though. I'll spare him much for that. And I have more to fear from him than you think. Frances, I am sure he saw me night before last down there at the sea wall. He knows--I am morally certain--that you were not attacked by a robber."

"But, David, I WAS robbed. My rings and my pendant were taken by someone. If Droom was the first man at my side--after you--then he must have taken them."

"I can't charge him with the theft," groaned Cable. "He saved your life and he might ruin mine. I would give anything I have to know just how much he saw of the affair. I can't account for his presence

there. It seems like fate."

"It is impossible for him to accuse you, David."

"It is not impossible, I'm afraid. He may have seen me plainly."

"But I have described my assailant to the police. You do not answer the description in any particular."

In the next ten minutes the nurse came in twice to caution him against overtaxing her nerves, politely hinting that he should depart at once. There was no medicine, no nursing, no care that could have done her so much good as this hour with her husband.

"It hurt me more than I can tell you, David, when I saw that you were jealous of him. I could see it growing in you day after day, and yet I could not find the courage to make everything clear to you. Oh, how could you have suspected me of that?"

"Because I am a man and because I love you enough to care what becomes of you. I was wrong, I am happy to confess. Forgive me, dear. I can't tell you how terrible the last month has been to me. I can't tell you of the bitter thoughts I have had, nor the vicious deeds I have planned. I was almost insane. I was not accountable. I have much to pay to you in the rest of the years that I live; I have much to pay to my own conscience; and I also owe something to James Bansemer. I shall try to pay all these different debts in the coin that they call for."

"We owe something, you and I, to Jane," said she, as he arose to leave the room.

"A confession and more love than ever, Frances. I love her with all my heart. When you are stronger, we will tell her that she is not our child. We have loved her so long and so well that she can't ask for better proof of our devotion. That terrible thing at the sea wall must remain our secret, dear. To-morrow I shall begin pulling James Bansemer's fangs."

He found Graydon downstairs with Jane. A sharp look into the young man's eyes convinced him that his questions concerning Mrs. Cable and the latest news concerning the efforts to take the bandit were sincere. Cable held his hand for a long time; the firm, warm grasp was that of an honest man. As he stepped out into the night for a short walk over town he wondered, with a great pain in his heart, if Graydon Bansemer would turn from Jane when he heard the truth concerning her.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VISIT OF HARBERT

"It's Harbert," said Elias Droom.

"Why didn't you say to him that I am busy? I don't want to see him," said his employer in a sharp undertone. Droom's long finger was on his lips, enjoining silence.

"He said that you wouldn't want to see him, but that it didn't make any difference. He'll wait, he says."

They were in the private office, with the door closed. Bansemer's face was whiter and more firmly set than ever. The ugly fighting light was in his eyes again.

"If he has come here to threaten me, I'll kill him," he said savagely.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said the clerk with what was meant to be a conciliatory smile. "Meet him squarely and hear what he has to say."

"Do you suppose she has told Cable? He may have sent Harbert here."

"Cable's hands are tied. I know too much. If I were to tell the police what I know he'd have a devil of a time getting the presidency of his road. Besides, they both owe me a vote of thanks. Didn't I have sense enough to make it look like robbery?"

"Yes, but curse your stupidity, they may charge you with the job. Nobody would believe that Cable would attempt to rob his own wife."

"But they would, in any event, decide that he had taken the rings to make it appear like robbery." There was a hard rap on the glass panel. "He's bound to see you, sir."

"Well, then, show him in!" snarled Bansemer.

"Mr. Bansemer will see you, sir," said Droom suavely, opening the door suddenly.

"Thanks," said Harbert shortly. He entered the private office and faced the lawyer, who was standing near his desk. "I've taken advantage of your invitation to drop in and see you."

"This is one of my busy days, Mr. Harbert," said Bansemer, determined to come to the point at once. "However, I hardly expected a social call from you, so it must be of a business nature. What is it?"

"It concerns your son, Mr. Bansemer. I'm here in the capacity of a physician. You must go away for his health." Harbert smiled as though he thought it a good joke. Bansemer turned red and then white.

"I don't quite appreciate your wit, sir."

"My humour, I'd suggest as a substitute. Well, to be perfectly plain, sir, your son does not know the true nature of the malady. He--"

"Do I understand you to say that he really has an ailment?" exclaimed Bansemer seriously.

"It isn't hopeless, my dear sir. My only desire is to keep him from ever finding out that he has a malady. He is sure to learn the truth if you remain here."

"Damn you, Harbert, I understand you now, and I want to say this to you: I'll not drag that boy away from this city. He's successful here and he's one of the most promising young men in town. I'm not going to have him hounded from town to town by--"

"You don't quite understand me, sir. On the contrary, he should remain here. What I do mean to say is this: he won't feel like staying here if the truth about his father is uttered. That's the brutal way to put it, Bansemer, but you've GOT TO GET OUT."

The two glared at each other for a full minute. Bansemer was as white as a sheet--but not with fear.

"Harbert," he said in low tones, "I've half a mind to kill you."

"Don't. You'd hang for it. There are at least a dozen members of the bar who know that I have come here to see you, and they know why, too. See here, Bansemer, you're a scoundrel to begin with. You've always been a knave. How you happen to have a son like Graydon I can't imagine. If I did not know that your wife was a noble, honest woman, it wouldn't be difficult to supply a reason for--"

"Stop! By God, you shall not say a word against my wife! I'll brain you with this weight! You--"

"I have not said a word against her--nor against your son. For her and for him I have the deepest respect. I am trying to protect the memory of one and the future of the other. Bansemer, I believe that I drove you out of New York. You escaped without exposure simply because the witnesses lost their nerve. That won't be the case here. You think you've covered your tracks nicely. You haven't. You've tripped into half a dozen traps. I don't know what your game is with the Cables, but you're base enough to take advantage of your son's position in that home. Don't interrupt! I'll soon be through. I'm a man of few words. If it were not for your son I'd swear out the warrants for you to-day on five different charges. For his sake I'm going to give you a chance. I've worked on you for three years. I swore I'd get you some time. Well, I've got you, and I'm going to cheat myself out of a whole lot of pleasure. I'm not going to smash you as I intended. Your son's friends have prevailed. To show you that I'm not bluffing, I have every bit of evidence in the Burkenday case, the Flossie Bellamy job, the widow Hensmith affair--and it was a damnable one, too--with two or three more. You broke that woman's heart. I don't suppose you know that she died last month. You never noticed it, eh? Her precious coachman is living like a lord on the money you and he took from her. Old Burkenday's housemaid has bought a little home in Edgewater--but not from her wages. The two jobs you now have on hand never will be pulled off. The girl in the Banker Watts case has been cornered and has confessed. She is ready to appear against you. McLennan's wife

has had the courage to defy your accomplice--that dastardly butler of theirs--and he has left town, frightened out of his wits. Your time has come. The jig is up. It won't be as it was in New York, because we have the proof. There is a committee of three down in Rigby's office now waiting for me to report. If I take word to them that you expect to sail for Europe next week, never to return to this country, all well and good. It is for your son's good health, bear in mind. If you go, the public may never learn the truth about you; if you stay you will be in jail before you are a week older. And, Mr. Bansemer, you've got to decide DAMNED QUICK."

Bansemer looked his accuser straight in the eye, a faint smile of derision touching his lips, but not his eyes.

"Mr. Harbert, the first thing you have to learn in connection with your patient's father is that he is not a coward. I refuse to run, sir. I am innocent of any intentional wrong, and I'll stand my ground. My son will stand beside me, too; he is that sort. Go back to your committee and tell them that Bansemer will not go to Europe for his son's health. Good-day, sir!"

"Nonsense, Bansemer," exploded Harbert. "You know we've got you fast enough. Why be a fool as well as a knave? You haven't a ghost of a chance. I'm trying to do you a good turn."

"A good turn? Mr. Harbert, I am neither a fool nor a knave. If I were a fool I'd kill you where you stand. I would be justified in killing the man who represents a crowd of blackmailers. That's what you are, sir. I refuse to pay your price. If I were a knave I'd pay it. I want you to understand one thing. I shall stand my ground here. If you persecute me, I'll not stop flaying you until death ends my endeavours. We'll see what justice can give me in exchange for your bulldozing. I will have restitution, remember that. Now, you've nothing more to say to me. Get out!"

"Sir!"

"Get out!"

"By George, you're a wonderful bluffer."

"Do you expect me to throw you out, sir?"

"It isn't necessary. I've had a change of heart in the last minute, Mr. Bansemer. I withdraw my proposition. By all that's holy, I intend to go after you now without pity. Hang your son's feelings! You won't take my advice. I didn't give it as a friend, because I detest you. It was done in a weak spirit of fairness toward your son and toward the girl he is to marry. Now, I put them out of my consideration. They---"

"Get out!"

Harbert, very red in the face, slammed the door after him and strode angrily through the outer office into the corridor. Droom immediately entered the consultation room.

"Well? What is it?" demanded Bansemer.

"What did he want?"

"He invited me to go to Europe for an indefinite stay. I refused. We'll fight it out, Droom. We have covered our trail better than he thinks. They can't convict me. I'm sure of that. They have nothing but conjectures, and they won't go in court."

"I'm afraid of him, just the same. You're bull-headed about it. Every criminal thinks his tracks are covered until it is too late to cover them properly."

"Curse you, Droom, I'm no criminal."

"A slip of the tongue on my part. Do you know who is down there in Rigby's office with those fellows?"

"An officer, I daresay."

"No. David Cable."

"Cable? Then, his wife has told him everything. Well, I've something to tell, too. By the Lord Harry, Elias, there will be several sensations in high life."

"You don't mean that you'll tell all there is to tell about the girl?"

"No! That's just it! That is one thing I won't tell. If you tell whose blood she has in her veins, I'll kill you like a dog. But, I'll see that Miss Cable is dropped by Chicago society inside of a week. I'm mad, Droom--do you understand?"

"But Graydon loves her."

"He won't love her long. I was a fool to let him go this far--a blind, loving fool. But I'll end it now. He shan't marry her. He has no---"

"I haven't much of a heart to boast of, Bansemer, but I beg of you not to do this thing. I love Graydon. He doesn't deserve any pain or disgrace. Take my advice and leave the city. Let me call Harbert back."

"No! They can't drive me out! Telephone over and ask Graydon to stop here on his way up this afternoon."

The opening and closing of the outer door attracted their attention. Droom peeped forth. In spite of himself, Bansemer started and his eyes widened with sudden alarm. A glance of apprehension passed between the two men.

"It's that Deever boy from Judge Smith's," reported Droom.

"Tell him to get out," said Bansemer, with a breath of relief.

"I thought it might have been---" began Droom with a wry grin.

"Nonsense!"

"It is a bit too soon. They haven't had time."

As Droom left the room, Bansemer crossed to the window and looked down into the seething street far below. He saw that his hand trembled and he tried to laugh at his weakness. For a long time he stood there, his unseeing eyes focused on the hurrying masses, his ears alert for unusual sounds from the outer office.

"If it were not f

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