

"Go! Did n't you hear me tell you that you were not going? Who do you think I am that you can flout and browbeat and threaten —"

"Come! Let us go up to bed —"

"Who do you think I am!" repeated Surface, bringing his twitching face nearer, his voice breaking to sudden shrillness. "Who do you think I am, I say?"

Queed thought the old man had gone off his head, and indeed he looked it. He began soothingly: "You are —"

"I'm your father! Your father, do you hear!" cried Surface. "You're my son — Henry G. Surface, Jr.!"

This time, Queed, looking with a wild sudden terror into the flaming eyes, knew that he heard the truth from Surface at last. The revelation broke upon him in a stunning flash. He sprang away from the old man with a movement of loathing unspeakable.

"Father!" he said, in a dull curious whisper. "O God! Father!"

Surface gazed at him, his upper lip drawn up into his old purring sneer.

"So that is how you feel about it, my son?" he inquired suavely, and suddenly crumpled down upon the floor.

The young man shook him by the shoulder, but he did not stir. Henderson came running at the sound of the fall, and together they bore the old man, breathing, but inert as the dead, to his room. In an hour, the doctor had come and gone. In two hours, a trained nurse was sitting by the bed as though she had been there always. The doctor called it a "stroke," superinduced by a "shock." He said that Professor Nicolovius might live for a week, or a year, but was hardly likely to speak again on this side the dark river that runs round the world.

XXVII

Sharlee Weyland reads the Morning Post; of Rev. Mr. Dayne's Fight at Ephesus and the Telephone Message that never came; of the Editor's Comment upon the Assistant Editor's Resignation, which perhaps lacked Clarity; and of how Eight Men elect a Mayor.

NEXT morning, in the first moment she had, Sharlee Weyland read the *Post's* editorial on the reformatory. And as she read she felt as though the skies had fallen, and the friendly earth suddenly risen up and smitten her.

It was a rainy morning, the steady downpour of the night before turned into a fine drizzle; and Sharlee, who nearly always walked, took the car downtown. She was late this morning; there had been but flying minutes she could give to breakfast; not a second to give to anything else; and therefore she took the *Post* with her to read on the ride to "the" office. And, seating herself, she turned immediately to the editorial page, in which the State Department of Charities felt an especial interest this morning.

Both the name and the position of the editorial were immediately disappointing to her. It was not in the leading place, and its caption was simply "As to the Reformatory," which seemed to her too colorless and weak. Subconsciously, she passed the same judgment upon the opening sentences of the text, which somehow failed to ring out that challenge to the obstructionists she had confidently expected. As she read further, her vague disappointment gave way to a sudden breathless incredulity; that to a heartsick rigidity of attention; and when she went back, and began to read the whole article over, slowly and carefully, from the beginning, her face was about the color of the pretty white collar she wore.

For what she was looking on at was, so it seemed to her, not simply the killing of the chief ambition of her two years' work, but the treacherous murder of it in the house of its friends.

As she reread "As to the Reformatory," she became impressed by its audacious cleverness. It would have been impossible to manage a tremendous shift in position with more consummate dexterity. Indeed, she was almost ready to take the *Post's* word for it that no shift at all had been made. From beginning to end the paper's unshakable loyalty to the reformatory was everywhere insisted upon; that was the strong keynote; the ruinous qualifications were slipped in, as it were, reluctantly, hard-wrung concessions to indisputable and overwhelming evidence. But there they were, scarcely noticeable to the casual reader, perhaps, but to passionate partisans sticking up like palm-trees on a plain. In a back-handed, sinuous but unmistakable way, the *Post* was telling the legislature that it had better postpone the reformatory for another two years. It was difficult to say just what phrase or phrases finally pushed the odious idea out into the light; but Sharlee lingered longest on a passage which, after referring to the "list of inescapable expenditures published elsewhere," said:

Immediacy, of course, was never the great question; but it was a question; and the *Post* has therefore watched with keen regret the rolling up of absolutely unavoidable expenses to the point where the spending of another dollar for any cause, however meritorious in itself, must be regarded as of dubious wisdom.

That sentence was enough. It would be as good as a volume to the powerful opposition in the House, hardly repressed heretofore by the *Post's* thunders. The reformatory, which they had labored for so long, was dead.

The thought was bitter to the young assistant secretary. But from the first, her mind had jumped beyond it, to fasten on another and, to her, far worse one, a burning personal question by the side of which the loss of the reformatory seemed for the moment an unimportant detail.

Which of the two men had done it?

Rev. Mr. Dayne was sitting bowed over his desk, his strong head clamped in his hands, the morning *Post* crumpled on the floor beside him. He did not look up when his assistant entered the office; his response to her "Good-morning" was of the briefest. Sharlee understood. It was only the corporeal husk of her friend that was seated at the desk. All the rest of him was down at Ephesus fighting with the beasts, and grimly resolved to give no sign from the arena till he had set his foot upon their necks for the glory of God and the honor of his cloth.

Sharlee herself did not feel conversational. In silence she took off her things, and, going over to her own desk, began opening the mail. In an hour, maybe more, maybe less, the Secretary stood at her side, his kind face calm as ever.

"Well," he said quietly, "how do you explain it?"

Sharlee's eyes offered him bay-leaves for his victory.

"There is a suggestion about it," said she, still rather white, "of thirty pieces of silver."

"Oh! We can hardly say that. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt, as long as there can be any doubt. Let us view it for the present as a death-bed repentance."

Him? Which did he mean?

"No," said Sharlee, "it is not possible to view it that way. The *Post* has been as familiar with the arguments all along, from beginning to end, as you or I. It could not be honestly converted any more than you could. This," said she, struggling to speak calmly, "is treachery."

"Appearances, I am sorry to say, are much that way. Still — I think we should not condemn the paper unheard."

"Then why not have the hearing at once? An explanation is —"

"I shall seek none," interrupted Mr. Dayne, quietly. "The *Post* must volunteer it, if it has any to offer. Of course," he went on, "we know nothing of the history of that editorial now. Of one thing, however, I feel absolutely certain; that is, that it was published without the know-

ledge of Mr. West. Developments may follow. . . . As for instance a shake-up in the staff."

That settled it. This good man whom she admired so much had not entertained a doubt that the editorial was from the brain and pen of Mr. Queed.

She said painfully: "As to the effect upon the — the reformatory —"

"It is killed," said Mr. Dayne, and went away to his desk.

Sharlee turned in her desk-chair and looked out of the rain-blurred windows.

Through and beyond the trees of the park, over ridges of roofs and away to the west and north, she saw the weather-beaten *Post* building, its distant gray tower cutting mistily out of the dreary sky. From where she sat she could just pick out, as she had so often noticed before, the tops of the fifth-floor row of windows, the windows from which the *Post's* editorial department looked out upon a world with which it could not keep faith. Behind one of those windows at this moment, in all likelihood, sat the false friend who had cut down the reformatory from behind.

Which was it? Oh, was not Mr. Dayne right, as he always was? Where was there any room for doubt?

Long before Sharlee knew Charles Gardiner West personally, when she was a little girl and he just out of college, she had known him by report as a young man of fine ideals, exalted character, the very pattern of stainless honor. Her later intimate knowledge of him, she told herself, had fully borne out the common reputation. Wherever she had touched him, she had found him generous and sound and sweet. That he was capable of what seemed to her the baldest and basest treachery was simply unthinkable. And what reason was there ever to drag his name into her thought of the affair at all? Was it not Mr. Queed who had written all the reformatory articles since Colonel Cowles's death — Mr. Queed who had promised only twenty-four hours ago to do his utmost for the cause at the critical moment to-day?

And yet . . . and yet . . . her mind clung desperately

to the thought that possibly the assistant editor had not done this thing, after all. The memory of his visit to her, less than a week ago, was very vivid in her mind. What sort of world was it that a man with a face of such shining honesty could stoop to such shabby dishonesty? — that a man who had looked at her as he had looked at her that night, could turn again and strike her such a blow? That Queed should have done this seemed as inconceivable as that West should have done it. There was the wild hundredth chance that neither had done it, that the article had been written by somebody else and published by mistake.

But the hope hardly fluttered its wings before her reason struck it dead. No, there was no way out there. The fact was too plain that one of her two good friends, under what pressure she could not guess, had consented to commit dishonor and, by the same stroke, to wound her so deeply. For no honest explanation was possible; there was no argument in the case to-day that was not equally potent a month ago. It was all a story of cajolery or intimidation from the formidable opposition, and of mean yielding in the places of responsibility. And — yes — She felt it as bad for one of her two friends to be so stained as another. It had come to that. At last she must admit that they stood upon level ground in her imagination, the nameless little Doctor of two years back side by side with the beau ideal of all her girlhood. One's honor was as dear to her as another's; one's friendship as sweet; and now one of them was her friend no more.

And it was not West whom she must cast out. There was no peg anywhere to hang even the smallest suspicion of him upon. She scoured her mind for seeking one. It was Queed who, at the pinch, had broken down and betrayed them with a kiss: Queed, of the obscure parentage, dubious inheritance, and omitted upbringing; Queed, whom she had first stood upon his feet and started forward in a world of men, had helped and counseled and guided, had admitted to her acquaintance, her friendship — for this.

But because Sharlee had known Queed well as a man who

loved truth, because the very thing that she had seen and most admired in him from the beginning was an unflinching honesty of intellect and character, because of the remembrance of his face as she had last seen it: a tiny corner of her mind, in defiance of all reason, revolted against this condemnation and refused to shut tight against him. All morning she sat at her work, torn by anxiety, hoping every moment that her telephone might ring with some unthought-of explanation, which would leave her with nothing worse upon her mind than the dead reformatory. But though the telephone rang often, it was never for this.

Sitting in a corner of the House gallery, about noon, Mr. Dayne saw the reformatory bill, which he himself had written, called up out of order and snowed under. The only speech was made by the Solon who had the bill called up, a familiar organization wheelhorse, named Meachy T. Bangor, who quoted with unconcealed triumph from the morning's *Post*, wholly ignoring all the careful safeguards and tearing out of the context only such portions as suited his humor and his need. Mr. Bangor pointed out that, inasmuch as the "acknowledged organ" of the State Department of Charities now at length "confessed" that the reformatory had better wait two years, there were no longer two sides to the question. Many of the gentleman's hearers appeared to agree with him. They rose and fell upon the bill, and massacred it by a vote of 54 to 32.

From "Sis" Hopkins, legislative reporter of the *Post*, the news went skipping over the telephone wire to the editorial rooms, where the assistant editor, who received it, remarked that he was sorry to hear it. That done, the assistant hung up the receiver, and resumed work upon an article entitled "A Constitution for Turkey?" He had hardly added a sentence to this composition before West came in and, with a cheery word of greeting, passed into his own office.

The assistant editor went on with his writing. He looked worn this morning, Henry Surface's son, and not without

reason. Half the night he had shared the nurse's vigil at the bedside of Surface, who lay in unbroken stupor. Half the night he had maintained an individual vigil in his own room, lying flat on his back and staring wide-eyed into the darkness. And on the heels of the day, there had come new trouble for him, real trouble, though in the general cataclysm its full bearings and farther reaches did not at once come home to him. Running professionally through the *Post* at breakfast-time, his eye, like Miss Weyland's, had been suddenly riveted by that paper's remarks upon the reformatory. . . . What was the meaning of the staggering performance he had no idea, and need not inquire. Its immediate effect upon his own career was at least too plain for argument. His editorship and his reformatory had gone down together.

Yet he was in no hurry now about following West into his sanctum. Of all things Queed, as people called him, despised heroics and abhorred a "scene." Nothing could be gained by a quarrel now; very earnestly he desired the interview to be as matter-of-fact as possible. In half an hour, when he had come to a convenient stopping-place, he opened the door and stood uncomfortably before the young man he had so long admired.

West, sitting behind his long table, skimming busily through the paper with blue pencil and scissors, looked up with his agreeable smile.

"Well! What do you see that looks likely for — What's the matter? Are you sick to-day?"

"No, I am quite well, thank you. I find very little in the news, though. You notice that a digest of the railroad bill is given out?"

"Yes. You don't look a bit well, old fellow. You must take a holiday after the legislature goes. Yes, I'm going to take the hide off that bill. Or better yet — you. Don't you feel like shooting off some big guns at it?"

"Certainly, if you want me to. There is the farmers' convention, too. And by the way, I'd like to leave as soon as you can fill my place."

West dropped scissors, pencil, and paper and stared at him with dismayed amazement. "Leave! Why, you are never thinking of *leaving* me!"

"Yes. I'd — like to leave. I thought I ought to tell you this morning, so that you can at once make your plans as to my successor."

"But my dear fellow! I can't let you *leave me*! You've no idea how I value your assistance, how I've come to lean and depend upon you at every point. I never dreamed you were thinking of this. What's the matter? What have you got on your mind?"

"I think," said Queed, unhappily, "that I should be better satisfied off the paper than on it."

"Why, confound you — it's the money!" said West, with a sudden relieved laugh. "Why did n't you tell me, old fellow? You're worth five times what they're paying you — five times as much as I am for that matter — and I can make the directors see it. Trust me to make them raise you to my salary at the next meeting."

"Thank you — but no, my salary is quite satisfactory."

West frowned off into space, looking utterly bewildered. "Of course," he said in a troubled voice, "you have a perfect right to resign without saying a word. I have n't the smallest right to press you for an explanation against your will. But — good Lord! Here we've worked together side by side, day after day, for nearly a year, pretty good friends, as I thought, and — well, it hurts a little to have you put on your hat and walk out without a word. I wish you would tell me what's wrong. There's nothing I would n't do, if I could, to fix it and keep you."

The eyes of the two men met across the table, and it was Queed's that faltered and fell.

"Well," he said, obviously embarrassed, "I find that I am out of sympathy with the policy of the paper."

"Oh-h-ho!" said West, slowly and dubiously. "Do you mean my article on the reformatory?"

"Yes — I do."

"Why, my dear fellow!"

West paused, his handsome eyes clouded, considering how best he might put the matter to overcome most surely the singular scruples of his assistant.

"Let's take it this way, old fellow. Suppose that my standpoint in that article was diametrically wrong. I am sure I could convince you that it was not, but admit, for argument's sake, that it was. Do you feel that the appearance in the paper of an article with which you don't agree makes it necessary for you, in honor, to resign?"

"No, certainly not —"

"Is it that you don't like my turning down one of your articles and printing one of my own instead? I did n't know you objected to that, old fellow. You see — while your judgment is probably a hanged sight better than mine, after all I am the man who is held responsible, and I am paid a salary to see that my opinions become the opinions of the *Post*."

"It is entirely right that your opinions —"

"Then wherein have I offended? Be frank with me, like a good fellow, I beg you!"

Queed eyed him strangely. Was the editor's inner vision really so curiously astigmatic?

"I look at it this way," he said, in a slow, controlled voice.

"The *Post* has said again and again that *this* legislature must establish a reformatory. That was the burden of a long series of editorials, running back over a year, which, as I thought, had your entire approval. Now, at the critical moment, when it was only necessary to say once more what had been said a hundred times before, the *Post* suddenly turns about and, in effect, authorizes this legislature not to establish the reformatory. The House killed the bill just now. Bangor quoted from the *Post* editorial. There can be no doubt, of course, that it turned a number of votes — enough to have safely carried the bill."

West looked disturbed and unhappy.

"But if we find out that this legislature is so drained by

inescapable expenses that it simply cannot provide the money? Suppose the State had been swept by a plague? Suppose there was a war and a million of unexpected expenses had suddenly dropped on us from the clouds? Would n't you agree that circumstances altered cases, and that, under such circumstances, everything that was not indispensable to the State's existence would have to go over?"

Queed felt like answering West's pepper-fire of casuistry by throwing Eva Bernheimer at his head. Despite his determination to avoid a "scene," he felt his bottled-up indignation rising. A light showed in his stone-gray eyes.

"Can't you really see that these circumstances are not in the least like those? Did you do me the courtesy to read what I wrote about this so-called 'economy argument' last night?"

"Certainly," said West, surprised by the other's tone. "But clever as it was, it was not based, in my opinion, on a clear understanding of the facts as they actually exist. You and I stay so close inside of four walls here that we are apt to get out of touch with practical conditions. Yesterday, I was fortunate enough to get new facts, from a confidential and highly authoritative source. In the light of these — I wish I could explain them more fully to you, but I was pledged to secrecy — I am obliged to tell you that what you had written seemed to me altogether out of focus, unfair, and extreme."

"Did you get these facts, as you call them, from Plonny Neal?"

"As to that, I am at liberty to say nothing."

Queed, looking at him, saw that he had. He began to feel sorry for West.

"I would give four hundred and fifty dollars," he said slowly — "all the money that I happen to have — if you had told me last night that you meant to do this."

"I am awfully sorry," said West, with a touch of dignity, "that you take it so hard. But I assure you —"

"I know Plonny Neal even better than you do," continued Queed, "for I have known him as his social equal. He is laughing at you to-day."

West, of course, knew better than that. The remark confirmed his belief that Queed had brooded over the reformatory till he saw everything about it distorted and magnified.

"Well, old fellow," he said, without a trace of ill-humor in his voice or his manner, "then it is I he is laughing at — not you. That brings us right back to my point. If you feel, as I understand it, that the *Post* is in the position of having deserted its own cause, I alone am the deserter. Don't you see that? Not only am I the editor of the paper, and so responsible for all that it says; but I wrote the article, on my own best information and judgment. Whatever consequences there are," said West, his thoughts on the consequences most likely to accrue to the saviour of the party, "I assume them all."

"A few people," said Queed, slowly, "know that I have been conducting this fight for the *Post*. They may not understand that I was suddenly superseded this morning. But of course it is n't that. It is simply a matter —"

"Believe me, it can all be made right. I shall take the greatest pleasure in explaining to your friends that I alone am responsible. I shall call to-day — right now — at —"

"I'm sorry," said Queed, abruptly, "but it is entirely impossible for me to remain."

West looked, and felt, genuinely distressed. "I wish," he said, "the old reformatory had never been born"; and he went on in a resigned voice: "Of course I can't keep you with a padlock and chain, but — for the life of me, I can't catch your point of view. To my mind it appears the honorable and courageous thing to correct a mistake, even at the last moment, rather than stand by it for appearance's sake."

"You see I don't regard our principles as a mistake."

But he went back to his office marveling at himself for the ease with which West had put him in the wrong.

For friendship's sake, West had meant to call at the Chari-

ties Department that day, and explain to his two friends there how his sense of responsibility to the larger good had made it necessary for him to inflict a momentary disappointment upon them. But this disturbing interview with his assistant left him not so sure that an immediate call would be desirable, after all. At the moment, both Dayne and the dearest girl in the world would naturally be feeling vexed over the failure of their plan; would n't it be the sensible and considerate thing to give them a little time to conquer their pique and compose themselves to see facts as they were?

The *Chronicle* that afternoon finally convinced him that this would be the considerate thing. That offensive little busybody, which pretended to have been a champion of "this people's institution" came out with a nasty editorial, entitled "The *Post's* Latest Flop." "Flop" appeared to be an intensely popular word in the *Chronicle* office. The article boldly taxed "our more or less esteemed contemporary" with the murder of the reformatory, and showed unpleasant freedom in employing such phrases as "instantaneous conversation," "treacherous friendship," "disgusting somersaulting," and the like. Next day, grown still more audacious, it had the hardihood to refer to the *Post* as "The Plonny Neal organ."

Now, of course, the reformatory had not been in any sense a burning public "issue." Measures like this, being solid and really important, seldom interest the people. There was not the smallest popular excitement over the legislature's conduct, or the *Post's*. The *Chronicle's* venomous remarks were dismissed as the usual "newspaper scrap." All this West understood perfectly. Still, it was plain that a few enthusiasts, reformatory fanatics, were taking the first flush of disappointment rather hard. For himself, West reflected, he cared nothing about their clamor. Conscious of having performed an unparalleled service to his party, and thus to his State, he was willing to stand for a time the indignation of the ignorant, the obloquy of the malicious, even revolt and

disloyalty among his own lieutenants. One day the truth about his disinterested patriotism would become known. For the present he would sit silent, calmly waiting at least until unjust resentment subsided and reason reasserted her sway.

Many days passed, as it happened, before West and the Secretary of Charities met; six days before West and the Assistant Secretary met. On the sixth night, about half-past seven in the evening, he came unexpectedly face to face with Sharlee Weyland in the vestibule of Mrs. Byrd, Senior's, handsome house. In the days intervening, Sharlee's state of mind had remained very much where it was on the first morning: only now the tiny open corner of her mind had shrunk to imperceptible dimensions. Of West she entertained not the smallest doubt; and she greeted him like the excellent friend she knew him to be.

There was a little dinner-dance at Mrs. Byrd's, for the season's *débutantes*. It became remembered as one of the most charming of all her charming parties. To the buds were added a sprinkling of older girls who had survived as the fittest, while among the swains a splendid catholicity as to age prevailed. A retinue of imported men, Caucasian at that, served dinner at six small tables, six at a table; the viands were fashioned to tickle tired epicures; there was vintage champagne such as kings quaff to pledge the comity of nations; Wissner's little band of artists, known to command its own price, divinely mingled melody with the rose-sweetness of the air. West, having dined beautifully, and lingered over coffee in the smoking-room among the last, emerged to find the polished floors crowded with an influx of new guests, come to enliven the dance. His was, as ever, a Roman progress; he stopped and was stopped everywhere; like a happy opportunist, he plucked the flowers as they came under his hand, and gayly whirled from one measure to another. So the glorious evening was half spent before, in an intermission, he found himself facing Sharlee Weyland, who was uncommonly well attended, imploring her hand for the approaching waltz.

Without the smallest hesitation, Sharlee drew her ornamental pencil through the next name on her list, and ordered her flowers and fan transferred from the hands of Mr. Beverley Byrd to those of Mr. Charles Gardiner West.

"Only," said she, thinking of her partners, "you'll have to hide me somewhere."

With a masterful grace which others imitated, indeed, but could not copy, West extricated his lady from her gallants, and led her away to a pretty haven; not indeed, to a conservatory, since there was none, but to a bewitching nook under the wide stairway, all banked about with palm and fern and pretty flowering shrub. There they sat them down, unseeing and unseen, near yet utterly remote, while in the blood of West beat the intoxicating strains of Straus, not to mention the vintage champagne, to which he had taken a very particular fancy.

All night, while the roses heard the flute, violin, bassoon, none in all the gay company had been gayer than Sharlee. Past many heads in the dining-room, West had watched her, laughing, radiant, sparkling as the wine itself, a pretty little lady of a joyous sweetness that never knew a care. In the dance, for he had watched her there, too, wondering, as she circled laughing by, whether she felt any lingering traces of pique with him, she had been the same: no girl ever wore a merrier heart. But a sudden change came now. In the friendly freedom of the green-banked alcove, Sharlee's gayety dropped from her like a painted mask, which, having amused the children, has done its full part. Against the back of the cushioned settle where they sat she leaned a weary head, and frankly let her fringed lids droop.

At another time West might have been pleased by such candid evidences of confidence and intimacy, but not to-night. He felt that Sharlee, having advertised a delightful gayety by her manner, should now proceed to deliver it: it certainly was not for tired sweetness and disconcerting silences that he had sought this *tête-à-tête*. But at last his failure to arouse her on indifferent topics became too

marked to be passed over; and then he said in a gentle voice:—

"Confess, Miss Weyland. You're as tired as you can be."

She turned her head, and smiled a little into his eyes.

"Yes — you don't mind, do you?"

"Indeed I do, though! You're going altogether too hard — working like a Trojan all day and dancing like a dryad all night. You'll break yourself down — indeed you will!"

Hardly conscious of it herself, Sharlee had been waiting with a tense anxiety of which her face began to give signs, for him to speak. And now she understood that he would not speak; and she knew why. . . . How her heart warmed to him for his honorable silence in defense of his unworthy friend.

But she herself was under no such restraint. "It is n't that," she said quickly. "It's the reformatory — I've worried myself sick over it."

West averted his gaze; he saw that it had come, and in a peculiarly aggravated form. He recognized at once how impossible it would be to talk the matter over, in a calm and rational way, under such conditions as these. This little girl had brooded over it till the incident had assumed grotesque and fantastic proportions in her mind. She was seeing visions, having nightmares. In a soothing, sympathetic voice, he began consoling her with the thought that a postponement for two brief years was really not so serious, and that —

"It is n't that!" she corrected him again, in the same voice. "That was pretty bad, but — what I have minded so much was M — was the *Post's* desertion."

West's troubled eyes fell. But some hovering imp of darkness instantly popped it into his head to ask: "Have you seen Queed?"

"No," said Sharlee, colorlessly. "Not since —"

"You — did n't know, then, that he has left the *Post*?"

"Left the *Post*!" she echoed, with a face suddenly rigid.

"No! Did he? Won't you tell me —?"

West looked unhappily at the floor. "Well — I'd much rather not go into this now. But the fact is that he left because . . . well, we had a difference of opinion as to that reformatory article."

Sharlee turned hastily away, pretending to look for her fan. The sudden shutting of that tiny door had shot her through with unexpected pain. The last doubt fell now; all was plain. Mr. Queed had been discharged for writing an article which outraged his chief's sense of honor, that knightly young chief who still would not betray him by a word. The little door clicked; Sharlee turned the key upon it and threw away the key. And then she turned upon West a face so luminous with pure trust that it all but unsteadied him.

To do West justice, it was not until his words had started caroming down the eternal halls of time, that their possible implication dawned upon him. His vague idea had been merely to give a non-committal summary of the situation to ease the present moment; this to be followed, at a more suitable time, by the calm and rational explanation he had always intended. But the magical effect of his chance words, entirely unexpected by him, was quite too delightful to be wiped out. To erase this look from the tired little lady's face by labored exposition and tedious statistic would be the height of clumsy unkindness. She had been unhappy; he had made her happy; that was all that was vital just now. At a later time, when she had stopped brooding over the thing and could see and discuss it intelligently, he would take her quietly and straighten the whole matter out for her.

For this present, there was a look in her eyes which made a trip-hammer of his heart. Never had her face — less of the mere pretty young girl's than he had ever seen it, somewhat worn beneath its color, a little wistful under her smile — seemed to him so immeasurably sweet. In his blood Straus and the famous Verzenay plied their dizzying vocations. Suddenly he leaned forward, seeing nothing but two wonder-

ful blue eyes, and his hand fell upon hers, with a grip which claimed her out of all the world.

"Sharlee —" he said hoarsely. "Don't you know that —"

But he was, alas, summarily checked. At just that minute, outraged partners of Miss Weyland's espied and descended upon them with loud reproachful cries, and Charles Gardiner West's moment of superb impetuosity had flowered in nothing.

At a little earlier hour on the same evening, in a dining-room a mile away, eight men met "without political significance" to elect a new set of officers for the city. A bit of red-tape legislation permitted the people to ratify the choices at a "primary," to be held some months later; but the election came now. Unanimously, and with little or no discussion, the eight men elected one of their own number, Mr. Meachy T. Bangor by name, to the office of Mayor of the City.

One of them then referred humorously to Mr. Bangor as just the sort of progressive young reformer that suited *him*. Another suggested, more seriously, that they might have to allow for the genuine article some day. Plonny Neal, who sat at the head of the table, as being the wisest of them, said that the organization certainly must expect to knuckle to reform some day; perhaps in eight years, perhaps in twelve years, perhaps in sixteen.

"Got your young feller all picked out, Plonny?" queried the Mayor elect, Mr. Bangor, with a wink around the room.

Plonny denied that he had any candidate. Under pressure, however, he admitted having his eye on a certain youth, a "dark horse" who was little known at present, but who, in his humble judgment, was a coming man. Plonny said that this man was very young just now, but would be plenty old enough before they would have need of him.

Mr. Bangor once more winked at the six. "Why, Plonny, I thought you were rooting for Charles Gardinia West."

"Then there's two of ye," said Plonny, dryly, "he being the other one."

He removed his unlighted cigar, and spat loudly into a tall brass cuspidor, which he had taken the precaution to place for just such emergencies.

"Meachy," said Plonny, slowly, "I would n't give the job of dog-catcher to a man you could n't trust to stand by his friends."

XXVIII

How Words can be like Blows, and Blue Eyes stab deep; how Queed sits by a Bedside and reviews his Life; and how a Thought leaps at him and will not down.

IN the first crushing burst of revelation, Queed had had a wild impulse to wash his hands of everything, and fly. He would pack Surface off to a hospital; dispose of the house; escape back to Mrs. Paynter's; forget his terrible knowledge, and finally bury it with Surface. His reason fortified the impulse at every point. He owed less than nothing to his father; he had not the slightest responsibility either toward him or for him; to acknowledge the relation between them would do no conceivable good to anybody. He would go back to the Scriptorium, and all would be as it had been before.

But when the moment came either to go or to stay, another and deeper impulse rose against this one, and beat it down. Within him a voice whispered that though he might go back to the Scriptorium, he would never be as he had been before. Whether he acknowledged the relation or not, it was still there. And, in time, his reason brought forth material to fortify this impulse, too: it came out in brief, grim sentences which burned themselves into his mind. Surface was his father. To deny the primal blood-tie was not honorable. The sins of the fathers descended to the children. To suppress Truth was the crowning blasphemy.

Queed did not go. He stayed, resolved, after a violent struggle — it was all over in the first hour of his discovery — to bear his burden, shouldering everything that his sonship involved.

By day and by night the little house stood very quiet. Its secret remained inviolate; the young man was still Mr.