

Miss Weyland would rather think that he had written the editorial than to know that West had written it.

The thought, when he finally reached it, leapt up at him, but he pushed it away. However, it returned. It became like one of those swinging logs which hunters hang in trees to catch bears: the harder he pushed it away, the harder it swung back at him.

He fully understood the persistence of this idea. It was the heart and soul of the whole question. He himself was simply Miss Weyland's friend, the least among many. If belief in his dishonesty had brought her pain — and he had her word for that — it was a hurt that would quickly pass. False friends are soon forgotten. But to West belonged the shining pedestal in the innermost temple of her heart. It would go hard with the little lady to find at the last moment this stain upon her lover's honor.

He had only to sit still and say nothing to make her happy. That was plain. So the whole issue was shifted. It was not, as it had first seemed, merely a matter between West and himself. The real issue was between Miss Weyland and himself — between her happiness and his . . . no, not his happiness — his self-respect, his sense of justice, his honor, his chaste passion for Truth, his . . . yes, his happiness.

Did he think most of Miss Weyland or of himself? That was what it all came down to. Here was the new demand that his acknowledgment of a personal life was making upon him, the supreme demand, it seemed, that any man's personal life could ever make upon him. For if, on the day when Nicolovius had suddenly revealed himself as Surface, he had been asked to give himself bodily, he was now asked to give himself spiritually — to give all that made him the man he was.

From the stark alternative, once raised, there was no escape. Queed closed with it, and together they went down into deep waters.

## XXIX

*In which Queed's Shoulders can bear One Man's Roguery and Another's Dishonor, and of what these Fardels cost him: how for the Second Time in his Life he stays out of Bed to think.*

SHARLEE, sitting upstairs, took the card from the tray and, seeing the name upon it, imperceptibly hesitated. But even while hesitating, she rose and turned to her dressing-table mirror.

"Very well. Say that I'll be down in a minute."

She felt nervous, she did not know why; chilled at her hands and cold within; she rubbed her cheeks vigorously with a handkerchief to restore to them some of the color which had fled. There was a slightly pinched look at the corners of her mouth, and she smiled at her reflection in the glass, somewhat artificially and elaborately, until she had chased it away. Undoubtedly she had been working too hard by day, and going too hard by night; she must let up, stop burning the candle at both ends. But she must see Mr. Queed, of course, to show him finally that no explanation could explain now. It came into her mind that this was but the third time he had ever been inside her house — the third, and it was the last.

He had been shown into the front parlor, the stiffer and less friendly of the two rooms, and its effect of formality matched well with the temper of their greeting. By the obvious stratagem of coming down with book in one hand and some pretense at fancy-work in the other, Sharlee avoided shaking hands with him. Having served their purpose, the small burdens were laid aside upon the table. He had been standing, awaiting her, in the shadows near the mantel; the chair that he chanced to drop into stood almost under one of the yellow lamps; and when she saw his face, she hardly re-



pressed a start. For he seemed to have aged ten years since he last sat in her parlor, and if she had thought his face long ago as grave as a face could be, she now perceived her mistake.

The moment they were seated he began, in his usual voice, and with rather the air of having thought out in advance exactly what he was to say.

"I have come again, after all, to talk only of definite things. In fact, I have something of much importance to tell you. May I ask that you will consider it as confidential for the present?"

At the very beginning she was disquieted by the discovery that his gaze was steadier than her own. She was annoyingly conscious of looking away from him, as she said:—

"I think you have no right to ask that of me."

Surface's son smiled sadly. "It is not about—anything that you could possibly guess. I have made a discovery of—a business nature, which concerns you vitally."

"A discovery?"

"Yes. The circumstances are such that I do not feel that anybody should know of it just yet, but you. However—"

"I think you must leave me to decide, after hearing you—"

"I believe I will. I am not in the least afraid to do so. Miss Weyland, Henry G. Surface is alive."

Her face showed how completely taken back she was by the introduction of this topic, so utterly remote from the subject she had expected of him.

"Not only that," continued Queed, evenly—"he is within reach. Both he—and some property which he has—are within reach of the courts."

"Oh! How do you know? . . . Where is he?"

"For the present I am not free to answer those questions."

There was a brief silence. Sharlee looked at the fire, the stirrings of painful memories betrayed in her eyes.

"We knew, of course, that he might be still alive," she said slowly. "I—hope he is well and happy. But—we

have no interest in him now. That is all closed and done with. As for the courts—I am sure that he has been punished already more than enough."

"It is not a question of punishing him any more. You fail to catch my meaning, it seems. It has come to my knowledge that he has some money, a good deal of it—"

"But you cannot have imagined that I would want his money?"

"His money? He has none. It is all yours. That is why I am telling you about it."

"Oh, but that can't be possible. I don't understand."

Sitting upright in his chair, as businesslike as an attorney, Queed explained how Surface had managed to secrete part of the embezzled trustee funds, and had been snugly living on it ever since his release from prison.

"The exact amount is, at present, mere guesswork. But I think it will hardly fall below fifty thousand dollars, and it may run as high as a hundred thousand. I learn that Mr. Surface thinks, or pretends to think, that this money belongs to him. He is, needless to say, wholly mistaken. I have taken the liberty of consulting a lawyer about it, of course laying it before him as a hypothetical case. I am advised that when Mr. Surface was put through bankruptcy, he must have made a false statement in order to withhold this money. Therefore, that settlement counts for nothing, except to make him punishable for perjury now. The money is yours whenever you apply for it. That—"

"Oh—but I shall not apply for it. I don't want it, you see."

"It is not a question of whether you want it or not. It is yours—in just the way that the furniture in this room is yours. You simply have no right to evade it."

Through all the agitation she felt in the sudden dragging out of this long-buried subject, his air of dictatorial authority brought the blood to her cheek.

"I have a right to evade it, in the first place, and in the second, I am not evading it at all. He took it; I let him keep



it. That is the whole situation. I don't want it—I could n't touch it — ”

“Well, don't decide that now. There would be no harm, I suppose, in your talking with your mother about it — even with some man in whose judgment you have confidence. You will feel differently when you have had time to think it over. Probably it — ”

“Thinking it over will make not the slightest difference in the way I feel — ”

“Perhaps it would if you stopped thinking about it from a purely selfish point of view. Other — ”

“What?”

“I say,” he repeated dryly, “that you should stop thinking of the matter from a purely selfish point of view. Don't you know that that is what you are doing? You are thinking only whether or not you, personally, desire this money. Well, other people have an interest in the question besides you. There is your mother, for example. Why not consider it from her standpoint? Why not consider it from — well, from the standpoint of Mr. Surface?”

“Of Mr. Surface?”

“Certainly. Suppose that in his old age he has become penitent, and wants to do what he can to right the old wrong. Would you refuse him absolution by declining to accept your own money?”

“I think it will be time enough to decide that when Mr. Surface asks me for absolution.”

“Undoubtedly. I have particularly asked, you remember, that you do not make up your mind to anything now.”

“But you,” said she, looking at him steadily enough now — “I don't understand how you happen to be here apparently both as my counselor and Mr. Surface's agent.”

“I have a right to both capacities, I assure you.”

“Or — have you a habit of being — ?”

She left her sentence unended, and he finished it for her in a colorless voice.

“Of being on two sides of a fence, perhaps you were about to say?”

She made no reply.

“That is what you were going to say, is n't it?”

“Yes, I started to say that,” she answered, “and then I thought better of it.”

She spoke calmly; but she was oddly disquieted by his fixed gaze, and angry with herself for feeling it.

“I will tell you,” said he, “how I happen to be acting in both capacities.”

The marks of his internal struggle broke through upon his face. For the first time, it occurred to Sharlee, as she looked at the new markings about his straight-cut mouth, that this old young man whom she had commonly seen so matter-of-fact and self-contained, might be a person of stronger emotions than her own. After all, what did she really know about him?

As if to answer her, his controlled voice spoke.

“Mr. Surface is my father. I am his son.”

She smothered a little cry. “*Your father!*”

“My name,” he said, with a face of stone, “is Henry G. Surface, Jr.”

“Your father!” she echoed lifelessly.

Shocked and stunned, she turned her head hurriedly away; her elbow rested on the broad chair-arm, and her chin sank into her hand. Surface's son looked at her. It was many months since he had learned to look at her as at a woman, and that is knowledge that is not unlearned. His eyes rested upon her piled-up mass of crinkly brown hair; upon the dark curtain of lashes lying on her cheek; upon the firm line of the cheek, which swept so smoothly into the white neck; upon the rounded bosom, now rising and falling so fast; upon the whole pretty little person which could so stir him now to undreamed depths of his being. . . . No altruism here, Fifi; no self-denial to want to make *her* happy.

He began speaking quietly.

“I can't tell you now how I found out all this. It is a long



story; you will hear it all some day. But the facts are all clear. I have been to New York and seen Tim Queed. It is — strange, is it not? Do you remember that afternoon in my office, when I showed you the letters from him? We little thought — ”

“Oh me!” said Sharlee. “Oh me!”

She rose hastily and walked away from him, unable to bear the look on his face. For a pretense of doing something, she went to the fire and poked aimlessly at the glowing coals.

As on the afternoon of which he spoke, waves of pity for the little Doctor's worse than fatherlessness swept through her; only these waves were a thousand times bigger and stormier than those. How hardly he himself had taken his sonship she read in the strange sadness of his face. She dared not let him see how desperately sorry for him she felt; the most perfunctory phrase might betray her. Her knowledge of his falseness stood between them like a wall; blindly she struggled to keep it staunch, not letting her rushing pity undermine and crumble it. He had been false to her, like his father. Father and son, they had deceived and betrayed her; honor and truth were not in them.

“So you see,” the son was saying, “I have a close personal interest in this question of the money. Naturally it — means a good deal to me to — have as much of it as possible restored. Of course there is a great deal which — he took, and which — we are not in position to restore at present. I will explain later what is to be done about that — ”

“Oh, don't!” she begged. “I never want to see or hear of it again.”

Suddenly she turned upon him, aware that her self-control was going, but unable for her life to repress the sympathy for him which welled up overwhelmingly from her heart.

“Won't you tell me something more about it? Please do! Where is he? Have you seen him — ?”

“I cannot tell you — ”

“Oh, I will keep your confidence. You asked me if I

would. I will — won't you tell me? Is he here — in the city — ?”

“You must not ask me these questions,” he said with some evidence of agitation.

But even as he spoke, he saw knowledge dawn painfully on her face. His shelter, after all, was too small; once her glance turned that way, once her mind started upon conjectures, discovery had been inevitable.

“Oh!” she cried, in a choked voice. . . . “It is Professor Nicolovius!”

He looked at her steadily; no change passed over his face. When all was said, he was glad to have the whole truth out; and he knew the secret to be as safe with her as with himself.

“No one must know,” he said sadly, “until his death. That is not far away, I think.”

She dropped into a chair, and suddenly buried her face in her hands.

Surface's son had risen with her, but he did not resume his seat. He stood looking down at her bowed head, and the expression in his eyes, if she had looked up and captured it, might have taken her completely by surprise.

His chance, indeed, had summoned him, though not for the perfect sacrifice. Circumstance had crushed out most of the joy of giving. For, first, she had suspected him, which nothing could ever blot out; and now, when she knew the truth about him, there could hardly be much left for him to give. It needed no treacherous editorial to make her hate the son of his father; their friendship was over in any case.

Still, it was his opportunity to do for her something genuine and large; to pay in part the debt he owed her — the personal and living debt, which was so much greater than the dead thing of principal and interest.

No, no. It was not endurable that this proud little lady, who kept her head so high, should find at the last moment, this stain upon her lover's honor.

She dropped her hands and lifted a white face.



"And you —" she began unsteadily, but checked herself and went on in a calmer voice. "And you — after what he has done to you, too — you are going to stand by him — take his name — accept that inheritance — *be* his son?"

"What else is there for me to do?"

Their eyes met, and hers were hurriedly averted.

"Don't you think," he said, "that that is the only thing to do?"

Again she found it impossible to endure the knowledge of his fixed gaze. She rose once more and stood at the mantel, her forehead leaned against her hand upon it, staring unseeing down into the fire.

"How can I tell you how fine a thing you are doing — how big — and splendid — when —"

A dark red color flooded his face from neck to forehead; it receded almost violently leaving him whiter than before.

"Not at all! Not in the least!" he said, with all his old impatience. "I could not escape if I would."

She seemed not to hear him. "How can I tell you that — and about how sorry I am — when all the time it seems that I can think only of — something else!"

"You are speaking of the reformatory," he said, with bracing directness.

There followed a strained silence.

"Oh," broke from her — "how could you bear to do it?"

"Don't you see that we cannot possibly discuss it? It is a question of one's honor — is n't it? It is impossible that such a thing could be argued about."

"But — surely you have something to say — some explanation to make! Tell me. You will not find me — a hard judge."

"I'm sorry," he said brusquely, "but I can make no explanation."

She was conscious that he stood beside her on the hearth-rug. Though her face was lowered and turned from him, the eye of her mind held perfectly the presentment of his face, and she knew that more than age had gone over it since she

had seen it last. Had any other man in the world but West been in the balance, she felt that, despite his own words, she could no longer believe him guilty. And even as it was — how could that conceivably be the face of a man who —

"Won't you shake hands?"

Turning, she gave him briefly the tips of fingers cold as ice. As their hands touched, a sudden tragic sense overwhelmed him that here was a farewell indeed. The light contact set him shaking; and for a moment his iron self-control, which covered torments she never guessed at, almost forsook him.

"Good-by. And may that God of yours who loves all that is beautiful and sweet be good to you — now and always."

She made no reply; he wheeled, abruptly, and left her. But on the threshold he was checked by the sound of her voice.

The interview, from the beginning, had profoundly affected her; these last words, so utterly unlike his usual manner of speech, had shaken her through and through. For some moments she had been miserably aware that, if he would but tell her everything and throw himself on her mercy, she would instantly forgive him. And now, when she saw that she could not make him do that, she felt that tiny door, which she had thought double-locked forever, creaking open, and heard herself saying in a small, desperate voice: —

"*You did write it, did n't you?*"

But he paused only long enough to look at her and say, quite convincingly: —

"You need hardly ask that — now — need you?"

He went home, to his own bedroom, lit his small student-lamp, and sat down at his table to begin a new article. The debt of money which was his patrimony required of him that he should make every minute tell now.

In old newspaper files at the State Library, he had found the facts of his father's defalcations. The total embezzlement from the Weyland estate, allowing for \$14,000 recov-



ered in the enforced settlement of Surface's affairs, stood at \$203,000. But that was twenty-seven years ago, and in all this time interest had been doubling and redoubling: simple interest, at 4%, brought it to \$420,000; compound interest to something like \$500,000, due at the present moment. Against this could be credited only his father's "nest-egg" — provided always that he could find it — estimated at not less than \$50,000. That left his father's son staring at a debt of \$450,000, due and payable now. It was of course, utterly hopeless. The interest on that sum alone was \$18,000 a year, and he could not earn \$5000 a year to save his immortal soul.

So the son knew that, however desperately he might strive, he would go to his grave more deeply in debt to Sharlee Weyland than he stood at this moment. But of course it was the trying that chiefly counted. The fifty thousand dollars, which he would turn over to her as soon as he got it — how he was counting on a sum as big as that! — would be a help; so would the three or four thousand a year which he would surely pay toward keeping down the interest. This money in itself would be a good. But much better than that, it would stand as a gage that the son acknowledged and desired to atone for his father's dishonor.

His book must stand aside now — it might be forever. Henceforward he must count his success upon a cash-register. But to-night his pencil labored and dragged. What he wrote he saw was not good. He could do harder things than force himself to sit at a table and put writing upon paper; but over the subtler processes of his mind, which alone yields the rich fruit, no man is master. In an hour he put out his lamp, undressed in the dark, and went to bed.

He lay on his back in the blackness, and in all the world he could find nothing to think about but Sharlee Weyland.

Of all that she had done for him, in a personal way, he had at least tried to give her some idea; he was glad to remember that now. And now at the last, when he was nearer worthy

than ever before, she had turned him out because she believed that he had stooped to dishonor. She would have forgiven his sonship; he had been mistaken about that. She had felt sympathy and sorrow for Henry Surface's son, and not repulsion, for he had read it in her face. But she could not forgive him a personal dishonor. And he was glad that, so believing, she would do as she had done; it was the perfect thing to do; to demand honor without a blemish, or to cancel all. Never had she stood so high in his fancy as now when she had ordered him out of her life. His heart leapt with the knowledge that, though she would never know it, she was his true mate there, in their pure passion for Truth.

Whatever else might or might not have been, the knowledge remained with him that she herself had suspected and convicted him. In all that mattered their friendship had ended there. Distrust was unbearable between friends. It was a flaw in his little lady that she could believe him capable of baseness. . . . But not an unforgivable flaw, it would seem, since every hour that he had spent in her presence had become roses and music in his memory, and the thought that he would see her no more stabbed ceaselessly at his heart.

Yes, Surface's son knew very well what was the matter with him now. The knowledge pulled him from his bed to a seat by the open window; dragged him from his chair to send him pacing on bare feet up and down his little bedroom, up and down, up and down; threw him later, much later, into his chair again, to gaze out, quiet and exhausted, over the sleeping city.

He had written something of love in his time. In his perfect scheme of human society, he had diagnosed with scientific precision the instinct of sex attraction implanted in man's being for the most obvious and grossly practical of reasons: an illusive candle-glow easily lit, quickly extinguished when its uses were fulfilled. And lo, here was love tearing him by the throat till he choked; an exquisite torture, a rampant passion, a devastating flame, that most glorified when it burned most deeply, aroar and ablaze forevermore.



He sat by the window and looked out over the sleeping city.

By slow degrees, he had allowed himself to be drawn from his academic hermitry into contact with the visible life around him. And everywhere that he had touched life, it had turned about and smitten him. He had meant to be a great editor of the *Post* some day, and the *Post* had turned him out with a brand of dishonor upon his forehead. He had tried to befriend a friendless old man, and he had acquired a father whose bequest was a rogue's debt, and his name a byword and a hissing. He had let himself be befriended by a slim little girl with a passion for Truth and enough blue eyes for two, and the price of that contact was this pain in his heart which would not be still . . . which would not be still.

Yet he would not have had anything different, would not have changed anything if he could. He was no longer the pure scientist in the observatory, but a bigger and better thing, a man . . . A man down in the thick of the hurly-burly which we call This Life, and which, when all is said, is all that we certainly know. Not by pen alone, but also by body and mind and heart and spirit, he had taken his man's place in Society. And as for this unimagined pain that strung his whole being upon the thumb-screw, it was nothing but the measure of the life he had now, and had it more abundantly. Oh, all was for the best, all as it should be. He knew the truth about living at last, and it is the truth that makes men free.

### XXX

*Death of the Old Professor, and how Queed finds that his List of Friends has grown; a Last Will and Testament; Exchange of Letters among Prominent Attorneys, which unhappily proves futile.*

ON the merriest, maddest day in March, Henry G. Surface, who had bitterly complained of earthly justice, slipped away to join the invisible procession which somewhere winds into the presence of the Incorruptible Judge. He went with his lips locked. At the last moment there had been faint signs of recurring consciousness; the doctor had said that there was one chance in a hundred that the dying man might have a normal moment at the end. On this chance his son had said to the nurse, alone with him in the room: —

"Will you kindly leave me with him a moment? If he should be conscious there is a private question of importance that I must ask him."

She left him. The young man knelt down by the bedside, and put his lips close to the old man's ear. Vainly he tried to drive his voice into that stilled consciousness, and drag from his father the secret of the hiding-place of his loot.

"Father!" he said, over and over. "Father! *Where is the money?*"

There was no doubt that the old man stirred a little. In the dim light of the room it seemed to his son that his right eye half opened, leaving the other closed in a ghastly parody of a wink, while the upper lip drew away from the strong teeth like an evil imitation of the old bland sneer. But that was all.

So Surface died, and was gathered to his fathers. The embargo of secrecy was lifted; and the very first step toward