

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

righting the ancient wrong was to let the full facts be known. Henry G. Surface, Jr., took this step, in person, by at once telephoning all that was salient to the *Post*. Brower Williams, the *Post's* city editor, at the other end of the wire, called the name of his God in holy awe at the dimensions of the scoop thus dropped down upon him as from heaven; and implored the Doc, for old time's sake, by all that he held most sacred and most dear, to say not a word till the evening papers were out, thus insuring the sensation for the *Post*.

Mr. Williams's professional appraisal of the scoop proved not extravagant. The *Post's* five columns next morning threw the city into something like an uproar. It is doubtful if you would not have to go back to the '60's to find a newspaper story which eclipsed this one in effect. For a generation, the biography of Henry G. Surface had had, in that city and State, a quality of undying interest, and the sudden denouement, more thrilling than any fiction, captured the imagination of the dullest. Nothing else was mentioned at any breakfast-table where a morning paper was taken that day; hardly anything for many breakfasts to follow. In homes containing boys who had actually studied Greek under the mysterious Professor Nicolovius at Milner's School, feeling waxed quite hysterical; while at Mrs. Paynter's, where everybody was virtually a leading actor in the moving drama, the excitement closely approached delirium.

Henry G. Surface, Jr., was up betimes on the morning after his father's death — in fact, as will appear, he had not found time to go to bed at all — and the sensational effects of the *Post's* story were not lost upon him. As early as seven o'clock, a knot of people had gathered in front of the little house on Duke of Gloucester Street, staring curiously at the shut blinds, and telling each other, doubtless, how well they had known the dead man. When young Surface came out of the front door, an awed hush fell upon them; he was aware of their nudges, and their curious but oddly respectful stare. And this, at the very beginning, was typical of the whole day; wherever he went, he found himself an object of the frankest

public curiosity. But all of this interest, he early discovered, was neither cool nor impersonal.

To begin with, there was the *Post's* story itself. As he hurried through it very early in the morning, the young man was struck again and again with the delicacy of the phrasing. And gradually it came to him that the young men of the *Post* had made very special efforts to avoid hurting the feelings of their old associate and friend the Doc. This little discovery had touched him unbelievably. And it was only part with other kindness that came to him to soften that first long day of his acknowledged sonship. Probably the sympathy extended to him from various sources was not really so abundant, but to him, having looked for nothing, it was simply overwhelming. All day, it seemed to him, his door-bell and telephone rang, all day unexpected people of all sorts and conditions stopped him on the street — only to tell him, in many ways and sometimes without saying a word about it, that they were sorry.

The very first of them to come was Charles Gardiner West, stopping on his way to the office, troubled, concerned, truly sympathetic, to express, in a beautiful and perfect way, his lasting interest in his one-time assistant. Not far behind him had come Mr. Hickok, the director who looked like James E. Winter, who had often chatted with the assistant editor in times gone by, and who spoke confidently of the day when he would come back to the *Post*. Beverley Byrd had come, too, manly and friendly; Plonny Neal, ill at ease for once in his life; Evan Montague, of the *Post*, had asked to be allowed to make the arrangements for the funeral; Buck Klinker had actually made those arrangements. Better than most of these, perhaps, were the young men of the Mercury, raw, embarrassed, genuine young men, who, stopping him on the street, did not seem to know why they stopped him, who, lacking West's verbal felicity, could do nothing but take his hand, hot with the fear that they might be betrayed into expressing feeling, and stammer out: "Doc, if you want anything — why dammit, Doc — you call on *me*, hear?"

Best of all had been Buck Klinker — Buck, who had made him physically, who had dragged him into contact with life over his own protests, who had given him the first editorial he ever wrote that was worth reading — Buck, the first real friend he had ever had. It was to Buck that he had telephoned an hour after his father's death, for he needed help of a practical sort at once, and his one-time trainer was the man of all men to give it to him. Buck had come, constrained and silent; he was obviously awed by the Doc's sudden emergence into stunning notoriety. To be Surface's son was, to him, like being the son of Iscariot and Lucrezia Borgia. On the other hand, he was aware that, of Klinkers and Queeds, a Surface might proudly say: "There are no such people." So he had greeted his friend stiffly as Mr. Surface, and was amazed at the agitation with which that usually impassive young man had put a hand upon his shoulder and said: "I'm the same Doc always to you, Buck, only now I'm Doc Surface instead of Doc Queed." After that everything had been all right. Buck had answered very much after the fashion of the young men of the Mercury, and then rushed off to arrange for the interment, and also to find for Doc Surface lodgings somewhere which heavily undercut Mrs. Paynter's modest prices.

The sudden discovery that he was not alone in the world, that he had friends in it, real friends who believed in him and whom nothing could ever take away, shook the young man to the depths of his being. Was not this compensation for everything? Never had he imagined that people could be so kind; never had he dreamed that people's kindness could mean so much to him. In the light of this new knowledge, it seemed to him that the last scales fell from his eyes. . . . Were not these friendships, after all, the best work of a man's life? Did he place a higher value even on his book itself, which, it seemed, he might never finish now?

And now there returned to him something that the dead old Colonel had told him long ago, and to-day he saw it for truth. However his father had wronged him, he would always

have this, at least, to bless his memory for. For it was his father who had called him to live in this city where dwelt, as the strong voice that was now still had said, the kindest and sweetest people in the world.

Henry G. Surface died at half-past two o'clock on the afternoon of March 24. At one o'clock that night, while the *Post's* startling story was yet in process of the making, his son stood at the mantel in Surface's sitting-room, and looked over the wreck that his hands had made. That his father's treasures were hidden somewhere here he had hardly entertained a doubt. Yet he had pulled the place all to pieces without finding a trace of them.

The once pretty sitting-room looked, indeed, as if a tornado had struck it. The fireplace was a litter of broken brick and mortar; half the floor was ripped up and the boards flung back anyhow; table drawers and bookcases had been ransacked, and looked it; books rifled in vain were heaped in disorderly hummocks wherever there was room for them; everywhere a vandal hand had been, leaving behind a train of devastation and ruin.

And it had all been fruitless. He had been working without pause since half-past six o'clock, and not the smallest clue had rewarded him.

It was one of those interludes when early spring demonstrates that she could play August convincingly had she a mind to. The night was stifling. That the windows had to be shut tight, to deaden the noise of loosening brick and ripping board, made matters so much the worse. Surface was stripped to the waist, and it needed no second glance at him, as he stood now, to see that he was physically competent. There was no one-sided over-development here; Klinker's exercises, it will be remembered, were for all parts of the body. Shoulders stalwart, but not too broad, rounded beautifully into the upper arm; the chest swelled like a full sail; many a woman in that town had a larger waist. Never he moved but muscle flowed and rippled under the shining skin;

he raised his right hand to scratch his left ear, and the hard blue biceps leaped out like a live thing. In fact, it had been some months since the young man had first entertained the suspicion that he could administer that thrashing to Mr. Pat whenever he felt inclined. Only it happened that he and Mr. Pat had become pretty good friends now, and it was the proof-reader's boast that he had never once made a bull in "Mr. Queed's copy" since the day of the famous fleas.

In the quiet night the young man stood resting from his labors, and taking depressed thought. He was covered with grime and streaked with sweat; a ragged red stripe on his cheek, where a board had bounced up and struck him, detracted nothing from the sombreness of his appearance. Somewhere, valuable papers waited to be found; bank-books, certainly; very likely stock or bonds or certificates of deposit; please God, a will. Somewhere — but where? From his father's significant remark during their last conversation, he would have staked his life that all these things were here, in easy reach. And yet —

Standing precariously on the loose-piled bricks of the fireplace, he looked over the ravaged room. He felt profoundly discouraged. Success in this search meant more to him than he liked to think about, and now his chance of success had shrunk to the vanishing point. The bowels of the room lay open before his eye, and there was no hiding-place in them. He knew of nowhere else to look. The cold fear seized him that the money and the papers were hidden beyond his finding — that they lay tucked away in some safety-deposit vault in New York, where his eye would never hunt them out.

Surface's son leaned against the elaborate mantel, illimitably weary. He shifted his position ever so little; and thereupon luck did for him what reason would never have done. The brick on which his right foot rested turned under his weight and he lost his foothold. To save himself, he caught the mantel-top with both hands, and the next moment pitched heavily backward to the floor.

The mantel, in fact, had come off in his hands. It pitched to the floor with him, speeding his fall, thumping upon his chest like a vigorous adversary. But the violence of his descent only made him the more sharply aware that this strange mantel had left its moorings as though on greased rollers.

His heart playing a sudden drum-beat, he threw the carven timber from him and bounded to his feet. The first flying glance showed him the strange truth: his blundering feet had marvelously stumbled into his father's arcana. For he looked, not at an unsightly mass of splintered laths and torn wall-paper and shattered plaster, but into as neat a little cupboard as a man could wish.

The cupboard was as wide as the mantel itself; lined and ceiled with a dark red wood which beautifully threw back the glare of the dancing gas-jet. It was half-full of things, old books, letters, bundles of papers held together with rubber bands, canvas bags — all grouped and piled in the most orderly way about a large tin dispatch-box. This box drew the young man's gaze like a sudden shout; he was hardly on his feet before he had sprung forward and jerked it out. Instantly the treacherous bricks threw him again; sprawled on the floor he seized one of them and smashed through the hasp at a blow.

Bit by bit the illuminating truth came out. In all his own calculations, close and exact as he had thought them, he had lost sight of one simple but vital fact. In the years that he had been in prison, his father had spent no money beyond the twenty-five dollars a month to Tim Queed; and comparatively little in the years of his wanderings. In all this time the interest upon his "nest-egg" had been steadily accumulating. Five per cent railroad bonds, and certificates of deposit in four different banks, were the forms in which the money had been tucked away, by what devilish cleverness could only be imagined. But the simple fact was that his father had died worth not less than two hundred thousand dollars and probably more. And this did not include

the house, which, it appeared, his father had bought, and not leased as he said; nor did it include four thousand four hundred dollars in gold and banknotes which he found in the canvas sacks after his first flying calculation was made.

Early in the morning, when the newsboys were already crying the *Post* upon the streets, young Henry Surface came at last upon the will. It was very brief, but entirely clear and to the point. His father had left to him without conditions, everything of which he died possessed. The will was dated in June of the previous summer — he recalled a two days' absence of his father's at that time — and was witnessed, in a villainous hand, by Timothy Queed.

There were many formalities to be complied with, and some of them would take time. But within a week matters were on a solid enough footing to warrant a first step; and about this time Sharlee Weyland read, at her breakfast-table one morning, a long letter which surprised and disturbed her very much.

The letter came from a well-known firm of attorneys. At great length it rehearsed the misfortunes that had befallen the Weyland estate, through the misappropriations of the late Henry G. Surface. But the gist of this letter, briefly put, was that the late Henry G. Surface had died possessed of a property estimated to be worth two hundred thousand dollars, either more or less; that this property was believed to be merely the late trustee's appropriations from the Weyland estate, with accrued interest; that "our client Mr. Henry G. Surface, Jr., heir by will to his father's ostensible property," therefore purposed to pay over this sum to the Weyland estate, as soon as necessary formalities could be complied with; and that, further, our client, Mr. Henry G. Surface, Jr., assumed personal responsibility "for the residue due to your late father's estate, amounting to one hundred and seventeen thousand dollars, either more or less, with interest since 1881; and this debt, he instructs us to

say, he will discharge from time to time, as his own resources will permit."

So wrote Messrs. Blair and Jamieson to Miss Charlotte Lee Weyland, congratulating her, "in conclusion, upon the strange circumstances which have brought you, after so long an interval, justice and restitution," and begging to remain very respectfully hers. To which letter after four days' interval, they received the following reply:

Messrs. Blair & Jamieson,
Commonwealth Building,
City.

DEAR SIR:—

Our client, Miss C. L. Weyland, of this city, instructs us to advise you, in reply to your letter of the 4th inst., directed to her, that, while thanking you for the expression of intention therein contained anent the property left by the late Henry G. Surface, and very cordially appreciating the spirit actuating Mr. Henry G. Surface, Jr., in the matter, she nevertheless feels herself without title or claim to said property, and therefore positively declines to accept it, in whole or in any part.

Respectfully yours,
AMPERSAND, BOLLING AND BYRD.

A more argumentative and insistent letter from Messrs. Blair and Jamieson was answered with the same brief positiveness by Messrs. Ampersand, Bolling and Byrd. Thereafter, no more communications were exchanged by the attorneys. But a day or two after her second refusal, Sharlee Weyland received another letter about the matter of dispute, this time a more personal one. The envelope was directed in a small neat hand which she knew very well; she had first seen it on sheets of yellow paper in Mrs. Paynter's dining-room. The letter said:

DEAR MISS WEYLAND:—

Your refusal to allow my father's estate to restore to you, so far as it can, the money which it took from you, and thus to right, in part, a grave wrong, is to me a great surprise and disappointment. I had not thought it possible that you, upon due reflection, could take a position the one obvious effect of which is to keep a son permanently under the shadow of his father's dishonor.

Do not, of course, misunderstand me. I have known you too well to believe for a moment that you can be swayed by ungenerous motives. I am very sure that you are taking now the part which you believe most generous. But that view is, I assure you, so far from the real facts that I can only conclude that you have refused to learn what these facts are. Both legally and morally the money is yours. No one else on earth has a shadow of claim to it. I most earnestly beg that, in fairness to me, you will at least give my attorneys the chance to convince yours that what I write here is true and unanswerable.

Should you adhere to your present position, the money will, of course, be trusteeed for your benefit, nor will a penny of it be touched until it is accepted, if not by you, then by your heirs or assigns. But I cannot believe that you will continue to find magnanimity in shirking your just responsibilities, and denying to me my right to wipe out this stain.

Very truly yours,

HENRY G. SURFACE, Jr.

No answer ever came to this letter, and there the matter rested through March and into the sultry April.

XXXI

God moves in a Mysterious Way: how the Finished Miss Avery appears as the Instrument of Providence; how Sharlee sees her Idol of Many Years go toppling in the Dust, and how it is her Turn to meditate in the Still Watches.

THE print danced before his outraged eyes; his chest heaved at the revolting evidence of man's duplicity; and Charles Gardiner West laid down his morning's Post with a hand that shook.

Meachy T. Bangor announces his candidacy for the nomination for Mayor, subject to the Democratic primary.

For West had not a moment's uncertainty as to what this announcement meant. Meachy T. Bangor spoke, nay invented, the language of the tribe. He was elect of the elect; what the silent powers that were thought was his thought; their ways were his ways, their people his people. When Meachy T. Bangor announced that he was a candidate for the nomination for Mayor, it meant that the all-powerful machine had already nominated him for Mayor, and whom the organization nominated it elected. Meachy T. Bangor! Plonny Neal's young, progressive candidate of the reformer type!

Bitterness flooded West's soul when he thought of Plonny. Had the boss been grossly deceived or grossly deceiving? Could that honest and affectionate eye, whose look of frank admiration had been almost embarrassing, have covered base and deliberate treachery? Was it possible that he, West, who had always been confident that he could see as far into a millstone as another, had been a cheap trickster's easy meat?

Day by day, since the appearance of the reformatory article, West had waited for some sign of appreciation and understanding from those on the inside. None had come. Not