The Great “Push” Experiment

Pratt, Ambrose (1874-1944)

A digital text sponsored by
AustLit

University of Sydney Library
Sydney

2003

Source Text:

Prepared from the print edition published by Grant Richards London 1902
332pp.

All quotation marks are retained as data.

First Published: 1902

A823.91 *Australian Etext Collections at novels 1890-1909*

The Great "Push" Experiment

London
Grant Richards
1902

Preface

This book is so much more true to the life which it is intended to depict than most of those which profess to be "founded upon fact," that I only apply to it such a designation, faute de mieux.

All Australian capital cities are infested with criminal secret societies, called "pushes," whose members murder and commit lesser felonies, for the most part with impunity, terrorize both police and private citizens with whom they come in conflict, ana play a not unimportant part in the political arena of the community, exactly in the manner I have related.

The "Dogs' Push," about which this book is principally concerned, is a typical organization which, under another name, is actually in existence. In describing it, I have faithfully portrayed the constitution, habits, projects, ambition, and the nefarious procedure of all the more important and notorious pushes of Australia, and I have been at pains therein to refrain from the least exaggeration.

For the rest, my principal characters are drawn from life, and the principal incidents of the narrative positively occurred.

Those who, after perusal of these pages, are curious to learn more authoritatively of the secret murder clubs of Australia, I beg to refer to my article, "Push Larrikinism in Australia," published in the July number of "Blackwooa's Magazine."

AMBROSE PRATT.

23rd November, 1901.

The Great “Push” Experiment

I Nullius Filius

THE earliest recollection of my childhood comprises a tragic and indelible memorial of my parents: a scene which is so sharply fixed and which stands out in such bold relief from other mind pictures of the remoter past as to blot and blur them into spectral and unseizable mist. It concerns, in the first place, a large and stately chamber the lofty ceiling of which was painted with rosy figures emblematical of spring. It was furnished richly, and its walls were embellished with deep-toned pictures, from the shades of which looked forth sad-eyed dames, and men in armour leaning thoughtfully upon cross-hilted swords. Upon the floor was cast a profusion of rugs and skins, amongst which grinned a cruel tiger face, his yellow eyes half closed, his dried, painted lips uptwisted in a sardonic snarl, to show his yellow fangs. A grand piano occupied a moiety of the apartment: it was open, its great flat lid propped upon a shining amber-coloured rod. The keyboard was white as snow, and on the stand rested a sheaf of unbound manuscript. A dark and very handsome man was seated before the instrument on a massive stool shaped like a lyre. His eyes were exceedingly black, large, and heavy-lidded; his nose was long and straight; his mouth and chin were hidden behind a black moustache and pointed Vandyck beard. His left hand strayed idly over the keys, touching them unconsciously into soft tones of sound; his right was outstretched in a warning gesture, and he regarded a young woman, who had disturbed him, with a frown of stern disapprobation. The woman stood some feet away; her right foot rested on the tiger's head. She was beautiful, but her expression held something evil, and at the moment there was a strange resemblance between her face and that of the dead thing on the floor. Her cheeks were flushed with passion, her eyes glittered wickedly, and her scarlet lips were drawn back, displaying sharp, white teeth. Her hair was tawny, like the tiger's. As she stood there the resemblance became each moment more striking and hideous. The man observed it and frowned more sternly than before; his right hand fell to his side.

“There is no need to shout,” he protested, disdainfully. “I should hear you perfectly were you to whisper.”

“Ho, my fine gentleman!” she cried, enraged. “Afraid of the servants, are you?”

I shudder now as I did then, for with the shock of an old but ever fresh

conviction I realise that the man was a gentleman, but the woman — for all her beauty — a harridan.

The man rose slowly from the stool and stood erect, his face gloomy but resolute. “I warned you, Clara!” he said, icily.

“You will leave me?”

He nodded: “At once!”

She ground her teeth. “A damned good riddance too,” she cried; “but you'll not have the boy.”

“Lucas!” said the man, “come here!”

I had been standing somewhere, exactly where I cannot recollect, for the room was large, and the only part of it I remember perfectly I have described. On hearing my father's voice I moved towards him. He took my hand and looked steadily at the woman. “The child shall decide. Will that content you?”

The woman shook with a sudden access of rage. “No!” she shouted, “No!” and sprang forward. The man directed at her a commanding look and she paused — for a moment cowed.

“Choose between us, Lucas!” said my father, gravely; his eyes were fixed upon me tenderly, his voice was marvellously sweet and kind.

“Will you come with me, Lucas, or will you stay with — your mother?”

I looked at the woman and shuddered — her eyes glowed with an expression of speechless menace. Terrified I clasped my father's hands — “With you, take me with you!” I cried.

“Kismet!” said my father, and glancing swiftly at the woman he stooped to kiss me on the brow. There came a swift rush from behind us. My father uttered a loud cry and started upright, my head and hands were bathed with a flow of warm fluid. Half blinded I stared about me; childishly conscious of some terrible catastrophe. When at last I could see, the woman was sitting huddled in a chair beside the tiger's head, feverishly wiping her hands, which did not, however, seem to be soiled, with a tiny lace handkerchief. I looked at my father; his right hand was plucking at something fastened in his shoulder, he was staggering and swaying as though of a sudden grown weak and helpless, his face was paper-white. At last he wrenched the something from his shoulder. I saw that it was a cross-handled knife. He threw it from him. His coat was covered with dark blood which trickled downwards to the floor.

“Father!” I cried, terrified at I knew not what. I was shivering like a leaf.

“Go!” he said; “go for the servants — I am dying.”

But I was rooted to the spot, I could not stir. “Mother!” I gasped.

The woman arose; her face was ghastly, she seemed dazed. “What is the matter, Jim?” she asked in a queer, strained voice. “Did I hurt you? — I didn't mean to — I was drunk!” and she reeled towards him.

But he did not answer — he sank at her feet in a limp, dreadful heap.

For hours I seemed to stand, while the woman — my mother — foolishly mumbled over and caressed my father's body lying stretched beside her on the floor, and all the while his blood oozed out upon the white rug upon which he lay, until a great purple pool collected there. It is still an agony to think I might have saved him could I have collected my panic-stricken senses; but I was scarcely seven years old.

My mother stood up at last; it was dark, the sun had disappeared, and the short southern twilight had already fled. She took me by the hand and led me from the house. On the steps I tottered and fell. She carried me. We entered a hansom cab. It was raining hard. We drove through dripping streets and streets, then reached a park, scattered houses, and the sea. We left the carriage and walked, the rain beat upon our faces — we were drenched, but we proceeded without a pause along a rocky path quite close to the water's edge. Our road was sometimes illumined by flashes of lightning — but, for the rest, it was very dark and gloomy, and I was very terrified. The woman held my wrist as in a vice. At last we stopped. We were standing on a little rocky eminence, the foot of which was splashed with a rim of surf. Suddenly I noticed that the woman was crying, crying silently, her body was heaving and shuddering with sobs. I commenced to cry too, not from sympathy, but fear and childish horror. She noticed, and turned to me.

“What is it, Lucas — what are you crying for?” she asked in a shaking voice.

“Father!” I moaned.

But at that she threw me from her and both her hands on high. “Oh, God!” she cried, “Oh, God!” Staring up wildly into the black sky she rushed forward. I knew that she was going to her death, but I could not stay her. I fell swooning to the ground, and throughout that long, awful night lay unconscious on the rocks while the ceaseless rain beat down.

In the morning I was discovered by the park-ranger and taken to a hospital. There I lay for weeks, fighting fiercest pain, with intervals of blissful delirium, beset with rheumatic fever. I recovered, and was given into the care of my mother's brother, who came forward with a charitable offer of protection, on which account he reaped much *kudos* from the authorities because he was reputed a poor man and a rascal, and such liberality was unlooked for from his class It was then I learned that although my father had been wealthy, I gained nothing but ill from his death. Had he lived he would no doubt have provided for me passing well, for I think he loved me, but his heir — a hard and grasping man — had stepped in, and he condemned me as no-man's son, equipped only with a heritage of crime and shame to commence my battle with the world among the shades.

II My Boyhood

MY uncle was a short, bull-necked, thick-barrelled man; his face was large, coarse, and puffy. He had a low, receding forehead and tiny, close-set eyes; his lips were thick, colourless, and protruding. When I was given into his charge I felt terribly afraid of him. I had never seen him before nor heard of our relationship. His harsh voice jarred upon my nerves, yet he spoke kindly to me and carried me from the hospital to a waiting cab tenderly as any woman. We drove to an unfamiliar part of the city, passing on our route a great number of Chinese shops and warehouses. We drew up at last before a small stone building, shop-fronted, situated in a narrow and filthy lane, which was separated by a long row of wharves and dirty terraced houses from the sea. The windows of the shop were half concealed behind grimy shutters, which seemed cemented in their places by the greasy dirt of ages. Between their interstices I perceived slopes of unwashed glass, and stretching beyond, a dim vista of gloomy rubbish: antique horse-pistols, rusted sabres, guns, locks, medallions, silver cruet-stands, lockets, brooches, and rings. Above these tottered decrepit rows of folded clothes, reaching to the ceiling — men's coats, women's cloaks, soldiers' uniforms — tawdry and tattered for the most part, but still retaining traces of their ancient gloss and tinsel. From the lintel swung three gilded balls, and a battered sign-post, whose half-obliterated legend I one day learned to read: “Daniel Rowe, Pawnbroker.” My uncle paused before the shop and surveyed it with a look of pride. I noticed that all his movements were awkward but stealthy; he trod softly, like a cat, though he lumbered in his gait. His hands were huge, his thumbs were clubbed and stunted, the sight of them made me feel sick. Mentally I contrasted the man with my murdered father and involuntarily shuddered.

“Sonny,” he said presently, “this is home!” He pointed to the signboard. “Yonder is my name, and, well, p'raps it had better be yours too. Can you read?”

I shook my head. “No, sir.”

He glanced at me sharply. “Not ‘sir’ yet,” he muttered; “call me uncle!”

“Uncle,” I replied, obediently.

He laughed and drew me into the shop. “Mother!” he shouted.

A thin woman, with a sharp-featured, acid face, sprang up from behind

a counter like a jack-in-the-box. Her hair was crimped close to her head, twisted up in wisps of oily tissue paper.

"So you're back at last!" she cried. Her voice was tart and crisp. "Is that the brat?"

My uncle frowned. "He is my nephew — Lucas — Lucas Rowe."

The woman sneered, lifting her eyebrows with an expression of bitter superciliousness.

"Rowe!" she cried.

"Lucas," said he, "go and kiss your aunt!"

I tried to obey, but her eyes obliged me to pause: they hated me.

My uncle broke an awkward silence. "Put the kid to bed!" he growled. "The doctor says he's got to rest for a day or two and only have bread and milk!"

"A whipper snapper!" sneered the woman, "and death in his face; we'll have a funeral pretty soon."

My uncle stamped his foot and uttered a fierce oath. "Damnation, do as I bid you!" he roared.

The woman wilted before him, plainly terrified. Seizing my arm she dragged me from the shop, and up a flight of stairs to a tiny garret. She tore off my clothes and thrust me shivering into a dirty little trestle bed, which, nevertheless, almost filled the room. She boxed my ears as I lay helpless before her, and addressed me in a subdued but passionate harangue. Dazed from the blow, I did not understand her words, except that she seemed to promise me a future of hardship and evil.

My recollections of the next twelve years are blurred and scarcely tangible, save for a few vivid landmarks, if that word may be allowed.

I was constantly ill-treated. My uncle alone showed me any kindness; but he was almost always away from home engaged in some mysterious occupation, the name of which was never mentioned. The woman — my aunt — kept the promise she had made me. I was a weak, puling child, nerveless and spiritless, created to be victimised. Mrs. Rowe was a sour, slothful creature, bilious by nature and disposition, bitterly cruel-hearted. She obliged me to do the menial work of the household — to make the beds, scrub the floors, wash the dishes, pots, and pans. Only in the presence of my uncle did she relax her tyranny. At other times I was her drudge and slave. I suffered in silence, too much afraid of her to dispute her will, too much afraid of my uncle to inform him of her persecution. She beat me several times a day, often for no reason except her hate of me. My solitary comfort was gained in sleep. I longed for night throughout each day, and after supper crept to my room noiseless as a phantom. I think my craving for rest was inordinate and must have arisen from some constitutional requirement. I was always dull and drowsy. If left for any time alone, I immediately fell asleep. My aunt never permitted me to sleep long; I was generally aroused with a rawhide

switch. She had been a widow when my uncle married her, and possessed a daughter by her former husband, a girl of about my own age, named Judith Kelly. This child, a pretty saucy kitten then, had inherited something of her mother's disposition. She assisted the woman in rendering my life a veritable Hades. She was my sole companion during many years, for I was never allowed to leave the shop, except upon an errand, and was always cruelly beaten if I loitered or spoke to other children out of doors. Judith loved best to follow me about as I worked, with her mother's switch, and she whipped me when it pleased her fancy. The woman doted on her and spoiled her horribly. Only once did she ever raise her hand against the child, and that was because Judith, in a fit of compassion, scrubbed the kitchen floor for me, when I was ill.

I was very miserable, but I think my brain was clouded. I never imagined it possible to escape my fate or even lighten it. I learned three lessons very thoroughly — how to endure pain, how to be silent, how to hate. I hated my aunt and Judith with an incalculable depth of suppressed passion and energy. My day dreams were all of a dim and distant revenge. I determined that when I should become a man I would torture them to death. These dreams were the only solace of my persecuted hours, but they upheld me; perhaps except for them I would have wasted and died; they gave me something to live for.

Judith and I were sternly forbidden to enter a certain room on the ground floor of the house. Its door was always locked, and we came to regard it as a sort of Bluebeard's chamber, full of awful mystery. Judith was tormented with a ceaseless curiosity concerning it, but my disposition was not inquisitive. Judith longed to explore its mysteries, but I shivered to hear her talk. She called me a spiritless coward; perhaps I was.

One day she brought me a key and thrust it into my hand. “It is the key of the room!” she whispered excitedly, and danced about like a triumphant sprite in the very seventh heaven of delight.

“What room?” I asked, soberly. “We mustn't go into the back room, Judith; it's forbidden!”

She flashed at me a glance of scorn and caught my arm. “Come!” she cried, in a shrill whisper, “mother is asleep.”

I dared neither resist nor refuse, for fear that she would beat me. She pushed me before her to the door of the forbidden room.

“Open it!” she commanded.

Clumsily I obeyed. We entered the chamber. It was bare of furniture, save three wooden benches and a chair. It had no windows and no other door, but in the centre of the floor yawned a square black hole, which seemed deep as a well. Judith and I timorously approached, hand in hand, and peered over the edge. Far down beneath us shone a tiny star of light. While we gazed at the star two rude hands shot from out the gloom

and grasped us. Judith screamed with fright, I fainted. I was aroused with kicks and blows. My uncle stood over me with a stick. Judith was whimpering in a corner. “He stole the key; he made me come!” she cried over and over. My uncle did not cease beating me until a second time I sank into unconsciousness. Afterwards Judith mocked me for my stupid silence. By dint of voluble lying she had escaped punishment and fastened her guilt on my shoulders!

When my uncle was present I called the woman “Aunt,” by her command. But when we were alone, or only Judith was by, she made me name her “Mrs. Rowe” or “Ma-am.” She loathed the word “Aunt” uttered by my lips, but she feared her husband, who appeared to be fond of me, and played the hypocrite so well before him that he believed us to be a very happy family. Sometimes she would take me on her knee and pet me with loving words. My uncle would smile approvingly to see it, and scold me if I displayed any impatience at those endearments. But the fact was that while my aunt caressed me with one hand, she relieved the surging venom of her heart by pinching me with the other, and the marks of her pinches sometimes disfigured my body for days.

Mrs. Rowe did not love my uncle, but she suffered him. He seemed a slow-witted man, dull, gross, and ponderously good-natured, but when once excited he had the temper of a devil. The woman loved to experiment with this temper; it was her dearest amusement, and she exhibited the passion of a true gambler risking her hazard, in the manner she indulged herself. Whenever opportunity occurred she would bait him in a covertly sarcastic fashion, tease him with equivocally insulting phrases, vex him with the sting of poisonous words. If he displayed signs of rising anger, she took care to soothe him instantly, but in a few moments would recommence the campaign. Sometimes he did not entirely apprehend her, but as if vaguely conscious of the intended lashes, he would curse her broadly into silence. At other times the woman would miscalculate by a hair's breadth the edge of my uncle's intelligence. Then she paid the penalty. He would spring up with the agility of a tiger or a pugilist, catch her in his arms, and, after propping her against a handy wall, pin her there securely with one hand, and with the other, regardless of her screams, strike her again and again in a slow but intensely savage fashion upon the face and chest, until she seemed to faint, whereupon he would let her drop to the floor, and perhaps administer a few kicks by way of a finale.

I watched these proceedings helpless with terror and shivering at the thud of each blow, but deep in my heart I rejoiced to see her punishment. I longed for my uncle's strength, and craved to assume his part. My uncle would quit the house soon after his wife had fallen, swearing horribly. She would then arise, and when satisfied he was really gone, exact vengeance upon me. After one of these vindictive assaults Judith

accosted me, animated with a sort of fiercely compassionate contempt.

"You are a fool!" she cried. "When you are beaten, cry, cry, scream out as loud as ever you can, then mother will stop!"

"I can't!" I answered, gloomily. It was the truth. I could not. When the woman commenced to beat me a lump rose in my throat, which prevented any outcry. My heart would swell and almost burst, but I could not but be silent and stare at her, shudderingly anticipating each blow. My stillness infuriated her.

"Don't look at me with your cursed saucer eyes!" she would cry, and sometimes dash her shut hand in my face. If deep, still hate could have killed, how many times she would have died!

I was over twelve years of age before I went to school. Perhaps I should never have gone but for a chance meeting in the street with a Government truant inspector. He stopped me and asked many questions, which I answered truthfully. He then called on my aunt, and the very next day I was sent off to the nearest public school, but not before I had been severely beaten for having told the inspector the truth. I was placed at first among infants half my age and taught the alphabet, but I soon outstripped my companions and graduated swiftly from class to class. For a long while I was not much happier or better off than when at home. I found that I had exchanged two tyrants for two hundred. The school was almost exclusively attended by the children of larrikins, ill-natured and brutal boys and girls, who bullied and beat me with impunity. I was tall for my age, but so weak and frail that they could nearly all do with me as they wished. Very few failed to take advantage of my feeble frame and pusillanimity, and within a week I became the butt and victim of the school. One day in the playground a vicious little girl stuck a pin deep into my arm. Startled by the pain, I struck her. I had not intended to, for I was horribly afraid of her. But to my astonishment, instead of soundly thrashing me, as, indeed, she could well have done, she ran screaming to the headmaster. Mr. Collins called me presently before the class.

"You struck Amy Higgins!" he said, severely. "A big, hulking boy like you to strike a little girl. What a cowardly thing to do! Are you not ashamed?"

"No," I replied; "you'd be a coward yourself if you were weak like me."

"Why did you do it?" he demanded, staring at me with awakened curiosity.

I glanced at the little girl, and suddenly realised the disparity between us. "Perhaps, after all," I reflected, "she is weaker than I am." The thought filled me with the joy of hope.

"I hate her!" I answered, quietly.

"Hold out your hand!" said Mr. Collins.

I did so, but instead of caning me, he took my thin fingers between his

own and examined them for some seconds, then my face, feature by feature. I met his eyes tranquilly. I had long ago grown used to punishment. I did not fear the cane at all.

"You hate her?" he asked, puzzled.

"I hate everybody!" I replied.

He dropped my hand in amaze. "Why?"

"Because everybody hates me and beats me."

"Everybody?" he demanded.

"Yes," I replied, boldly; "even you; you are going to beat me."

Mr. Collins frowned and administered six cuts on each of my hands. But from that day I had gained a friend. He watched me, and soon discovering how tortured I was by my schoolmates, gave orders that the pupil teachers should allow me to remain in the class-rooms during play hours if I so wished. Ah, the joy of it! for an hour each day thenceforward I was immune from attack, free to lie down, sleep upon the benches or the floor, or drowsily dream the time away, my weak frame propped comfortably against a desk. Sometimes Mr. Collins would give me a sweet-meat, or a pitiful pupil teacher share with me his lunch. I accepted such attentions gratefully, but I was never really hungry, for my aunt fed me well. It is true that afterwards I had to suffer. When I quitted the school the bigger boys greeted me with stinging words: "sneak," "suck," and the like, and with still more stinging flips and blows. Yet I never carried tales to the masters, and suffered their bullying in patient silence.

One term day, after I had been three years at school, I won a prize, a beautiful illustrated copy of "Paradise Lost." It was the first happy moment of my life when Mr. Collins placed the book in my hands. I was thrilled with delight, and immediately my class was dismissed, hurried homewards to show it to my uncle. I thought he would be glad. But at the corner of the lane in which was my uncle's shop a boy named Sam Pagney wrenched my treasure from me and threw it into a deep open drain beside the path. Tears came into my eyes, the first for years. The pretty book was buried in a mass of filthy slime. Scarcely conscious of what I did, I threw myself upon the bully. A crowd collected about us; in the crowd I saw my uncle's face. Pagney beat me cruelly, for I knew nothing of fighting, but every blow he gave increased my rage. The strength of madness for a moment visited my flaccid muscles. I seized the bully by the throat, and with one terrible effort threw him into the drain. He broke both his arms in the fall. I thought that my uncle would half-murder me for what I had done, but on the contrary he praised me warmly and gave me half-a-crown; he had seen everything and appeared delighted. Thereafter I was not again molested by my schoolmates. They shrank in dismay from one who had so fiercely revenged himself, and avoided me like the plague. But I had gained what I had always craved

for — peace. I developed an engrossing love of study. I read every book I could lay my hands upon, and lived in a world of imaginative dreams. I worked so hard at my lessons that in another three years I became dux of the school.

Mr. Collins took an increased interest in me, and rather than allow me to leave prepared me for the matriculation examination without my uncle's knowledge. I was then a tall, slim lad of nineteen, a dreamer, and an enthusiast in books. I cared for nothing in the world beside. Sometimes I wondered vaguely why my uncle permitted me to remain at school, why he did not oblige me to go into some trade and earn my living; but fearing that if I asked him the reason, my course might be broken, I kept silence, for in my studies I was happy as a king. A year later I passed the matriculation examination with honours in all subjects, and I won the gold medal in Greek.

When I exhibited the journal containing the report of my triumph to my uncle he seemed dazed and scarcely able to credit the evidence of his senses. Judith Kelly kissed me on both cheeks; Mrs. Rowe was speechless, but her eyes were full of angry spite. She hated me doubly for my success.

“To-night,” said my uncle, after a considerable silence, “you shall come with me.”

There was a light of resolution in his eyes.

“Where?” I asked.

He regarded me with a strange look of mingled pride and affection. “Never mind, lad, you'll know soon enough.”

“You're a fool, Dan!” cried Mrs. Rowe, who appeared to know her husband's mind. “Remember he's not of us; blood will out — look at what he's just done, and without even your knowing, you that's so fond of him, and that he's so fond of!”

My uncle gave her a terrible glance. “Shut your dirty mouth — it's none of your business!” he said, slowly.

“He'll turn out a traitor, Dan, you mark my words!” said Mrs. Rowe.

My uncle, with a quick movement, seized the woman by her hair and dragged her to an inner room. I caught a glimpse of his suddenly bloodshot eyes and tight-wreathed lips as he passed me, the look which was ever the ensign of his fiercest rage. But that evening I was the victim of a new emotion. I hated the woman, but in my heart a sense of chivalry, possibly long dormant, awoke to unexpected life. Scarcely conscious of what I did, I rushed after my uncle and caught his hand, upraised as it was to strike. “Don't, uncle!” I pleaded.

He turned on me the face of a snarling fiend. “Let go and clear out!” he muttered, thickly. “She wants it; she'll have it.”

“She's a woman!” I said.

“Let go, or I'll kill you!” he shouted.

“No!”

For a long moment we gazed into each other's eyes, watched in terrified silence by the woman and Judith, who stood trembling in the doorway. Then a wonderful thing happened. My uncle's glance drooped, his fit of rage passed from him; he let the woman go, frowned darkly, shook off my grasp, and staggered to the doorway — all without a word. Next second he was out of the house and tramping heavily down the street. We stared after him awhile in deep surprise, then at each other.

Presently the woman laughed. “My God, how he must like you!” she cried.

Her voice was cracked with spleen; bending forward, she spat in my face. I fell back against the wall mad with rage. I longed to beat her, to crush the life out of her frame; but I asked myself, how could I lift hand against her when I had just prevented my uncle from doing that very thing. I stood trembling in every limb, fiercely biting my lips, a thousand demons toiling in my brain, and she departed, laughing mockingly.

But Judith came forward and wiped my face; very tenderly and sweetly she did it; then she put her arms about my neck and kissed me softly on the lips. I turned from the caress and stared at her helpless as a babe.

“Never mind, Lucas!” she whispered. “I just think you're a darling, that clever, and your eyes are just beautiful. I love you — there!”

I pushed her from me, gasping for breath; her words had thrilled me to the core. No one had ever praised me before. I was obliged to look at her. I saw a girl of nineteen, vulgarly but richly dressed, beautiful of face, her figure rounded and voluptuous. She had big blue-grey eyes, wicked eyes, subtly suggestive of some unknown evil. Her mouth was scarlet, pouting and sensuous. She fascinated and repelled me. My senses seemed disintegrated and dispersed. Some liked, some hated her. My heart was crowded with emotions. I shivered when her swaying body touched mine. I seemed to be awaking from a sleep which had lasted all my life.

“You love me!” I muttered, and tried to read her soul.

“If you like — when you join the Push — I'll be your girl!” she said.

“The Push — what push?” I gasped.

“Oh, go on!” she cried; “I'm not the chicken you think. I don't know nothing, 'cause you know everything; you and your medal. Never mind, take it or leave it — there's whips of others!”

She seemed in a great rage, and flounced off, leaving me in a whirl.

“Judith! Judith!” I cried. But she did not heed. I did not know how I had offended her.

III The Push

ONCE alone, the sensations which her amorous declaration had excited soon faded, but the memory of my uncle's strange promise, and the girl's suggestion, remained. He had promised to take me somewhere, to some mysterious unnamed place known only to himself and perhaps to Mrs. Rowe. Then Judith had spoken of my joining a “push.” Might not these matters be related? I wondered. It seemed improbable, for what connection could there be between my uncle and any push? He was a quiet living man; slow, self-absorbed, apparently a respectable citizen in his dealings with the world. I had never observed him mix with low company during all the years that I had been an inmate of his household. It was true that he was usually absent throughout the day, leaving his pawnbroking business entirely to his wife's management; true that he sometimes absented himself until late into the night, returning testy and ill-humoured to bed. At such times Mrs. Rowe treated him with the greatest deference, asked him no questions, granted all his whims, and yet he would often beat her cruelly without apparent reason. I was a light sleeper, and the noise of his return invariably aroused me. I used to wonder what was my uncle's secret calling, but I had never dared to question him. I intuitively realised that he meant to keep it secret, and that impertinent curiosity on my part would have been severely punished. Then again, the business of the shop was worth very little. Sometimes during a whole week no customer would cross the threshold of the street door. And yet we lived well. We had meat to eat three times a day, and puddings twice a week. Mrs. Rowe's hands were covered with flashing rings; she dressed execrably, but her dresses were made of costly materials, and Judith was always gowned in showy silks or satins. Whenever I wanted a new suit I received it for the asking. The money to purchase these comforts must have been derived from my uncle's private business, for truly the pawnbroking yielded little profit, if any. For the first time in my life I burned with ardent curiosity. I asked my fancy a hundred questions which it made pretence to answer. It seemed to me that an occupation which required so much mystery in its conduct could scarcely be an honest one. But then, if my uncle were dishonest, how had he been able during so many years to evade the law? The police of our district bore him no goodwill, I was well aware of that; surely they would long ago have convicted him, since their inclination and duty tended in

the one direction. Thoroughly puzzled, I asked myself could he have anything to do with some push-organisation — perhaps be its king? The question appeared so extravagant that I laughed as I banished it. My uncle, so stolid and round-stomached, the king of a push! Ridiculous! Besides, he always deprecated the vicious habits and violent conduct of the younger larrikins of our district who were constantly in conflict with the police. At last I dismissed a subject which I found quite inexplicable, to revolve another matter. What could Judith have meant in saying she would be my "girl," after I had joined the "*push*" — *the* push? She must then believe that I was predestined to join a push, and one particularised in her consideration. What did she know of pushes? My acquaintance with those peculiar organisations was extremely limited, in spite of the fact that for twelve years I had resided in the lowest part of Miller's Point, probably the most larrikin-infected portion of the city. But then I had always kept strictly to myself. My days had been fully occupied, and after nightfall I had never been allowed out of the house. I personally knew most of the larrikins who dwelt in our immediate neighbourhood, but not one of them was my friend. I had no friend, indeed, in the world except my uncle and Mr. Collins. I vaguely believed that pushes were gangs of vicious young men and boys, banded together in more or less organised societies under the government of "kings," whose avowed objects were the seeking of amusement, the perpetration of paltry crimes, and the protecting themselves from the consequences thereof. I also knew that the more notorious pushes had occasionally committed murder in company, kicking their victims to death in an inexpressibly savage and cowardly fashion, always in odd nooks and lonely thoroughfares so as to avoid interruption. I did not experience the least desire to join any of these brutal orders, although such was the dearest ambition of all the boys with whom I was acquainted. I was of a strangely retiring and peaceful disposition. I abhorred violence of any description. A shrill voice grated on my nerves, an angry exclamation made me shrink and shiver. I think I should have been born a girl, and yet I could endure physical pain with the greatest fortitude, the severest thrashing without a murmur. I was a curious boy. My body was possessed by two totally divergent spirits. One of these was proud, bitter, and revengeful. It treasured up the memory of injuries and acts of injustice, it delighted in devising schemes of vengeance, in planning tortures, in contemplating the imagined miseries of its enemies. It knew how to hate, how to derive strength from suffering, how to conceal a black heart with a smiling visage. The other spirit was mollient, placid, studious, and kind. It knew how to disarm its stubborn and venomous fellow prisoner with a gentle "patience!" a philosophic "*cui bono?*" It melted at an unexpected smile, forgave all injuries for a word of unwonted softness; it shuddered at an oath, and trembled at a frown — it loved best to bury itself in the love of

books, to wing its flight afar in rich romantic dreams, or live immersed in splendid visions of its own creation. Musing for hours in the gloom of that deserted room I learned to know myself better than I had ever done before. I recognised my powers, I realised my limitations. Mr. Collins, my kind teacher, whom I dearly loved, fondly believed that I was endowed with a mind of exceptional intelligence. He had once said to me, “Of all the boys who have been my pupils you are the brightest.” At another time — “Your quickness of apprehension resembles genius.” I had gladly accepted his valuation of my talents as the true one. Consideration informed me that he had overestimated my abilities. I had no special predilection — quickness of apprehension without doubt, also a love of study — but I lacked energy of application, lacked ambition, lacked a special province. All subjects of learning equally attracted me, but once I had mastered the rudiments they grew uninteresting. I believed genius to be a quality of persevering and deeply applied intelligence in one direction. I had a certain shallow aptitude for all. Yet I longed for genius, longed to possess profundity of knowledge. It was in sharp bitterness of spirit and in abased and humble mood that I confessed to myself my lacks, that I realised I should never acquire what I so ardently desired. A constitutional failing prevented me from carrying a study to its end. My mind was inquisitive rather than embracing; its curiosity was easily satisfied. The knowledge of these things came upon me with the anguish of a tragedy. I felt myself a miserable failure in spite of the medal I had won. A passage in a book on heredity which I had lately read buzzed in my head persistently like the refrain of a song: “Be sure that the progeny of ill-assorted parents will reflect as well as its father's strength, its mother's weakness; as well as its mother's strength its father's weakness. It cannot be too strongly urged or too frequently insisted on that since existing characters are the fruit of past virtues or excesses, they constitute also the condition of future generations.” The words overwhelmed me with a conviction of inexorable, unescapeable truth. “Ah!” I muttered, sadly, “I reflect my father's strength, for I am clever in a way, but how pallid is the reflection — he indeed was a genius! But I reflect also my mother's weakness. I shall never be anything but superficial, for I have no force of will! If only my mother had been another woman!”

My uncle's harsh voice broke in on my musings; he had noiselessly approached, and was standing in the open doorway: his squat, ugly figure limned against the dim light beyond.

“What's that you say of your mother, Lucas — you wish she'd been another woman?”

I had started back nervously; any unexpected sound always took away my breath, and sent a sharp pain to my heart. “Yes, uncle!” I gasped out presently.

He gave a grating laugh. “If she had been, I doubt if you'd ever been born, my lad. She was your mother whatever else, and my sister to boot, remember that, and strike me if she wasn't as good as your father any day — a damned music-playing snob!”

“She killed him — murdered him!” I muttered, angrily; any slighting mention of my father angered me — he was my fetish. It was my dearest pride to remember that he had been a gentleman.

“Served him right!” grated out my uncle; “he played up and wanted to desert her; he ought have knowed she wouldn't stand that.”

“She drank!” I cried, fiercely.

My uncle placed his stunted hand heavily on my shoulder. “See here, lad, it's a son's place to stick up for his mother, not run her down. You're not consistent, Lucas. A few hours back you stuck up for your aunt, and she deserved what I wanted to give her, but I let her be because you asked me. Your mother never did you no harm!”

“Uncle!” I cried.

“Well? What harm did she do you?”

“If it hadn't been for her who knows what my father might not have done for me — he loved me — had he lived — Oh!——” I suddenly cried out from sheer physical pain, for my uncle clutched my shoulder with a grip of iron.

“What!” he growled, “you're not contented — have I ever been unkind to you?”

“N-no.”

“Haven't I tried to make you happy?”

“Yes, uncle.”

“Have I tried to take ye from school or put you to a trade as I might have done years agone?”

“No.”

He shook me slowly back and forth, I felt his whole frame quivering with rage. “I've had offers for you — for the watchmaking, and for the foundry, where your white, thin fingers might have been of use. But no, because I saw you liked your schooling I let ye be. And this is what comes of it — ingratitude.”

Of a sudden I felt myself to be the most inhuman and thankless wretch alive. It was all true — my uncle had always treated me with kindness, he had hardly ever raised his hand to me; he had always taken an interest in my studies, and striven to encourage me. Tears rose in my eyes.

“Dear uncle,” I muttered, “indeed I am not ungrateful.”

“You'd like to leave me?” he growled.

His words gave me a curious thrill. I had never dreamed of leaving him; the very thought hurt; I realised then that I loved him, that without knowing it I had always loved him.

“I would not,” I replied, earnestly. “I hope I shall never leave you.”

My tones convinced him. He ceased shaking me, and his voice quivered a little as he said, almost in a whisper, “I'm glad to hear that, Lucas. I own up I set a lot of store by you — I have for years — I depend on ye to do me credit yet. Give me your hand, boy.”

I obeyed, and my fingers were caught in a grasp that crushed them almost to a pulp, but I did not wince.

“Promise me something, Lucas!” said my uncle.

“Yes — anything.”

“To-night,” he muttered impressively, “you'll start on a new life. I want you to promise me you'll not go back on it whatever comes, that you'll stick to it — for — (his voice quavered a little) for my sake, lad.”

I passed my word unhesitatingly. I would have given my uncle my life at that moment had he required it.

He immediately brightened up. “Come,” he said, “that's good — that's nicely done. I've great things set by for you, Lucas — a reg'lar career. You won't like it at first, for a bit perhaps, but you'll soon get over your squeamishness. And I'll help you all I can.”

“What is it, uncle?” I asked, my curiosity reviving.

“Never mind yet, I can't tell you yet.”

“But what do you want me to do to-night?”

“It's the start, boy; the thin edge of the wedge, you've got to crawl before you can walk, and walk before you can run; to-night you'll join the Push.”

“The Push!” I gasped.

“Yes, being as how you're my son — my adopted son — I got the novitiate service relaxed; you'll be elected to-night. I stand sponsor for you.”

“But — but, uncle, do you belong to a push?”

“Yes, why?”

“You have always seemed so down on larrikins.”

He laughed contemptuously. “On larrikins, yes — blasted set of fools — but we've got past all that years ago. But it must be time for us to go. Where is your aunt?”

“Upstairs.”

“Come, then!” He led me to the forbidden chamber, and after shouting to his wife to mind the shop, opened the door, which he carefully locked after we had entered the room. By the light of a match I perceived that it was exactly as I had last seen it. The trapdoor still yawned wide. My uncle lit a candle and approached the trap. I observed the rungs of a ladder down which my uncle climbed, motioning me to follow. Presently we reached the floor of a deep cellar which was bricked on all sides but one. It was about fourteen feet square. He approached the wall which was not bricked, and on removing a large barrel, the only article which the cellar contained, I perceived the mouth of a small open, sloping

tunnel about four feet high. This we entered, crouching low, and after a journey of some eighty yards emerged into a much larger passage, circular in shape, built of solid cement, and quite six feet in height. A stream of clear spring water flowed swiftly along the floor in one direction. “This,” said my uncle, pausing, “is the old pump stream which at one time supplied the convict settlement of Sydney Cove with water. It has been covered up and built over for close on sixty years.”

“The water is cold,” I commented, “is it fresh?”

“As paint, but don't drink it, lad — come on!”

We followed the course of the stream, wading through water just past our ankles, until I distinctly heard the swish of waves.

“Is that the sea?” I demanded.

My uncle nodded, and struck sharply to his left through the mouth of another passage I had not perceived. This was dry, and led us to a cellar exactly resembling the one under my uncle's house. We ascended a ladder, and rapped on a plank door, which was immediately raised. In another moment we stood upon the floor of a small room, roughly furnished as a business office. The wooden walls were thickly covered with files of account slips, bills, and other documents. A large old-fashioned deal desk occupied one portion of the apartment, and two small stand desks, littered with bill books and diaries, a letter press, and several chairs, completed the appointments. Five men who had been lounging about stood up to receive us. I knew them all slightly from having occasionally seen them in my uncle's company. They were respectable iron-workers, ranging in age from twenty to thirty.

“Good-day, sir!” said they all.

“Good-night, boys,” replied my uncle, genially. “I've brought my son along, as you see. Lucas, stand up here beside me, and I'll do the honours. This is Jack Robin, my first council — owner of this factory, and a man to tie to.”

We shook hands in silence. Robin was a tall and thin good-looking young man, with a pair of kindly eyes in his face.

“This is Jim McGrath, Jack's foreman and second council — a good sort.”

“Glad to know you,” said McGrath. The man was an undersized, black avized creature, with a huge hump on his back; his hands were hard as steel, as I found to my cost.

“This,” pursued my uncle, “is Dave Gardner, dock mechanic and third council — the man to make a fellow laugh.”

He looked it, his face was merry as a mask, and his eyes twinkled ceaselessly. “Welcome, brother Dog,” he cried, good-humouredly, “even though your tail is wet” — and he pointed to my sopping shoes.

“This is Pat Daly, piece-worker and designer, fourth council; Sour-leg is his nickname — don't cross him.”

“Ugh!” said Daly. “I don't deserve it, Lucas, my boy, as I'll prove to you one of these fine days. I'm the best tempered fellow living.”

The others roared with laughter; my uncle proceeded. “This, Lucas, last but not least in love, is Jerry Brown, the best locksmith and cracksman we have amongst us. We call him the priest because he's bald. Now, boys, that you're introduced, we'll go to the others and get to work. But before we clear out I want you to understand that I put it to you all to help my boy along, educate him — you'll not find him a fool. You, Jack Robin, in particular. Lucas, you'll start to-morrow working here to keep Jack's books; you'll be under his eyes, and must do your work like a man. I know you'll do that; and, Jack, I want you to look after him.” He paused.

“Yes, sir,” said Jack Robin.

“He knows nothing yet; he has a lot to learn, but he's my boy, and you'll find him grit through.”

“Knows nothing, sir?”

“Nothing,” replied my uncle, impressively glancing at the other.

“What about Tobin?”

“He'll join in that.”

“Good,” said Robin. “ 'Nuff said.”

“Quite,” said my uncle. “Open the door.”

“Uncle!” I cried, suddenly, “are you the king of this push?”

My uncle drew himself up with a gesture of great pride, his eyes flashed. “I am!” he said, pompously.

I was overwhelmed with surprise, and followed the king and his five councillors like one walking in a dream. We entered a large open structure, full seventy feet long, and twenty high. It opened at one end on the sea, at the other upon a street, and either door stood wide. I glanced about me half-dazed but curious. The building was filled with great iron cylinders, some finished, some in process of construction; it was only dimly illumined by a single gas-jet high above our heads; the whole place looked titanic and gloomy. It was a boiler foundry and workshop combined. As we entered some half-hundred young men emerged from the shadows of the boilers where they had been lurking, and others streamed in from the street and the floating jetty. My uncle made a sign, and the street doors were promptly closed; another, and half a dozen gas-jets sprang into sudden flame. He then seated himself upon a bench, directed me to stand beside him, and called out in a loud voice — “Pass.”

Instantly the young men filed before him in perfect silence, like so many shadows, but he narrowly scrutinized them all. Apparently satisfied at last, he stood up and addressed them in the following quaint speech: “Brother Dogs — and subjects — we are met to-night in secret conclave for two objects: the first is to consider the candidature of a person desiring to join our order, by name Lucas Rowe. You all know

him, for he is my son, and has been among you for many years, but when you come to elect or reject him, I want you to put his relationship to me from your minds, although I tell you plainly I'll be disappointed and hurt if you refuse him. The second object of our meeting here is to punish a fool. Any man who goes agin our rules is a fool, because he ought to know he'll get his divvy soon or late. That is why I call Sam Rogers a fool. I've sat on his case, and after due deliberation, reckoned that he needs a new pair of socks — so sock it is, Dogs!”

Here a low, deep murmur of approval burst from the ranks. My uncle raised his hand for silence, a soft rap had sounded on the street door — “Douse the glim!” he commanded; “you, Jack, go and see.”

In a second all the lights, save one, had disappeared. Cautious footsteps passed me, but I could see nothing in the sudden gloom. I heard some whispered converse in the distance, then the footsteps returned — “What is it?” asked my uncle's voice.

I dimly made out Robin's face. “No alarm, sir, but Tobin's just gone up Wylie Street.”

“Alone?” demanded my uncle, sharply.

“No, sir, with another cop and pistols drawn.”

“Bah!” said my uncle, “up with the rag, the sentinel's an idiot; who was it?”

“Joe Riley, sir.”

“He ought to be smacked. Well, Dogs, to business, and the first item on the programme first, that's business. Would you like to hear my boy speak before we go to count?”

The Push roared out their approbation of this suggestion.

My uncle bent to whisper in my ear. “Now, Lucas, boy, you'll have to make a speech. Here's a chance to show your book learning; do me credit!”

“But what shall I say?” I muttered, all a-tremble, “I've never made a speech in my life, uncle.”

“What you like; spout to 'em in Latin if you feel like it, but speak you must, and don't you disgrace me.”

Pale as a ghost, and shaking in every limb, I moved a few steps forward, opened my mouth, and gasped. I could scarcely breathe, my legs tottered to support me. My heart swelled and threatened to burst my ribs asunder. I felt like death.

“Go on, boy!” growled my uncle.

“G-g-entlemen,” I stammered.

The word evoked a faint laugh. “We're not gentlemen,” muttered someone, in a voice harsh with scorn.

“Speak for yourself,” cried another; “I'm a b—— toff, I am.”

“Blow me, the gal's shakin', she's like to faint — water, Bill!” cried a third.

There followed a low growl of laughter.

“Curse you!” whispered my uncle, his heavy hand pinching my arm; “if you make a fool of me, I'll break every bone in your body!”

“Scuse me,” rasped a thin voice from the outskirts of the crowd, “he's a scollard, he's may be composin' a rhyme to give us.”

“Give the boy a show!” cried a rich throaty voice from just behind me. “Buck up, lad, get it off your chest,” and my trembling hand was gripped hard. It was Jim McGrath, my uncle's second councillor, who had spoken; he gave me just the support I needed. My horrible nervousness departed as though it had not been in a great surging wave of gratitude to Jim McGrath; the hideous weight which had oppressed me lifted suddenly, I felt light as air, and was filled with a reaction of vivacity.

“Dogs,” I cried, boldly, “will you listen to me?” The sound of my voice gave me increased courage and confidence.

“Anythin', 'cept wait for ye,” returned someone, and all laughed.

Well, then,” said I, “Dogs, gentlemen, —— toffs, in fact, whatever and whoever you are, you see before you a lad who wants to join your ranks; a lad who knows very little of you, but who is quite willing to take you on trust, because he is thoroughly convinced that the men whom Dan Rowe owns as mates, comrades, and subjects, must be rattling good fellows. You know very little of me, but you are aware of my relationship to your king, and you ought to be sure that the lad whom Dan Rowe is willing to stand sponsor for must be a good sort, too. There are two sides to every bargain, but if I am willing to take you on trust, you ought to return the compliment. That's all I have to say; accept me if you want me, if you do you won't regret it. If you don't want me, say so, and be damned to you!”

I fell back amid a perfect storm of applause. I glanced at my uncle, his face was positively beaming.

“Good lad,” he muttered, then raised his arm. “Dogs, the question is before the meeting; those who accept the candidate say ay, and raise their arms.”

“Ay! ay! ay!” came in a hum, and every arm was uplifted.

“Those who object to the candidate, say no.”

There was a dead silence.

“Dogs,” said my uncle, solemnly, “you have a new brother, his name is Lucas Rowe!”

“The book, the book!” muttered all.

My uncle nodded, and, unbuttoning his coat, abstracted from beneath his vest a long, thin, leather-bound portfolio tied with strings of black silk. Two councillors brought forward a small table furnished with ink, pens, and blotting-paper. Upon this table the king placed the portfolio, and kneeling on the dust of the floor unfastened the strings. He opened the book at a particular marked page, then turned to me. “You must sign

your name here, Lucas.”

“Yes, uncle!”

“Yes, sir,” corrected my uncle, his voice stern and full of dignity.

“Yes, sir.”

He handed me a pen. I stooped, signed my name on a blank space indicated by my uncle's clubbed thumb, then stood erect. I was greeted with a long, deep sigh, as of pent-up excitement suddenly released. The eyes of all the Dogs that I could see were strangely glittering. They seemed to hail me as a victim rather than a companion. I did not know what I had done, but I experienced a sudden heart chill, a thrill of something like panic-fear. What was the mystery of the Book? I glanced at it. My uncle was carefully turning over the loose sheets that it contained.

“Do you wish to see, or shall I read the last?” he asked, addressing the Push, without, however, looking up.

“Read!” they cried.

“Attend then!” he answered, and commenced in a low, muttering voice. “I, James Rayne, for nine years a member of the Dogs' Push, being about to set forth for America on private business, before severing my connection with the Push, am desirous of transacting an act of justice, and exonerating my brother members from all suspicion of having participated in a deed which I alone committed. I, therefore, voluntarily hereby confess, declare, and assert that on the night of the —— day of ——, I, single-handed, and unaccompanied by living creature, killed Robert Pye, the night-watchman of Willis and Co.'s stores, in revenge for injuries sustained by me at his hands. I do not regret having killed him; the man was a perjured wretch, and well deserved his fate. Signed on this —— day of ——, 18 — , James Rayne. Witnesses, signed, James McGrath, John Robin, David Gardner.”

A second deep sigh testified the satisfaction of the Dogs as this terrible memorial was recited to them. I retreated into the friendly shadow of a big boiler, for I was assailed with a sort of blind, unreasoning terror. I felt that I was sharing in some dark and inexplicable species of villainy, and fell to shivering. Naturally I did not want my emotion to be observed by any of the Dogs.

My uncle got slowly to his feet. “The prisoner!” he said, commandingly.

The ranks of the Dogs opened, and a thin, weedy-looking youth stepped forward. His face was ghastly pale, his hands were tightly clenched.

“Forgive me, governor,” he pleaded, falling on his knees. “I swear to God I'll never do it again.”

“Sam Rogers,” said my uncle, sternly, “if I were to remit your punishment it would be an example for other offenders. Others would do

the same thing as you, and expect to be forgiven too. Personally I'm sorry for you, but you've got to be socked."

"For God's sake!" cried the wretched man. "I'm willin' to marry the girl."

"Whether you marry her or not, Sam Rogers, you'll have to stick to her, my boy; for she's your girl taken solemnly. You've been unfaithful to her, and will have to take the consequence. It's the rule of the Push — now silence! Councils three and five — the bench!"

Dave Gardner and Jerry Brown immediately stepped from my uncle's side, and from the rear of the building noiselessly brought forward a plain deal sitting bench, which they deposited upon the centre of the floor, the Push parting to make room for it.

"Councils one, two, and four, do your duty!" said my uncle.

Sam Rogers suddenly gave a scream, and springing to his feet made a rush for the sea. In a second, however, he was caught and overthrown. His yells were quickly stifled, and in less time than it takes to record it, the three councillors had stripped him naked. He was then roughly lifted from the floor and bound with straps face downwards along the wooden bench. I watched the proceedings dazed and feverishly wondering what was to come.

My uncle took a sheet of paper from his pocket and commenced to read therefrom a list of names. As each was called, a man would step from the crowd and take his stand beside the bench. At length nineteen men stood around the victim, who was thus hidden from my sight. My uncle paused after calling the nineteenth name, then turning round deliberately looked me in the face. "Lucas Rowe," he said.

"Sir!" I gasped.

He pointed slowly to the nineteen. "Take your place!" he said, sternly.

In obedience to his command I moved forward. The whole business seemed wildly fantastical and unreal I feverishly assured myself that I was experiencing some horrid dream, that it was not I but another who was under-going this ordeal. The hallucination comforted my mind a little. I took my place like a sleep-walker, without being conscious of the least sense of effort.

"Council one, the sock!" said my uncle.

Jack Robin disappeared into his office, and presently returned, carrying a curious-shaped bag. It looked like a woman's stockinged leg, amputated at the knee; some fluid dripped from it — I thought it must be blood, and almost fainted at the thought. This he placed in the hands of the man who stood opposite, and separated from me by the victim. This man glanced enquiringly at my uncle, who nodded as if in answer. The man then raised the dripping leg on high, and brought it down with a peculiar sweeping stroke on the back of Sam Rogers. A dull thud echoed through the deathly silence of the building. When the "sock" was raised I

perceived a mark of flame scored across the shoulders of the wretched victim; he was shuddering violently, but not more than I. The man who had struck the blow looked me full in the face, and offered me the sock: his eyes were strangely menacing. I guessed what was expected of me, and accepted his offering. I found that the sock was very heavy, it was filled with wet sand. Still animated with the idea that I must be dreaming, but too terrified to entertain a thought of disobedience, I raised the sock aloft, and brought it down gently as I could upon the body of Sam Rogers. He flattened under the blow, and in spite of his gag, uttered a hollow groan. I realised what I had done. The agony of that moment tortures me yet, and will haunt me to the last hour of my life. I believe that Sam Rogers did not endure a tithe of the pain I suffered when the sock was lifted and I saw his brown skin streaked with little lines of oozing blood. I threw rather than passed the ghastly weapon to the man nearest me, tottered a moment, clutching wildly at the air, then sank in a nerveless heap to the ground. When I recovered consciousness I found myself propped against a sort of daïs; my face and clothes streamed with sea-water. The execution was over, but dead silence still reigned. A glance showed me Sam Rogers, standing securely grasped by three or four men, a few yards off. From shoulder to thighs his back was one mass of raw flesh, which looked like butcher's meat. Jack Robin was sponging him down with water from a bucket. I could not remove my eyes from the horrid spectacle, much as I wished. The poor wretch was quavering and shrinking under each application of the sponge. “More salt,” said Robin, suddenly. A man emptied a packet of salt into the bucket, and stirred the mixture with a stick. Robin then continued his treatment of the prisoner, and from the increased twitchings of the wretch's body, I understood how much the salt stung his wounds. When all was over a large sheet of greased paper was bandaged around his back, his clothes were put on him, and as soon as he was completely dressed, three men led him between them to the floating jetty. I noticed that he was still gagged, and had to be supported, so feeble was his gait. He was lifted into a boat, his three guardians followed, and presently, in profound silence, the boat put off from the jetty, and was rowed away in the direction of the outer harbour.

I felt a hand upon my shoulder, and looking up, saw my uncle. His coat was tightly buttoned, his face was hard and set.

“I couldn't help fainting, uncle, really I could not,” I protested, miserably.

He smiled. “You'll do, my boy, you'll do,” he said, not unkindly; “lots faint at first.”

“Where are they taking him?” I muttered. “They are not going to kill him, are they?”

He shook his head. “No, boy, they will take him to a hulk of ours in

Kerosene Bay, and keep him there till he is better."

"They won't hurt him any more?" I pleaded.

My uncle laughed. "No, his punishment is over, he'll be fed on the fat of the land now, and receive two quid when he is discharged. We don't bear malice in our Push, lad. But come, it's time to go home."

He helped me to my feet, and glancing round I perceived that we were quite alone; the Push, even the councillors, had melted into air like so many phantoms. I rubbed my eyes to make sure that I was awake and had not dreamed everything, but even as I looked the gas lights were turned off, and we stood in thick gloom. My uncle struck a match and led me to Jack Robin's office. The first councillor was standing by the open trapdoor.

"Good-night, sir," he said, respectfully to my uncle, and to me, "Good-night, Lucas, I shall expect you here at eight to-morrow morning. Your hours will be from eight to twelve — from one to four; you can go home for lunch."

"Thank you!" I muttered. Next moment we were in the subterranean passage. I said to my uncle presently, "Uncle, why do you use this passage; what is the good of it?"

I heard his grim laugh. "My boy!" he returned, "we have already found it very useful, though I don't use it often now, only for secret meetings, when I have to show the Push Book, like that of to-night, so as to hoodwink the police."

"But," I objected, "if the police were to search your house they would easily discover it."

He laughed again. "They would dearly like to have the chance, my boy, but we give them no opportunity; we do all our business abroad."

"But they might."

"And if they did," he replied, impatiently, "what could they make of it? A tunnel, that is all; it's not unlawful to have an underground passage between the houses of friends."

"Do the police know that you are king of the Dog's Push?"

"They believe it, but they are not sure."

We had reached the pump stream by this, and here my uncle paused.

"Why are the police so down on you, uncle?" I asked.

"Because of the Push."

"But why?"

"Oh, they always hate what they can't get to the bottom of. They suspect us of all sorts of things, but luckily they can't hang men on suspicion."

"Uncle, what is your real business?" I muttered, half fearful of my impertinence.

He glanced at me over the candle, a queer look in his eyes.

"I am a pawnbroker."

“But you make very little out of that,” I whispered.

He laughed grimly. “No, boy, you are right, and since you are one of us now you have a right to know; I am a fence.”

“A fence? What is that?”

“I buy things which people can't sell elsewhere — tickers, chains, and things.”

“Stolen things!” I cried, in horror.

“Yes. Robin melts them down for me in his furnace at Balmain, that's why I'm often away at night.”

“What do you do with them?”

“Stones I send to Holland — to Amsterdam; I have a pal in business there; gold and silver I sell in bars to the Chinamen.” He had been watching me very narrowly. Of a sudden he cried, “You're disgusted; say so if you are, out with it!”

I felt my cheeks burn, and involuntarily I shrank from him. “I have no right to be,” I muttered.

“It's fed and clothed you these twelve years past, anyway!” he cried, angrily.

“But I didn't know.”

“You know now. What are you going to do?”

I stood looking at him, miserable and utterly forlorn. “What can I do?” I groaned. I felt inclined to weep.

“You can leave me if you want to,” he suggested, speaking very slowly. “You can put me away to the police!”

“Uncle!” I exclaimed, in weary indignation; “you don't believe that.”

“There's another thing you can do,” he went on, unmoved; “you can keep the promise you made to-night.”

“Ah!” I muttered, “I did not know what I was doing.”

He frowned, and I saw the blood mount into his forehead and cheeks, and suffuse his very eyes. It is a terrible thing to be a coward. So horribly did I fear my uncle's rising rage that nothing in the world seemed so important at that moment as that I must escape his wrath. I knew him capable of anything when aroused as he was then. Pride, honour, honesty, duty, shame, every virtue I admired or had ever hoped to possess, fled on the whirling wings of panic.

“Uncle,” I gasped, despairingly, wildly, “don't be angry with me. I shall keep my promise, you know I shall.”

His brow cleared like magic, he smiled, and his eyes grew mild and kind. I was wretch enough to feel criminally grateful for the change; I had expected to be dashed, bruised and mangled, to the streaming floor of the tunnel.

“I knew you would, dear boy,” said my uncle, affectionately; “I only tried you; but let me tell you this, Lucas, you have in future only one thing to do, and that is obey. You belong to an order now where

disobedience is punished as you saw to-night; think of it, Lucas; as for treachery" — he paused, impressively.

"What?" I muttered, timidly.

"Traitors are kicked to death, lad; but come, you'll catch your death of cold standing in this water!"

I could hear my heart beating as we pushed on our way. Any nascent idea of rebellion which had been in my mind was crushed and dead. My teeth chattered with craven fear, but I was commencing to burn with curiosity, and curiosity soon overcame my cowardice.

"Uncle," I said, when we reached the angle of the tunnel and turned to enter the passage leading from the pump stream, "are all pushes like yours?"

He shook his head. "We are the most advanced, but the others are copying us fast."

"But what do you do; what are pushes for?"

He looked puzzled, and shifted his candle from hand to hand. "Oh, I dun'no; if a member gets copped we pay for his defence, keep his missus and kids, too, if he's lagged for more than a week."

"Then it's a society for committing crime!"

"Boy, you're wrong; it was once, years agone, they all was, but now that's only incidental; my Push don't commit crimes — members might, and do now and then, but that don't affect the Push, except that we help them still. No, Lucas, what we want is to be let alone, left to amuse ourselves, and do what we like in our own fashion. We want nothing to do with outsiders, we'd be peaceable enough if we wasn't molested; a pity the cops won't understand that."

Somehow I did not quite credit what my uncle was saying, his eyes held a shifty look, and would not meet mine. I guessed he was trying to deceive me.

"But surely you must have some definite object in view, you don't go to so much trouble for nothing!" I protested.

"Hum," he replied. "Some. I guess the Dogs take an interest in politics; we held among us two hundred votes last election."

"But," I cried, "there were not more than sixty at the foundry to-night."

"The full number for a secret meeting," said my uncle. "Every district sends its representatives; we're more than four hundred all told."

I was silent for a moment in sheer amaze. "You are king of them all?" I asked at last.

"Ay," he muttered, with a look of pride, "and my word's life or death to every man jack of them. See here, Lucas" (he came quite close to me, and whispered as low as if he feared eavesdroppers in that deserted place), "you have a big future before you if you stick to me, lad. I'm no blasted dull fool as some folks think me (he tapped his forehead). In here I have big ideas, a big ambition. It's all for you. Wait a few years, go on

right, and do your duties properly, and — and — (his voice sank so low that I could barely catch his words), I'll send you to Parliament. Think of it, Lucas — to Parliament."

My uncle's dream did not move me at all. I knew nothing about politics, and had no ambition to do anything but study. But his enthusiasm was so marked, his manner so impressive, and his anxiety that I should appear delighted so painfully transparent, that I felt constrained to play the hypocrite. I pretended to be overwhelmed with my prospective good fortune, but all the while a quaint little music-hall rhyme was ringing in my ears:

Oh, Mr. Jones, of Lismore town,
Was full of aches and pains;
He fell off Locket's balcony,
And dashed out all his brains.

In the dark and dreary sky
A silver lining you'll descry,
If you wait till the clouds roll by.

Now when they found his brains all gone
They wisely agreed
To make him member of Parliament,
Where brains they do not need.

In the dark and dreary sky, etcetera.

I could hardly refrain from smiling, but fear is a most capable face-iron. During that evening I had grown to fear my uncle like the devil, and mentally resolved never to cross him in the least if I could help it. He detained me in the gloomy tunnel for a full half-hour recounting to me all the advantages which must accrue to the Push from having a private pocket member, as it were, and the glories which I should achieve as the Dogs' political representative. He confessed to me that this had for many years been his pet ambition, and admitted that for that reason only had he allowed me to stay so long at school. He wished me to obtain as good an education as possible, so that when the time came I should be able to reflect credit on the Dogs. I think my uncle was unwise to have been so frankly communicative. I no longer felt grateful for his past kindness, which I now believed had been dictated by a deep-seated policy rather than affection. He helped me upstairs to my tiny room with the tenderness of a woman. It was the first time that he had entered the place for many years. He glanced about him, sniffing disgustedly. "It's too small," he commented at last. "To-morrow I'll furnish the big room for you; we can put a mat over the trapdoor. It'll do really better as a

bedroom so long as you're careful to keep the door locked."

"Trust me for that!" I cried, delighted to escape from the loft at any cost. My uncle put his arm round my neck and kissed me on the forehead. He had never done so before. I felt embarrassed and silly, and blushed like a girl. "Good-night, boy," he said, affectionately. He could scarcely tear himself away, so much had I advanced in his regard because of my weak compliance with his strange designs. He saw in me an instrument which could be made to fulfil his dreams, and minister to his own glory. I dimly knew my uncle for what he actually was, that night: a man of extraordinary force of will and tenacity of purpose; of deep pride, yet of little vanity; of marvellous cunning, courage, ambition, and hypocrisy. I shuddered to consider the strength of character which had tricked me and many others for so many years into believing him a half-brutal, gross-witted, good-natured creature, incapable alike of imagination or invention. I considered him in his new and more truthful aspect for hours before I slept, and at last vaguely wondered how many crimes might rest at his door, how much blood might not have stained his hands. I did not attempt to deceive myself. I knew as well as if God had told me, that my uncle was not a man to spare for pity, or shrink from the sight of human blood. I felt that he was a murderer, I felt it in my bones. I cannot express the horrible sensation I experienced more clearly than by those words. It was a conviction of inexpressible sincerity, of unfathomable depth, I felt it tingle through every nerve and vein of my body; *yes*, I felt it in my bones.

IV Judith Kelly

MY work at Jack Robin's boiler shop was neither difficult nor arduous. His system of book-keeping was primitive in the extreme, and he was not the man to favour innovations. He insisted that I should persevere in his old methods, which were intelligible to him, fearing perhaps that any more elaborate scheme might puzzle his understanding. He carried on a sound and steady business, but as he paid his employees in cash, and purchased his materials in the same manner, practically all that I had to do was to enter up and look after his debit accounts, collect bills, and make up his bank balance. For this he paid me a salary of fifteen shillings per week. Mrs. Rowe levied a contribution of five shillings per week for my board. I had to pay sixpence per week to my uncle on account of the Push. The remainder was my own. I felt quite a capitalist, and immediately commenced to found a library. Jack Robin allowed me to read during my spare hours at the shop, so life seemed to have become quite pleasant and easy. To please my uncle I forced myself to study politics. I perused each morning the political articles in the daily papers, and at odd times immersed myself in the writings of Herbert Spencer, Kant, Le Conte, Fiske, and Henry George. It was at first a melancholy pastime, but I conceived it to be my duty to ground myself in all that might prove of use in my future career, and gradually grew to like it. Before many months had gone by I acquired a glib acquaintance with the laws of economics, and, influenced by my uncle's ideas, developed socialistic tendencies. My uncle obliged me to speak at every secret meeting of the Push, and insisted that my orations should always concern politics. With time I became a fluent speaker, and completely lost the nervousness which at first I suffered from. Only one restriction was placed upon my movements. I was forbidden to leave the Push district upon any pretext whatever. In consequence of this interdict, I knew really nothing of Sydney, beyond the confines of Miller's Point, Wooloomooloo, and Balmain, for several years. I never traversed George Street farther than the Circular Quay, and my ideas regarding the rest of the city were entirely gleaned from the study of maps. If I required exercise I was allowed to go sailing in the harbour, but was always accompanied by one or more of the Push. Even when a section of the Push had arranged a picnic, and proceeded to some distant rural resort to take their amusement, I was not permitted to go with them. I was actually

a state prisoner. The whole Push knew and approved. They regarded me as common property — something exceedingly rare and valuable, something which no other push owned, an instrument destined to contribute to their future power and glory. I feel sure they would have been pleased to have confined me in a glass cage, which they might approach at their convenience, so as to stare at, appraise and applaud me. I sometimes marvel now at my spiritless acquiescence in their humours. But a little analysis of my condition at that time discloses the shameful fact that vanity had much to do with my obedience: vanity and listlessness. Every member of the Push except myself was incredibly illiterate and ignorant. They could all write and read, it is true, but beyond that, nothing. Their literature consisted of penny sensational stories, such as “Ching Ching's Own,” “The Deadwood Dick Serials,” “Ironclad Bushranging,” and “The Annals of Newgate.” They also scanned the police news in the daily papers, if any of their members happened to be in trouble, and a few, including my uncle, closely studied the reports of Parliamentary proceedings. Their language was a mixture of slang, bad English, and blasphemy. I shone among them like a star. My education and scholastic pretensions were regarded by them as inexplicable phenomena. They wondered at me, praised and flattered me to the top of my bent. Their ceaseless adulation ministered an intoxicating incense to my vanity. I grew to love my lot, and would not have exchanged it to dwell in a palace. Moreover, I was constitutionally inordinately lazy. I detested trouble of any kind. At first I felt extremely annoyed at having my movements restricted, watched, and followed. I meditated rebellion, for I had long looked forward to visiting theatres, and fashionable thoroughfares, where I might observe the appearance and manners of well-dressed folk — of gentlemen and ladies — and compare myself with them. So feeble, however, were both my energy and courage that the consciousness of opposition, the knowledge of the punishment I must endure if detected, soon abolished all ideas of revolt, and finally erased my very desires. It filled me with pride to observe that I was an object of importance. I loved, after dusk, to wander through the wretched lanes of my prison suburb, affecting to be buried in profound abstraction, but all the while in reality keenly on the alert to see and hear. As I proceeded doors would fly open, windows go up. Men, boys, and maids would stare out at me, as though I were something worthy of infinite attention. Often I overheard complimentary remarks passed on my appearance, the aristocratic pallor of my face, the whiteness of my unlarrikin-like hands, the cut of my clothes, the brilliance of my last oration. Sometimes I would be accosted, but always respectfully, as a superior being. I maintained always an attitude of proud reserve, and, jealous of my dignity, discountenanced anything verging on familiarity. I was, in truth, a hypocritical young snob, and deserved a good thrashing

for my conceited airs and graces. The pity of it was that no one saw through me. My affectations were accepted as marks of genius, my arrogant manner as the proper demeanour of a “tin” god — their “tin” god. Meanwhile I despised everyone about me, even my uncle. I looked upon my brother Dogs as immeasurably beneath me. I placed myself on a private pedestal and worshipped myself with a whole-hearted admiration. I argued — I must be something grand, since I am universally so worshipfully regarded. There was a flaw, however, in my logic which I was resolutely blind to. Since I despised the people who adored me, what, then, was their worship worth? Were they wise to worship me? Did I deserve to be worshipped? But I was too vain to seriously consider these questions. I was too much of a coward to allow my contempt to be manifest. The Dogs believed that I loved them. I acted so that they should cherish the delusion. They were quite as vain as myself, and fancied themselves worthy objects of affection. So my task was not difficult, and we remained mutually self-satisfied.

My uncle's five councillors were the only persons with whom I ever unbent. In their case I had to, for they were my preceptors in push laws and habits, and as they had enlightened my ignorance in those concerns I could hardly treat them as absolute inferiors. Policy, too, urged me to make friends with them, since they possessed the confidence of the Push. This I did by devised degrees; but I permitted no familiarities, for I wished to preserve my position and their respect. I found the push laws at first bewildering, because of their many curious inconsistencies. The Dogs, for instance, were allowed to get drunk on holidays and at their social gatherings — in company; but if a Dog became a drunkard he was fined or socked into sobriety. If these methods failed of cure, he would be punished in some nameless fashion — I believe killed; but I am not sure, for there were no habitual drunkards among them. Again, a Dog could choose a mate among the girls of his acquaintance and live with her. He would thenceforth be obliged to remain absolutely faithful to her, and maintain her to the best of his ability. Yet he need not marry her. Women were not admitted into the pushes; they were regarded as inferior animals in the scale of creation altogether, but their importance as potential factors of evil was confessed in a law which enjoined death on any member who told a push secret to his wife or “donah.”

My uncle had power of life and death over the whole Push. I discovered that in the first instance he had been elected king, and that he must hold office for life or good conduct. He had already been their king for over twenty years. His lightest command was a Medean law. Disobedience was punishable by the sock, or, if he so decided, by death. His duties were manifold and onerous. He was treasurer of the Push, lawgiver, judge, and parent. He decided all disputes, adjusted all difficulties, arranged their meetings, amusements, and executions. He

decreed vengeance on outsiders, and at his command men were occasionally condemned to death and actually murdered. He also conducted, assisted by his council, all political elections in his district, and I soon discovered that his power in this respect was enormous. It depended upon him whether any candidate for Parliamentary honours should be allowed a hearing; if he said no, the Push would attend all meetings in force and so behave themselves that the poor politician would be obliged to depart without having ever opened his lips. On the other hand, the meetings would be well attended and orderly, and the fortunate candidate's oration unstintedly applauded. No wonder my uncle had conceived a political ambition. His electioneering methods were simple but effectual. When polling day came round, every member of the Push who was entitled to a vote, registered his vote in favour of my uncle's protégé. But if, as occasionally happened, the king did not care to exercise a choice, the Dogs would take a ballot among themselves, and the expression of the majority so determined would then decide the votes of the entire Push. It is a fair thing to say that the candidate selected by the Dogs' Push was pretty sure of return for that district, no matter who was his opponent. There were, of course, living in the neighbourhood some thousand of more respectable electors, but they were terrorised by the Push, and when it is considered that most Sydney elections are narrowly contested, a solid caucus vote of 200 will be admitted to be a great factor in determining results without at all regarding the other methods of the Push. I refer to the system of persecuting their political opponents at public meetings with stones, stale eggs, and continuous uproar. I have seen Sir Henry Parkes, the most popular man who ever contested an election in Australia, glad to sneak away from such a meeting, and he was old then, deeply versed in every wile for cajoling a mob, wise in every art of stump speaking, and entirely unscrupulous in his methods of securing votes. He had probably offended my autocratic uncle.

But I go ahead too fast. I have yet to relate things which happened during my initial service as a Dog, and much of these concerned the girl Judith Kelly.

As soon as Judith knew that I had joined the Push (it was not long before she made the discovery), she paid me open court. When I reached home one evening I found my room bright with flowers. That was the first symptom. Next afternoon my table was decorated with two pretty rose vases, and the walls were hung with gaudy-coloured prints — battle pictures. I detested battle pictures, and promptly tore them down. At supper Judith favoured me with many furtive glances, but I coldly thanked her for her kindness and paid her no further attention. Mrs. Rowe afterwards suggested that I should take Judith for a walk. I agreed, and we made our way to an old and unfrequented wharf, which jutted out

into the sea. We sat down at the extreme edge and dangled our feet over the water. I was shy, Judith quite confident. I nervously introduced a score of topics, which she calmly dismissed one after the other.

"Well," she said at last, "have you done?"

"Done what?" I asked, innocently.

"Done with rot," she replied, frowning; "you well know what I mean, Lucas. I've spoken to mother, she is willing."

"What about?" I gasped.

"You — you want me, don't you?"

I considered the matter. I did not want Judith for a sweetheart; in fact, I secretly disliked her, hated her, indeed, for the tyranny of the past. I did not wish, however, to hurt her feelings, and was a little afraid of her.

"Of course," I admitted, presently.

"Well, then!" she looked at me enquiringly.

I perceived that something was expected of me, but I hardly knew what. However, I had often seen larrikins kissing their donahs. I guessed it might be that. With great hesitation and extreme nervousness I slipped my arm round Judith's waist. She looked still far from satisfied. I glanced about, but no one was within sight; I kissed her. She kissed me, and smiled. I rather liked it, too; her lips were satin-soft and luscious; it was like rubbing a ripe plum across my mouth. I kissed her again.

"I guess," said Judith, presently, "we'd better get spliced; it's more respectable than the other."

Such rapidity of thought dazed me. "What other?" I asked, foolishly, to gain time.

"Just living," said Judith. "Besides, I want to be a bride and have a wedding dress."

"But," I cried, "there's plenty of time for all that, Judy; we can't marry on fifteen shillings a week!"

"Oh, yes, we can," said Judith, with a confident laugh.

"How?"

"Well, what difference can it make? It only means putting a double bed in your room."

"Judith," I cried, in utter dismay, "don't talk such nonsense. I shall never marry you until I can afford to keep you in a home of our own. Why uncle——"

"Uncle," snapped my sweetheart, "is quite agreeable. I asked him this morning; he and mother have fixed up the whole thing. Mother sent me out with you to-night to talk it over. We'll be married at the registry, but I'm to be dressed as a bride. Father is going to give me five quid for the gown. It 'll be white muslin, and silk shoes and stockings, and a veil with orange blossoms. We'll have a dance after in the Singers' Hall, and father's promised to give me a wardrobe, with a real glass door, full length, for a wedding present, and mother's going to get in a girl to do the

work, so I can act the lady."

I listened in a sort of trance. Never did a prospective bridegroom consider with so little ardour the details of his happiness. The very future seemed cut away from my feet to the last inch. I thought Judith horribly unmaidenly, bold, and forward. I liked her less every second, and each moment grew more enraged. But I dared not exhibit my anger. I knew that if this was my uncle's plan he would expect me to unquestioningly embrace it, and I feared him desperately.

"When — is all this to be?" I queried, with dry lips, after a long silence.

"When you are confirmed," said Judith.

"Confirmed! what can you mean?"

"It's to do with the Push," she replied. "I don't know what it means, but you'll have to be confirmed — they all have to. But gammon you don't know."

"I don't!" I protested. Mentally I prayed that the period of my confirmation might be indefinitely postponed.

Judith sniffed. "Oh, I know all about you Dogs; you never tell nothing to girls, I know. Never mind."

"Really, I don't know, Judy."

She turned to me. "Be confirmed quick, Lucas, won't you?" she muttered.

I saw something in her eyes that brought the colour to my cheeks, something that thrilled me through and through. I was a veritable innocent, and knew absolutely nothing of women; but for a moment I felt that if Judith were to always look at me like that I would not very much mind how soon I was confirmed.

"Yes!" I whispered.

She swayed towards me and our lips met. She put my hand on her heart.

"Feel how it beats," she said.

I was thrilled again. I caught her to me suddenly, as suddenly released her, for I almost swooned. Judith held me up and stroked my hair with her soft, fat fingers. "You are a pretty boy, Lucas," she muttered, dreamily. "I wouldn't give you up for two of Jim McGrath."

I moved away presently, quite recovered and a little curious.

"Why did you say Jim McGrath?" I demanded.

"He's after me."

"Does he kiss you?" I asked, jealously.

"When I let him."

"Do you often?"

"Sometimes, but he's rude."

"How do you mean?"

She giggled. "He's just rude, that's all."

“Well!” said I, “if you are going to be my girl you must never allow any other man to kiss you. I wouldn't stand that.”

Judith looked at me defiantly. “What would you do?”

“Throw you up,” I replied.

“Would you?” she muttered, half under her breath; “you wait, my boy. Soon you won't be able to. I'm just goin' to make you mad on me. I am.”

I smiled, for I did not think that possible.

“You think I can't!” she cried, frowning.

I got up. “You can try,” I replied. “I guess it's time to go in. I want to finish a book.”

She sprang to her feet furious with rage, and approached me, quivering all over, an excited little spit-fire. “You want to read, an' leave me for a dirty book?” she cried.

“It's quite clean,” I replied, calmly. “I bought it yesterday.”

She shook her fist in my face. “All right, Master Lucas, you wait. See if I don't pay you out for this. I'll go down to your shop an' — an' — I'll kiss Jim McGrath before your very eyes first blessed thing to-morrow.”

I was thoroughly amused. “You are not game,” I said, tauntingly.

“Go to blazes!” said Judith Kelly. I went instead to my room, and presently, deep in the mysteries of Darwin's “Origin of Species,” utterly forgot my sweetheart and her threat.

V Jim Mcgrath

NEXT morning I said to my master, “Jack, Dogs have to be confirmed.”

He glanced at me suspiciously. “Who's bin tellin' yer?” he demanded.

“Judith Kelly.”

He frowned. “What does she know about it?”

“I don't know, but at all events more than I do. I thought you had completed my instruction; how much more have I to learn?”

“I must see the king,” said Jack Robin.

“Won't you tell me?”

“Not till I see your uncle. I haven't the right. This looks serious; looks as if one of the boys had been talking to that girl. What exactly did she tell you?”

“She wants to marry me, but says my uncle won't let us until I am confirmed.”

“Did you tell your uncle about it?”

“No.”

The boiler-maker looked perplexed. He tied on his dirty leather apron and rolled up his shirt sleeves. I watched him in deep envy of his great muscle-knotted arms. Suddenly the fierce clangour of the hammers commenced in the workshop without. I cannot describe that noise; it was utterly bewildering, almost deafening, and it lasted without intermission from nine till five. The boiler-makers all had to have their ears stuffed with cotton wool to preserve their hearing; and, even so, many of them, especially those who worked inside the boilers, had gone stone deaf in spite of all precautions. Jack always wore a woollen pad right round his head when he went to work; the walls of the office were duplicated, and lined with felt between, so that business might be comfortably transacted there. I quickly shut the door to deaden the hateful sound, but even then the vibrating echoes penetrated the partition and beat upon our tympanums with painful persistency.

My master presently shook his head. “You'd better wait, Lucas,” he advised; “you'll know soon enough.”

The mystery irritated me. “It's all wait, wait!” I cried, angrily. “Anyone would think I was not to be trusted.”

The boiler-maker shrugged his shoulders. “You'd better not know till you're obliged; it won't be long, it might be any time — the trap's laid,”

he said, and immediately fastened his pad about his ears. It was no use protesting, he could no longer hear me; so I turned sullenly to my day book.

Before an hour had passed the door opened, and in came Judith Kelly, leading Jim McGrath by the hand. She locked the door behind her; there was a light of battle in her eyes. “You see!” she cried, looking at me defiantly.

I remembered her threat of the previous night, and determined to force her to its consummation. It would, I reflected, give me an excuse to refuse or postpone the marriage. Somehow I detested the thought of marriage, without, however, properly knowing why. I think I was afraid of tyranny, and I knew that, once bound to Judith, the Push would take care that I should never shake off my shackles. I said to her, “You'd better take care, Judy.”

She was in a flame on instant.

“Take care yourself. I said I'd do it, and I'll do it, 'less you apologise.”

“For what?”

“For threatening me.”

I smiled satirically, and turned to regard the foreman. He was watching Judith as though she were his dearest treasure. I had never seen such admiration, such fierce desire, in any man's eyes. I saw that he loved her. I liked and was still grateful to Jim McGrath for the help he had given me on the night of my initiation. I determined to help him win Judith Kelly. I did not want her; he did. Well, if I could bring it about, he should have her.

“Judy is dying to kiss you, Jim,” I said, quietly, “but she doubts if you would like it.”

“He lies!” cried Judith. “He dared me to kiss you; that's why I brought you here — to show him.”

“Is — is he your bloke?” stuttered the foreman, staring at Judith, but pointing to me with his grimy thumb.

“He's going to marry me,” she replied.

Jim McGrath's face went ashen white; he glanced at me with hatred in his eyes, and clenched his hands.

“You'll have to fight me for her first,” he growled.

The idea appalled me; more than ever I resolved that Jim McGrath was the proper mate for Judith Kelly, but it was necessary to decline the proferred contest in such a way as to retain my prestige, and not lose an atom of my dignity.

“Let the girl decide,” I said, with as much unconcern as I could command. “She said she would kiss you before me; well, if she does, if she dares to do such a thing — *dares* (I raised my voice). Do you hear, Judith?” I paused.

Judith's eyes glittered and snapped. I saw that I had struck the right

key.

"Well," she cried, "what'll happen?"

"Nothing. Jim can have you, so far as I'm concerned, that's all."

"A crab for you!" said Judith, and in a whirl of rage she threw herself into the foreman's arms. I wish him joy of that kiss, poor man. He must have extracted, however, some pleasure from it. When Judith fell back his face was brick red, he appeared embarrassed and inexpressibly sheepish. Judith was flushed and triumphant. But I was master of the situation.

"See!" she cried, bristling like an angry kitten. "See! Mr. Gold medal!"

"Quite well," I responded, coolly. "I'd do it again if I were you."

"Bah!"

I turned to the humpback. "Turn about is fair play, Jim," I suggested.

He waited no second bidding, but caught the vixen in his arms, and ate her face with kisses. She fought, struggled, spat, and bit at him, but she was a baby in his grasp, and he did not set her down until he had levied full toll. What a queer thing passion is! From the agitation of a moment the burly foreman was a trembling, nerveless hulk; his face was paper-white, he tottered on his legs, and looked ready to fall from sheer exhaustion, and yet he was capable of doing a strong man's work for toilsome hours on stretch without experiencing a tremor of fatigue.

Judith flew at him like a wild cat, and soundly boxed his ears.

I laughed mockingly. She rushed at me, but I held her with my eyes. She stopped suddenly, and faltered, staring at me — dumbly. I watched in her regard, rage being smothered by regret, and the dawn of fear.

"Well," I asked, calmly, "satisfied?"

She made no reply, but her bosom heaved tumultuously.

"Feel proud of yourself?" I pursued.

"I hate you!" she muttered, suddenly, and, bursting into a storm of tears, ran to the door, through which she passed out, slamming it violently behind her.

I caught McGrath sharply by the shoulder, and shook him, but he was still senseless and stupid. "You'd better go after her!" I advised.

"Haw, haw!" he guffawed, looking at me with disdain; "she hates you — she said she did!"

"All the better for you," I responded, cheerfully; the disdain of a dolt did not disturb my vanity at all. "Follow her; strike while the iron's hot, Jim, and you'll get her for your girl."

But the idiot would not go; he stood rubbing his ears, which no doubt still tingled from the hearty clouts they had received.

"You love her," he said, and repeated in a vague enquiring voice, "you love her."

"Not a bit," I answered, briskly. "You can have her with my blessing; go in and win, boy."

But he was still suspicious. “Anyone that wants her must fight me for her!” he declared, defiantly.

I wished the man not to think me a coward. I looked him firmly in the eyes. “My dear McGrath!” I said, contemptuously, “if I wanted the girl I would not ask your permission on the matter, and if you got in my way I'd break your neck with all the cheerfulness in life.”

To my amaze, the foreman backed away from me, visibly cowed. I had overawed him with words — mere words. He made no reply, but slunk out of the office, all the fight taken out of him. Oh, the joy I felt! I was released from the girl, and I believed myself strong enough to cope with her future importunities. But above and beyond that I had made a marvellous, glorious, and invaluable discovery. I had sounded the true value of hypocrisy, the tremendous potency of words. By assuming a resolute demeanour, by the use of bold words, I had victimised a man who could quite easily have broken me with a blow — a man of whom I had secretly for ten minutes stood in mortal fear!

I was by nature weak and cowardly, but from that moment I no longer experienced any terror of my associates. They were all more physically powerful than myself, but such was their dense ignorance that apparently they did not know it. I was armed with a command of feature and a fluency of tongue which they could not compete against. I resolved that for the future, should ever occasion arise, I would so comport myself that they would believe me gifted with superhuman courage. It would, of course, be merely an assumed virtue, with nothing substantial to support it. I would despise myself, perhaps, for the pretence, but what mattered that, so long as I could deceive the Push, and through that deception secure a very real advantage?

At lunch Judith did not put in an appearance. I enquired after her with my usual amiability.

“She's ill,” said Mrs. Rowe, eyeing me with open suspicion; “lying down with a bad headache. What have you been doing to her?”

“I? — nothing.” I knew how to look as innocent as a lamb.

Mrs. Rowe sniffed. “She says she wouldn't marry you if you was the only man alive,” she observed, sourly.

“What's that?” growled my uncle. “Have you two been rowing?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “Not rowing, uncle; we had a slight difference of opinion.” I leaned forward confidentially. “If I were you, uncle, I wouldn't attempt to force Judith's inclinations. I should dearly like to have her for my wife, but not while she is in love with another man.”

“What!” thundered my uncle.

“A rat!” cried Mrs. Rowe.

“Excuse me, aunt,” I said, turning politely to the woman; “you are in error. She is in love with a Dog — his name is Jim McGrath. She

brought him to my office this morning, and kissed him before me, presumably so that there should be no possible doubt in my mind as to the state of her affections."

My uncle sprang to his feet. I had anticipated what must occur, and was perfectly prepared.

"Judith," he roared, "come down here at once!"

Mrs. Rowe's face was pale with passion. I had cut her on the raw.

"I'm sick!" replied Judith.

"Sick or not, come down sharp, if you don't want me to go up and fetch you!" yelled my uncle.

We heard the noise of a sudden stir and bustle, and Judith, arrayed in a dressing-gown and with a bandaged head, presently made her appearance. She looked defiant and resentful, but she did not glance in my direction. "What's the matter?" she asked, her lips pursed out insolently.

"Did you kiss Jim McGrath?" shouted my uncle.

Judith turned a livid face to me. "Sneak!" she hissed.

"Tell him he lies," muttered Mrs. Rowe.

"I loathe and despise him," said Judith; her eyes were simply blazing.

"I'll break every bone in your body," cried my uncle, wrathfully.

"Uncle," said I, "please don't make a fuss about the matter. It's true I'm fond of Judith, but I'll get over it."

He sat down staring at me helplessly; he was utterly out of his depth, poor man.

"It was a mistake," I pursued, presently. "Judy would have done your bidding obediently enough; but how could I marry her, she caring for another fellow? it wouldn't be fair to her or him, and he is a good sort is Jim McGrath."

Judith gasped, she was almost choked with rage, but she was slow-witted, and all she could find to say was — "He's a better man than you!"

She wanted to hurt me, but she did not know how. She was not aware that she simply played into my hands.

"You're a fool!" shouted my uncle.

I waved my hand, and muttered soothingly, "When a girl loves a man, she thinks he's the best on earth, even if he has a hump on his back. She's not to be blamed, uncle!"

Judith darted to the table, and seized a knife, with which she rushed at me. But Mrs. Rowe intercepted her daughter, and, no doubt in fear of my uncle's rage, dragged her shrieking wildly from the room.

The king of the Dogs gazed at me in ludicrous dismay, too shocked for a while to speak. At last he gasped out, "I'll be hanged."

I shook my head and shrugged my shoulders, muttering, "I hope not, uncle!" He did not hear.

"Females is devils!" he declared. "Would you believe it, Lucas,

yesterday that she-cat came and asked me to let you two be married. I thought it all fixed; she seemed mad on you!”

“They never know their minds two hours together!” I replied, with a pathetic smile. “I don't mind telling you, it was a blow to me, uncle — a cruel blow!”

“Don't you go taking to drink on top of it!” he said, anxiously.

I was near bursting with suppressed laughter. “Don't fear!” I stammered. “I flatter myself I'm not such a fool as that.”

My uncle was much reassured from observing that I disposed of an excellent supper, in spite of the sorrow he imagined gnawed at my heart; but some anxiety remained nevertheless.

“There's one thing,” he suggested, hopefully, as we left the table, “any other girl in the district would rush ye — if you dropped a hint.”

“Thanks,” I replied, drily. “One experience is enough for me. I guess I shall remain a bachelor.”

When I reached the privacy of my chamber, I chuckled, or rather tried to chuckle, for my hilarious mood had passed, and the fact was that I was not overpleased with myself. It was true that I had slipped out of a nauseous entanglement; true that I had paid off a long score long owing to Judith and Mrs. Rowe. But I did not find vengeance quite as satisfying a morsel to the taste as I had anticipated. I could not help being sorry for the girl! I had treated her abominably. Her “sneak!” too, had cut me to the quick. I did not think I had behaved like a gentleman. I wondered how my dead father would have regarded my behaviour. I decided after a while that he would have condemned me as an unchivalrous young cad. I could not take my usual interest in reading that night, and — yes, I am not ashamed to confess it — I felt that I had fallen so far beneath my ideal of conduct, that in very misery and contrition I cried myself to sleep.

VI A Snare

FOR several days Judith did not speak to me. The sight of her pale face and reproachful eyes filled me with remorse. She seemed ill and dispirited. Mrs. Rowe, whose ancient habits of tyranny were no longer applicable to my emancipated manhood, nevertheless continued to persecute me in petty ways. She attempted to revenge my treatment of the girl by giving me cold tea at meals, sweeping the dust of the house into my bed-chamber, and talking at me when my uncle was not present. I bore these small-hardships with a meek spirit, conscious that I deserved them. But one night my remorse vanished. Strolling along a deserted wharf-front I saw Judith and Jim McGrath seated on a broken packing-case, whispering together. The man had his arm round the girl's waist, and she appeared perfectly contented. So strangely was I constituted that I experienced a thrill of jealous rage. It seemed to me that Judith was a wanton. I had believed that she really loved me, and I thought she was committing a sacrilege. It was my vanity that was wounded. But, calling philosophy to my aid, I slipped noiselessly away without their having observed me. I went for a long walk, and, at last with equanimity restored by meditation, returned to the shop. Judith was waiting for me, seated on a chair before the locked door of my room. My uncle and aunt had gone to bed.

"I want to speak to you," said Judith.

I opened my door and invited her within. I lighted a candle and offered her a chair, but she preferred to stand. But I was tired, and sat upon the bed. Judith closed the door, then moved to face me.

"I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for your sake," she said, nervously. "You'd better look out for Jim McGrath."

"What do you mean?"

"He's jealous!"

"He has no cause."

Judith blushed furiously. "I know that — you needn't tell me that."

"What is the matter with him, then?"

"He knows I'm fond of you."

"Judith!" I cried.

"I had to tell him," she muttered.

"You don't mean to say——" I stammered.

She answered quietly, "You treated me that bad, Lucas, I hated you as

long as I could. But——” and she paused — pale and trembling. I had never seen her look so pretty.

“Are you his girl now?” I asked, after a long silence.

She nodded.

“I suppose I'll have to look out for him. What will he do?”

“One of these days he'll down you, if he gets a chance; you mustn't let him.”

She came and sat down upon the bed beside me. “I wouldn't like you hurt, Lucas,” she whispered.

“Do you love him?” I asked.

“No.”

“Yet you are his girl now?”

“That's your fault.” She rubbed her head softly against my shoulder like a kitten. I tried not to, but something made me put an arm about her, and thus she rested for several moments, sighing at intervals.

“Let's be brother and sister; I'm fond of you really, Judy,” I whispered at last.

“Kiss me!” she said.

“Sister,” I muttered. She held up her face. “I'll never be true to him,” she whispered, and our lips met.

I was dreadfully perturbed. My work to free myself from the girl seemed rendered useless. If this sort of thing were to continue, who could foresee what might not happen? I saw myself in excited fancy lying in some dark corner a mangled corpse.

“Judy,” I said, desperately. “It's not right of us, you know. You belong to him.”

“You'd get the sock if it was known,” she muttered.

I shuddered. “I'd kill myself first.”

“Don't you fear — I wouldn't tell.”

“It isn't that!” I protested, untruthfully. “It's not fair to him; you ought to be true to him.”

“Brother!” said Judith, and looked into my eyes. I had not thought her so clever. I could not help admiring her. The girl's eyes were curiously soft, but also curiously passionate.

“You'll marry him?” I asked.

She kept looking at me, and I could not remove my fascinated glance.

“On one condition.”

“What is that?”

“That you'll have me for your girl — secretly.”

How much had her instinct taught her of me? I wondered. She seemed to know that my aversion to her only extended to the binding form of marriage. I was still too innocent to detect anything criminal in her proposal, but I foresaw hosts of dangers to myself. I knew what the Push would think of such an intimacy; how they would punish it! I don't think

Judith was as innocent as I was. Her eyes were full of mysterious knowledge, and seemed trying to instruct me.

"You are afraid!" she muttered, with a sneer.

"It would be wrong," I returned, uneasily.

"Brother and sister?" she asked.

I shivered; her eyes gave the words another meaning.

"No," I said, and "no, no, no," trying to gain strength from vehement iteration of the word.

"I love you," she whispered.

I felt the world swing round me. I sprang to my feet. "You are a wicked girl!" I cried. But I could not escape her eyes; she arose, and came to me slowly, slowly, but inexorably like the march of destiny. I was as helpless as a bird in the net of a fowler. She clasped her arms about me, and, holding me closely to her, forced me to feel the pulsing softness of her frame. She kissed me again and again, and each second I was more surely her prey. "See here," she said at last. "You needn't bother, Lucas. I won't worry you; but you like me, don't you?"

"Yes," I muttered. She smiled, sighed, and immediately departed.

And yet the moment after she had disappeared I loathed her; shrank from the memory of her embrace, as from some black evil, and fiercely wiped my lips which burned from her caresses.

VII The Strike

FOR a period extending over several months Judith kept her promise, and did not attempt to harass me. Jim McGrath proved a jealous lover, and watched her narrowly; perhaps she was afraid of him. Me he avoided, but I think he bided his time. His disposition was sullen, morose, and bitterly revengeful. He felt in his heart that Judith did not really care for him, and therefore he hated me. I knew him for an enemy, but I was not afraid; I thought, because I had overcome him in our first encounter, I should be able to do the same again if need arose; but occasionally meeting his eyes by chance, I received a thrill: they were so savage, so brute-like in their expression of mute malignity.

My life was uneventful. I studied, read and roamed, keeping much to myself. I only met Judith at meals, and seldom conversed with her even then; twice a week I harangued the Push, and rose steadily in their favour and esteem. I was fast sinking into a groove, a rut of monotonous and unexciting existence. My uncle dropped frequent hints of a trial which I should have to undergo in the near future, a mysterious ordeal, the meaning of which he refused to explain; but the constant “wolf” cry dulled my curiosity. Time passed, nothing happened, and the peace I loved seemed to be entirely mine. I developed both mentally and physically; sometimes I was impatient of my lot, and craved for change, but not often. The adulation of the Push acted as a balm, it was unstintedly lavished upon me, it comforted and soothed all discontented moods. So I lived until occurred the Great Maritime Strike, which so vitally affected the shipping and commercial interests of Australia, and placed Sydney for a time under arms. The Push district bordered upon a great number of wharves, and was, therefore, directly affected by the strike. Many of the Push were also themselves either sailors, dock assistants, or wharf labourers, and members of labour unions. The harbour was filled with crewless ships and steamers. Nearly all the shipping offices were barricaded and besieged. The strikers conducted their campaign with orderly violence. They flung out pickets from their regular bodies, and patrolled the streets in force, so that the ship owners should have no chance of introducing blackleg crews on board the vessels. Business in the city was practically suspended, and the entire population watched the struggle. Naturally feeling ran high. The Dogs' Push subscribed liberally to the strike fund from their reserves, and the

whole Push took keen interest in the strike. An army of special constables was enrolled by the authorities, and the military were held in readiness to check an insurrection. All streets in the neighbourhood of the sea were invaded by excited crowds, which thinned neither by day nor night, and the police hung on their outskirts watchful as hawks. Riots constantly occurred, and the strikers generally obtained the advantage. In spite of their vigilance, however, steamers left the harbour continually, manned by clerks, gentlefolk, and other blacklegs. The strikers, in sheer desperation, resorted to more stringent methods. When steamers appeared in readiness to sail, they were boarded in force from the water, and most reckless fights ensued. The police were at last armed with revolvers, and it seemed that a species of civil war was about to be waged. I felt the greatest sympathy for the strikers, for they had been called out in a just cause, and were, perhaps, the most hard-working and miserably underpaid body of labourers in Australia. My uncle, however, for some recondite reason of his own, sternly forbade me to take any part in the struggle, and enjoined me to keep within doors, except during my journeys to and from the foundry. Inflamed with excitement and curiosity, I found his mandates extremely distasteful, but for a time obeyed them. Perhaps I should have continued obedient, had it not been for a chance meeting with Jim McGrath. We came face to face one afternoon, just without the entrance of the foundry, as I was about to return home for the day. I had paused to watch a company of police marching citywards, with several prisoners in their midst. McGrath had been drinking; he smelt of rum, and his face was like a flag of wrath.

"Quit loafing here!" he cried, fiercely. "Get home, or I'll make you!"

I flushed with rage. "How dare you interfere with me? I shall do as I please!"

"Will you?" he grated, and seized my arm.

I tore myself free, and, swinging on heel, strode in the direction of the city, my only thought to show McGrath that I despised him.

"I'll tell your uncle!" he shouted, but I did not turn.

Pride came, and anger changed to stubbornness I made my way to Margaret Street, and in reckless mood sought the shipping. Soon my progress was blocked by a great shouting crowd. From the hill I perceived a large punt packed with grimy-faced men lying by the jetty. The crowd stared and strained in one direction, hoarsely exclaiming, groaning, and at intervals madly cheering. The men on the punt alone were silent. Burning with curiosity, I swarmed up a lamp-post, and, over the heads of the surging mob, saw that a desperate struggle was in progress between a body of police and strikers immediately before the North Coast Company's office doors. Slipping down, I wormed my way through the press, eager for a closer view. It was a mistake. Once in the grip of the crowd, I was helpless. Panting and breathless, I was forced,

being slight and lithe, to the very front rank, and was presently thrust into the heart of the *mêlée*. The police were in a bad plight; they were covered with flour, half blinded, and plainly overmatched, but they fought like heroes. Half frantic, I struck out right and left at friend and foe. I was pitched backward and forward like a shuttlecock, and thought my last hour had arrived. Suddenly there came a lull. Bruised, dazed, and bleeding, I stood for a second in a little open space. The combatants had separated; why, I did not know, but I was wild to escape. I darted forward, intending to slip through a serried opening, but a pistol flashed in my face, and I saw that the police had drawn their revolvers. I heard a mighty groan, and the throng fell back.

A policeman caught me by the collar and held tight. Mad with fear, I dashed my shut hand in his face, and wrenching myself free, ran like a hare along the houses towards the water. The crowd uttered a great cry, and, making way for me, turned to watch my flight. Two constables gave chase. I reached the end of the alley, and sprang for the rail of the jetty about two yards before them. A big man standing behind the rail helped me over and swung me on to the punt, where room was made for us both. I forgot to be afraid, and shook my fist in the face of the constables. One pointed his revolver at me, but he was detached from his companions and at the mercy of his enemies. Someone jerked his arm, and the bullet went singing into the sky. I felt myself a hero! The punt immediately pushed from the shore, and was sculled swiftly into the bay. I observed a large iron steamer backing out from the Company's wharf into the stream. The name on her bow was *Alice*. I understood then the reason of the riot. She was manned with blacklegs. The men on the punt were armed with coal. As the *Alice* turned they planted the punt before her bows and discharged a volley of missiles at the captain, who stood upon the bridge. He escaped unhurt. Fired with enthusiasm, I picked up a stone and hurled it, hardly knowing what I did. It struck the helmsman on the shoulder, and he dropped to the deck below. The captain sprang to the wheel and shouted out some orders. But my companions were frenzied with delight. They yelled like maniacs, patted me on the back, and one big bearded fellow actually kissed me. The crowd on shore cheered my exploit to the skies. I felt myself doubly a hero! But the captain of the *Alice* knew what he was about; he got his vessel under way, and headed directly for the punt, at full speed. In a second all was confusion aboard. Every man shouted a different direction or command. Our steerer got confused, and the oarsmen pulled different ways. We swung round, and the huge iron bows of the *Alice* almost shaved our stern as she thundered past. To add to our discomfiture, several buckets of hot water were poured upon us from the towering bulwarks. My companions utterly lost their heads; but, filled with rage, I caught up an iron bar and hurled it at the ship. It smashed through a portion of deckhouse with a crash which resounded

loud above the din. The strikers looked upon me as though I were a sort of battle-god, and frankly paid me homage as commander.

"Where to now?" they asked.

"Back to the shore!" I cried. My blood was up. I wanted revenge upon the policeman who had fired at me. I could not understand myself. I was completely reckless and on fire. But when we reached the jetty the police had disappeared. I was, however, recognised, and loud cries greeted me from Dogs among the crowd.

"Speech, speech!" they yelled.

Nothing loth, I sprang ashore, and was immediately hoisted on to a platform of boxes which appeared with the speed of magic.

"Friends!" I shouted. "Do you know what has happened this day? I shall tell you. We, the maritime working-men of New South Wales, have been long oppressed by capitalists, who have stolen the fruits of our labour, ground us down by every means which their cursed ingenuity could devise, forced us to toil early and late for a wretched pittance, and crushed our every effort to lift ourselves from the mire in which their infernal greed has plunged us. This is an old story. We have for years writhed under the injustice, and at last in the might of right we have risen united, like brothers, to resist the tyranny of our oppressors. What have we asked for? An advance in wages — not a great thing, not an unjust thing, but a thing we are well entitled to, for it is our labour, our toil, our sweat and suffering which keeps the fat man fat. We only want a little of his fat, or rather our fat, since we have made him fat. What happens? Rather than give us what is rightfully our own, he prefers to spend his stores to the last farthing in keeping us slaves, and forging new and stronger fetters for our limbs. He does not fight us himself — he dares not, for he is a coward, the beastly fat man! He sends his servants to fight us. His police — curse them!"

Here burst out a deafening thunder of applause. I scarcely waited for it to subside. "Friends," I shrieked, "to-day the fat man has put the last straw on the patient camel's back. While he fought us fair, we didn't mind; we are strong, and can fight at least as well as his paid hirelings. But, friends, to-day he passed the Rubicon — to-day his brutes have fired upon us. Friends, there are women among you, women and children. The police fired upon them, too. Shall we suffer that? shall we allow our wives and sisters to be shot down like dogs, by bloody hirelings?"

The uproar became so tremendous that I was forced to pause. I gazed at the sea of wild and frenzied faces, terrified at the passions I had stirred and fanned to life. I had spoken without thought, my senses carried away on a swirl of passionate emotion. I realised that I had been mad, criminally mad. The crowd was ripe for deeds of reckless violence. It howled and surged and screamed; it merely required a leader to become a mighty weapon of destruction. Its eyes gleamed like wind-driven sparks

of fire, its clenched hands struck at the sky, its cavernous mouths vomited fumes of rage, “My God! what have I done?” I cried, and did not hear the words. A cold perspiration drenched my face. I grew dizzy and strangely weak. Suddenly a man stood beside me on the platform. He waved his hand, and for a moment a hush succeeded. “Friends!” shouted the man. “Look at this boy. Look at his arm; he is shot, he is wounded!”

A low but terrible roar answered him; then a second hush.

“Look!” cried the speaker, “he totters! he faints! Revenge! Revenge is the word!”

“Revenge!” yelled the crowd.

Vertigo assailed me. The world swung round my aching eyes, fast and ever faster. I slipped into blank unconsciousness. I opened my eyes, wakened to life by pain. I was lying in my own bedroom, a strange man was sponging my arm over a basin of hot water. I was sick and dizzy. My uncle and Judith Kelly stood beside my bed, looking pale and anxious.

“I fell,” I muttered. “What happened then?”

My uncle started forward, his face lighting up. “Hush!” he said.

“What happened?” I persisted.

He whispered in my ear. “S-sh! The surgeon! They wrecked a warehouse, but the police were too strong for them!”

“Were any arrested?”

“Yes, but none of ours!”

I sighed. “Are you angry with me for breaking bounds?”

He shook his head, and muttered low: “It's the best thing you have ever done. The boys will just worship you; and, better than all, no one spotted you — not a single copper — not even Tobin, though he was there.”

I did not know who Tobin was, but the surgeon prevented me from feeling curious, so sharply did he hurt me in probing and dressing my wound. My uncle took him off at last. Judith fell to kissing my bandages. I was too weak to reprove her, and sleep came upon me before she had done.

Fever chained me to my bed for several weeks, and long before I resumed work at the foundry the great strike was a thing of the past.

VIII I Am Confirmed

"STICK to words," said Mephistopheles to Faust. "It is just when understanding fails that a word is useful!"

This ironical apothegm of the great German master struck me when I read it as a piece of profound wisdom, and wisdom peculiarly applicable to my position. I therefore turned it to such astute advantage in my speeches to the Push, I so enveloped them with verbiage, that they believed me the greatest orator on earth. My popularity rose by leaps and bounds, especially after my adventure with the police. I was their hero, and their instructor. I was required to make several speeches a week. I lectured them almost nightly, but always secretly, and they hung upon the words of my discourses with obsequious attention. I propounded to them the tenets of socialism, and soon every Dog was an ardent socialist. They began to grow ambitious, to want and to know what they wanted. What they did not know was how to get that which they wanted, and what I pretended I also desired. I was no wiser, but that they did not dream. When they asked questions I shrewdly concealed my innocence with voluminous phrases, spoke vaguely of an approaching general distribution of property, and suggested that this fanciful millennium would come to pass shortly after the time when I should enter Parliament. In their besotted ignorance they believed my promises, and impatiently looked forward to the time when I should come of age. My uncle watched my progress in a trance of delight. Each petty triumph I achieved stirred him to his depths. His affection for me developed into a species of intoxicated adoration. I could wind him round my finger whenever I chose. One evening, while chatting together after supper, about ten o'clock, there came to him his five councillors to present a petition from the Push. The Dogs humbly implored him to consent to my immediate confirmation, so that I should be bound to their interests for all time. I did not yet know what this confirmation portended, but such a proof of their regard touched me deeply. When the petition had been read aloud by Jack Robin, I joined my entreaties to those of the councillors.

"Yes, uncle!" I cried, "let me be confirmed as soon as possible!"

Jim McGrath watched me with glittering eyes.

"Sir," he said to my uncle, "the trap is laid; last night it was smelt, to-night the bait will be snapped, and the spring fall if you give the word."

"Twice last week," said Dave Gardner, "he went down Gates' Lane

alone. He now feels confident; besides, he is so anxious to win his last stripe, that he's game for anything," said Jack Robin. "It can't be put off for ever."

"The youngster's ripe and willing!" muttered Pat Daly.

"It's time Lucas was fixed," said Jerry Brown.

Their words were Arabic to me, but I listened with the greatest interest and curiosity.

My uncle mused; he looked steadily at me for quite a time. At last he turned to the petitioners. "He knows nothing!" he said. His voice was tremulous with feeling.

"But he's got to learn," urged Robin, with respectful persistence. "The Push is tired of waiting."

"Lucas," said my uncle, "go for a stroll, and come back in ten minutes."

I obeyed, and wandered forth down Conduit Lane, deep in thought. In my abstraction I walked straight into the arms of a policeman. He was a big and burly man, with a fat conceited face; he had sharp ferrety eyes, and a coarse but resolute mouth.

"Ho!" he cried. "You're the bloomin' orator, aren't ye?"

I looked at him disdainfully, and tried to pass; but he blocked the path. "Not so fast, young man; where are you off to?"

"What business is it of yours?" I demanded. I did not feel at all afraid of the fellow, because I knew that at a call twenty Dogs would rush to my assistance.

"You cheeky pup," he cried, angrily; "you just answer me or I'll run you in for vagrancy."

"How you talk!" I observed, indifferently; then, out of policy, "What do you want to know?"

He caught me by the collar. "This is what I want to know: the lights in Gates' Lane go out every night at ten. You tell your pals that if they do to-night Senior Constable Tobin 'll want to know the reason."

"That's not a question!" I retorted, insolently. "I'll trouble you to take your hand from my shoulder. You have nothing to do with me."

"I've heard of your speechmakin'!" he said, "an' I'll just give ye a word of warning, young man. You're very young, but you're goin' the right road to fit yourself for a hemp collar. A Dog, aren't you?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"A precious innocent!" he cried.

I swung on my heel, for he had let me go, and I judged it time to return to the shop, but he marched beside me keeping step.

"A lot of cowardly murderers!" he muttered, "but I'll lay them yet."

"Whom are you speaking of?"

"You and your kidney."

"You are mad!"

“Am I?” he growled. “Three in nine months, and I'm mad!”

“Three what?”

“Men disappeared, sonny. You tell your Push I'm on their trail, and your precious uncle, too.”

“What has he done?”

“Never mind.”

We paused before the door of my uncle's shop. “Goodnight to you,” I said, and turned to go in, but he caught me by the sleeve, and whispered: “Look here, sonny, you seem a bit above your crowd. You can't think much o' them. Now, you work in with me, and I'll make it worth your while.”

I laughed. Already several policemen had made me similar proposals. “You are barking up the wrong tree, Constable Tobin.”

He shook his head, muttered something inaudible, and strode off. I noticed that his boots were shod with felt; he made no sound as he walked.

I entered the shop, and pushed into the dining-room. My uncle and his councillors had apparently come to an agreement. They looked grave and thoughtful, with the one exception of Jim McGrath, who seemed extremely pleased. He was rubbing his hands together, as in the operation of soaping them; they were disgracefully dirty.

My uncle said to me: “Lucas, boy, it's fixed!”

“I'm to be confirmed?”

“Yes.”

“Then now I may know what it means, eh?”

The councillors glanced at one another questioningly. Jim McGrath uttered a grim laugh. My uncle replied: “It's not a thing to talk about, Lucas, but you needn't worry long. It'll take place to-night.” He shivered as he spoke, and his eyes held an anxious, furtive look that made me vaguely alarmed.

“It won't hurt?” I queried.

My uncle's face turned sallow; he laughed uneasily. “Wait,” he said. “Who was that you were talking to outside?”

“Constable Tobin! He was very tragic. He told me to warn you to beware. He calmly suggested that the Dogs' Push are a lot of murderers, and told me to inform you he is hot on your trail.”

My words were a perfect bombshell. My uncle and his councillors sprang to their feet, and, it was plain to see, were covered with confusion.

“You see, sir,” cried Jack Robin, “it is high time.”

“He should have been put to bye a month ago,” said Dave Gardner.

Jerry Brown gesticulated fiercely. “To-night,” he muttered; “to-night!”

“Something has been found out,” said Pat Daly.

Jim McGrath licked his lips; he seemed the least nervous of all. “I'll fix

him," he growled. "Don't worry, boys; leave him to me! — he paused — "and Lucas!" he added; his voice was threatening, he looked savagely at me.

I turned enquiringly to my uncle. He nodded slowly, and waved his hand.

"To-night, Lucas, Jim will be your captain; you'll do all he says — and remember it's by order of the Push. You may not like the work, boy," he muttered, rapidly; "but it's got to be done. You can't escape it, and I depend on you to do me credit. When it comes to the point think of this, the safety of the Push depends on the work of to-night; we are all in the same ship, and it means sink or swim together."

My fears awoke in full force. I anticipated some evil, perhaps some wild and awful crime in which I should be forced to participate.

"It — it — it is not murder?" I gasped.

"No!" said my uncle, and his eyes glittered. "McGrath, I give my boy into your charge; treat him kindly!"

"Trust me!" replied the humpback. He moved to the door, eyeing me all the while. "Come on!" he said.

"Go!" commanded my uncle.

I was overwhelmed with uncanny apprehension. I had a horrible sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. My steps were slow and uncertain; my feet seemed of a sudden heavily weighted. Outside the shop Jim McGrath passed his right arm through my left. "Cheer up, covey!" he muttered. "I'll be as good as a bad stepmother to you."

"Where are we going?" I demanded.

"To my shanty first."

At the corner of the street we met Judith Kelly. She started on observing me in such close companionship with her lover.

"Hallo!" she cried, "you are sudden friends."

"Bless you; we love each other," said the humpback, with a grating laugh.

"I'm glad to hear it," replied Judith. "Where are you going?"

"For a walk."

"It's late."

"Not eleven yet."

"When will you be back, Lucas?"

"Soon," I answered, vaguely.

The humpback laughed again. "Don't wait up for him, Judith. He's like to go home drunk; to-night he's on the loose!"

"Oh, Lucas!" said Judith, reproachfully. "You are not going to make a beast of yourself?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. I don't know at all."

"You try it on," said the girl, turning fiercely to her lover, "and I'll chuck you like a stick. As for you, you are tight now if you ask me."

“Garn!” cried McGrath, contemptuously. “I've not had 'arf a pint since sundown.”

“Lucas, you mind what I told you!” muttered Judith.

“Oh,” I answered, wearily. “Don't bother about us, Judy. I'll be alright.”

“I'll leave some supper for you in the dining-room,” she said, and moved off.

The humpback pulled me along — very roughly; but my temper commenced to rise. I shook myself free somewhat angrily. “I'm not your prisoner,” I muttered.

“You'll do as I bid ye,” he growled.

“I'll not be dragged.”

As we passed beneath a lamp I saw that his eyes were lurid and bloodshot; he was chewing savagely at his underlip.

“What's the matter with you? you look as if you'd like to kill me!” I muttered.

“So I will, if you show funk to-night,” he retorted. “Kill you like a crow; like this!” and, with a motion of his talon-like hands, he clawed the air as though my throat was in his grasp. I shuddered, and with the greatest difficulty concealed my terror.

“Two can play at that game,” I said, with all the hardihood I could muster.

He made no reply. We reached his cabin soon. It was on top of the hill overlooking Darling Harbour; a dirty four-roomed stone cot, built an age ago by convicts. It commanded an immediate view of the low-terraced tenements before the sea, but a wider prospect also of the shipping beyond, the bay, and in the distance the twinkling lights of Balmain. It was a black night. There was no moon, and the sky was heavily overcast with clouds. It seemed to me a night fit for the darkest of crimes. I cannot describe the feelings which oppressed my fainting spirit as I gazed out over the mysterious waters. In the middle distance a ferry-boat swam through the oily gloom — a monster, with a hundred fiery eyes. I could see people, little black specks of people, moving on its decks. I vainly craved to be among them. For one wild moment I thought of flight as an escape from the vague evil which threatened, from the terror and loathing of my companion, which obsessed me like an insidious disease. But I had no refuge in the wide world.

Jim McGrath, having opened his door, returned to my side, and for a moment peered in the direction of my distracted glance. “Not a flake of white, not a breath of air. Wot a night!” he muttered.

The depths below us seemed a very pit of Hades. The lamps on the far shore excited no reflections, the surface of the waters was indistinguishable from the gloomy atmosphere, only the lamps twinkled up through the haze like warning beacons, or uncanny demon eyes.

“Wot's that?” said the humpback, suddenly clutching my arm, and pointing seawards. A white shape fluttered through the blackness — whining as it flew — some big sea-bird.

“A lost soul,” I whispered.

He shuddered. “Wot a beastly thought; but it wasn't, it was a curlew.”

“At night ghosts walk,” I whispered; “the air is full of spirits, can't you feel them, Jim?”

“Rot!” he gasped. “Stow such twaddle.” But the man was superstitious, and my words profoundly disturbed him. “There's no such things,” he protested; “when we're dead, we're dead — like dogs.”

“No!” said I, impressively as I could. “Only fools think that; we are watched, Jim McGrath — watched by a thousand devils. They are gloating over us and what we intend to do, because one day they hope that we will be devils, too.”

His teeth chattered in his head. “There's no such things as devils; it's all rot,” he muttered.

“Jim, do you believe in God?”

“No, do you?”

“Yes.”

“Come inside,” he said, gruffly. I followed him into the cabin. To my surprise the interior was wonderfully natty and clean. “Speak low,” he advised. “Mother's asleep. I don't want to wake her.”

On the deal table was a jug of rum. Jim helped himself to a generous measure, and gulped it down. “God!” he said, presently, “is a bogey invented by the lazy sky pilots as a livin' for themselves.” The rum had quickly restored him to his normal state of brutal opinionatedness.

“Indeed,” I observed, with sarcasm; “did they tell you?”

“I'm no fool,” he replied; “I can see a hole through a ladder, I can. Once a sky pilot come to me, he did; tried to convert me; a priest he was, Father Le Rennitoul he called himself.”

“He met his match,” I suggested.

“Bet your pile on me,” replied the vain rascal. “I told him I'd go to church if he'd work a Bible miracle, or prove in some way he wasn't a lyin' villain. He prayed over me till I got sick; 'twas all he could do. But it didn't come off; he caught the old woman, though, but she was born a Catholic, she was. She goes to Mass twice a week now.”

“To pray for her son!” I suggested.

“Damned if I care what she goes for! she's a blasted old fool!”

“Shut up!” I said, sternly.

We stared at each other for near an hour in deep silence, but the air was vibrant with evil feelings. We hated each other intensely, and our eyes made no secret of our disposition. Jim McGrath would dearly like to have strangled me, but he restrained himself, and was supported by some secret exultation. Often he chuckled as at some thought of joy. I grew

with the passing moments more and more oppressed, more fearful, more excited. Sometimes it was with the greatest pain that I kept from shrieking aloud or bursting into hysterical laughter. We heard the city clocks chime for midnight, yet still sat on. At last there reached us the sound of a thin, weird cat-call. My companion raised his head and stared at the open door. A curlew wailed. He got to his feet and uttered a low, horrid laugh. “Time's up,” he whispered. “Come and be confirmed!”

I arose, tottered, and almost fell. My heart was beating like a boiler-maker's hammer. My body ached with fever pains; my hands were hot and clammy. The humpback caught and shook me in his iron grip. “I knew you was a coward!” he grated, low.

“Pity!” I moaned. “Oh, Jim, let me go; don't take me with you. I'll be your slave!”

His eyes glittered with a fiendish joy. “This is just nuts!” he muttered, derisively; “I wish Judith could see you!”

“Jim” I whispered, feverishly, “I'll be your slave for life if you save me.”

He pushed me a little from him and glared into my eyes. “I'll strangle you like a pup, and the Push'll kick you to death if you show the white rag to-night, understand that. Bah! you've got no pride; you're not worth hating. Come, I rather like you!”

His scorn restored me to my senses. I clenched my hands, and tried to smile. “Lead on!” I said, “che sera, sera.”

“What's that?” he asked, suspiciously.

“Lead on!”

He caught my left hand within his right, and drew me into the street. Near the stone steps we struck sharp aside, and descended towards the sea, picking our way cautiously, and gliding like phantoms past the silent houses of the quarter. All the street lamps were extinguished, and the darkness was profound. Very soon I was lost, but the humpback never paused. We trod, often ankle-deep, through slush and rubbish which had been carelessly thrown out by the filthy housewives. The stench was abominable. Presently, however, we reached a cleaner part. We slipped through a maze of stone-paved narrow streets and alleys, tenanted with an inexpressible silence, the blackest gloom. But all the while I felt that we were watched; that eyes peered at us from the deepest shadows, that in spite of the deadly stillness the quarter was awake and on the tiptoe of evil expectation. At infrequent intervals cat-calls sounded faintly, seemingly far off. As we proceeded, snakes hissed at us unseen — human serpents. It was a region of devils. I shivered like an aspen, and wished a thousand times that I were dead. My dry tongue clicked against my parched palate and hurt. I could hear the noise of it distinctly, and wondered if also others could. I was past the pitch of swooning, though I longed to swoon. I think that no man has ever experienced

greater anguish than I did during that abominable night. At last we paused before a high stone wall. With his free hand my companion felt his way along the brick-work. I panted with terror. Suddenly came a little grating sound. A door had opened in the wall. The humpback pulled me to the ground. Crouching there, I watched sixteen silent shapes of men defile into the lane. The door closed then with a low click. The shadowy forms vanished like spirits. Twenty minutes dragged slowly by, and still we waited, crouching on our haunches. McGrath's clutch on my hand never relaxed. He hurt me cruelly, but I endured so many other forms of pain that only occasionally did I realise that piece of torture. Suddenly the humpback stood up, a curlew had wailed far to our left, from the opposite direction to that which we had followed.

"Do exactly as I do!" whispered McGrath; "you know what disobedience means."

I could not reply. I nodded, though I knew he could not see. Soon about a hundred yards down the lane a tiny ball of fire flashed across the path, quavering for the space of a second here and there. It disappeared. The humpback crushed my hand so that I almost uttered a cry; he pressed me against the wall. In the deep silence I caught the sound of furtive footfalls. The ball of fire again quivered into view. It flashed before our feet and passed, fleeting along the path, feeling its way like a finger of flame. It issued from a bull's-eye lantern in the hand of a man who was creeping down the lane not ten yards from where we stood. I could see nothing but the lantern. It approached us seemingly of its own volition, swimming through the air about four feet from the earth, a veritable fire-fly.

It passed us and vanished. The owner of the light had paused. The only sound I could hear was the throbbing of my bursting heart. I felt I stood upon the threshold of a tragedy. A low sigh wailed through the night, then a sort of angry hiss. A deep guttural exclamation sounded in my very ears. The bull's-eye flashed in my face, and a rough hand caught me by the throat.

"Whom have we here?" a voice cried out. "Ha, the orator." The voice was that of Constable Tobin. "I arrest you as a suspicious character; you can't say I didn't warn you," he growled.

I trembled in every limb. Jim McGrath still held my hand. He gave a low whistle. I heard a sound like the pattering of raindrops on the sand. Figures swarmed about us, but unseen. The constable uttered a hoarse, startled scream, and blew his whistle long and loud. Then he groaned, stumbled, and fell. For a horrible second his lantern flared up. Dimly I discerned a crowd of wretches surrounding the prostrate man, who savagely but silently kicked him as he lay upon the ground; then the lamp expired. I heard dreadful thuds, a few deep groans, then nothing but thud, thud, thud!

“Dogs!” said Jim McGrath, “here is Lucas Rowe waiting to be confirmed!”

I was dragged forward helpless as a babe, amid a low, deep storm of hisses. The thuds ceased. “Kick,” said Jim McGrath. I stamped upon the ground, desperately thankful for the dark. The fiends thought I had kicked the constable. My agony was so great that I moaned aloud. The devils thought it was their victim who had groaned, and, muttering applause, returned to the charge as at a signal, in a body. Suddenly from our left came a shout and the crashing snap of a revolver. The devils ceased their horrid work, turned and incontinently fled. The humpback, who had never let go my hand, sprang away like a deer, dragging me with him; but in a second he stumbled. I sprawled to earth beside him, but to my joy scrambled up again unhurt and free. Someone clutched my coat in the dark. I struck out wildly, frenzied with terror.

“Fool!” muttered a voice. I was caught up, bodily carried a few yards, and swung over a wall. I fell sprawling upon a patch of soft turf. My captor followed with the speed of thought, wrenched me to my feet, and pulled me down a flight of winding stone steps — down, down, down. Giddy and breathless, I was always clasping at the black air. It seemed a bottomless pit which we descended, but after a period we emerged into an alley; hurried to its end, it was a cul-de-sac, climbed a wall, crossed a slush-covered yard, and, scrambling over a fence, finally stood panting and palpitating before the door of Jack Robin's workshop. My captor opened the door without speaking, pushed me within, and locked it behind us. He led me to the office, and there struck a light. I saw Jack Robin; his face was brick-red, and perspiring with exertion. He held the candle under my face, and examined me attentively. “You are baptised,” he said, grimly. I felt like death. I commenced to weep and wring my hands. Jack Robin gave a ghastly smile. “I felt like that — once,” he said, gravely. “Bear up, boy, you'll have to get home as quickly as you can; a lot of houses will be visited to-night!”

I put my hand to my forehead. “It's here!” I cried; “here — can't you see it?”

“What?” he demanded.

“The brand of Cain!”

He shuddered, glanced at me curiously, then, stooping, pulled up the trap. He forced the candle into my hands. “Go,” he said, hoarsely. “Go home quick.”

I slipped down the steps, and hurried through the tunnel, pursued by haunting fears. I reached my bedroom, and undressed; I know not how. Then I fell upon my knees beside the bed, and humbly thanked God that I had had no hand in Tobin's murder. He had not suffered by me. I had not touched him. I could not have saved him, at least I tried and still try to think so. It was the first prayer my lips had ever breathed. I crept into

my bed at last. God knows the sort of night I passed. I cannot describe it. My pen falters and language fails when I essay the task, and once again I endure a small part of the horror which possessed me throughout those few but dreadful hours before the dawn. When daylight came I left my bed and glided like a spectre to the mirror. My face was ashen white, haggard, and incomparably old. Indeed, from that moment I was no longer a boy. I marvelled that my hair had not turned grey as I have heard hair does from abnormal mental suffering. I had suffered — surely enough! But I did not feel the guilt of murder on my soul — only a heart-numbing knowledge of crime which robbed my mind of peace, and weighed upon my senses like a pall.

IX A Vow

ABOUT six o'clock my uncle knocked softly at the door. I unlocked it, and he entered. We gazed at one another with painful intentness for a dreadful apocalyptic moment.

“Well?” he muttered at last. I had never seen him so grave and careworn; his eyes were puffed and swollen as from many successive nights of feverish unrest, his cheeks hung over his jaws in two hollow, flabby bags.

“Uncle!” I cried, and threw out my hands despairingly.

He put his arms about me, and half led, half carried me to the bed. “My poor, poor boy,” he said, his voice was inexpressibly pathetic. I broke down at that, and wept like a child; he soothed me with the tenderness of the gentlest mother. He had never been so lovable and kind. I knew him for a black murderer, and his touch burned me; yet my heart so yearned for sympathy, for a grain of comfort, that I welcomed his caresses though they seemed to blacken all my soul. My tears gave me no relief, they soon dried up, and I lay gasping for breath, shuddering from the anguish of my thoughts.

“Is he dead?” I whispered at last.

My uncle nodded; he seemed to choke, and put up his hand to his throat. “McGrath was copped,” he groaned.

“What!”

“Yes, they caught him!”

“He'll betray us!” I cried, wildly.

“No; but they'll hang him, poor fellow. He's as good as dead.”

“Anyone else?”

“No.”

Strange as it may seem, I experienced a profound pity for McGrath. I do not know why; he deserved none, and I hated him.

“You'll help him?” I whispered. I was caught in a spasm of mortal pain, to which a shivering fit succeeded. By turns I was cold as death and hot as fire, and the bed shook with my shudders. But my uncle was deeply preoccupied, and noticed nothing.

“As soon as he's committed, I'll get either Pilcher or George Reid to defend him. His mother will be here soon; I'll send her to Wallace, he's the best criminal solicitor. Luckily we have plenty of gants in hand; but this 'll run to hundreds, and never a chance to get the poor cove off, I'm

afraid.” Seemingly forgetful of me he maundered on.

“You are in no danger, are you?” I muttered, my teeth chattering, as I spoke, like castanets.

He shook his head. “No, they can't touch me. Luckily a king never has to take a hand in those affairs.”

“You are exempt because of your position?”

“Yes. I'm treasurer, you see. We must always save the treasurer scot free, else how could we run the show at all?”

My shivering fit passed. I turned wearily in the bed. “Uncle, I am so sick!” I said.

He patted my head. “You must brace up, boy; you'll have to go to work so as to nark the cops. They'll be round us like hornets to-day; they're sure to arrest lots on suspicion. You mustn't give 'em a show.”

“I'll die if they come near me,” I cried.

He shook his head. “You're not fit for this sort of thing, Lucas boy. I've known it for a long while, but it's all over now. Keep a stiff upper lip a bit longer.”

“Uncle!” I cried, raising myself in bed. “Rather than go through another night like last I'd cut my throat. I swear to you by God, I would.”

“Hush,” he answered, soothingly; “you've no cause to growl. I have a plan mapped out for you. I'm goin' to send you away.”

“Where?”

“You're confirmed now, that was all as was wanted; so when this biz is over, you'll go, not far, but far enough. It's all arranged. I had it out with the Push a month ago in a secret meeting, and they all agreed to it. I've been keepin' it as a surprise for you.”

“Where, where?” I muttered, feverishly.

“To Forest Lodge, or Newtown, close to the Uni.”

“But why, why?” impatience was consuming me.

“So you can go to the Uni.”

I almost swooned with amaze. “The University, you mean?” I gasped.

“Yes.” He sat down beside the bed. “The Push 'll do the payin'; they're sendin' you.”

I could not speak. He proceeded, with suddenly kindling eyes: “It's been my ambition for years. The whole thing's like this. You're to live right away from us, never come here 'cept now an' then to see me. It'll be give out to outsiders that you've come in for money from your father's folk in England, and that you're goin' to take your degree at the Uni, and go in for politics like a gentleman. And you're to make yourself a gentleman — mind (he interjected, fiercely), a real gentleman, and no shenanikin, copper-bottomed A1 at Lloyd's. Then, ye see, when ye stand for member later on, you'll get respectable, all-round support as well as from the Push. See my blimey dart? You'll be sure to go in slick then! See my dart?”

I nodded helplessly, but I was aflame with excitement.

“No one 'll know at the Uni. where you come from, or who you really are,” he pursued, “that is, if you play the game right. It's for that reason you've been really kept in bounds here these years past, so that none of your future mates could place you. Ain't I a cute old cuss, eh?”

“Wonderful!” I gasped.

“You'll board at some good house, an' live like a toff. I'll allow you four quid a week; that's enough to live on handsome, and pay your lecture fees besides. I found out from your old schoolmaster.”

“Does he know?”

“Think I'm a blasted ass?” he growled. “He know? — if he knew, everyone might as well. Not much. I wormed it out of him!”

“This is November; lectures recommence in March!” I cried.

“March will do,” replied my uncle. “We'll fix it at March; you've passed your Matric., so you can sail in straight off and win. How do you like the plan?”

“I love it.”

“I'll hate to lose you,” he remarked, “so'll the boys — but it's for the good of the Push!”

“Uncle!” I muttered, “why don't you stop this murder business? It's bound to come out some day!”

He frowned. “It keeps 'em together, boy.”

“It's horrible,” I groaned. “They are all murderers, are they — all; tell me, uncle?”

“You are the last,” he answered, grimly, “but we'll be having some more recruits presently. Three lads reached seventeen last week, and all have given notice they want to join.”

“Will they have to assist in a murder, too?”

“Yes; but we don't call it murder, Lucas; it's vengeance!”

“But what for — what did poor Tobin do to merit so terrible a punishment?”

“Poor Tobin! — you'd not call him poor Tobin if you'd ever fallen into his clutches. All the cops are brutes, but he was the worst of the lot, a reg'lar bloodhound. Do you know what he used to do when he got hold of a Dog?”

“No.”

“As soon as he'd got the poor beggar in a cell — no matter how quiet he'd taken the arrest — Tobin'd lambaste him nigh to death, just 'cos he was a Dog, and then next morning charge him with assaultin' him — him — in the execution of his duty, as well as whatever he'd copped him for. I've known the cops tear their uniforms a-purpose to get our fellows lagged. They hate us payin' up the fines; it's their biz to lag us.”

“But why?”

“Out of spite and ill-feeling; the cops are all that down on pushes, you

wouldn't believe. It's the cops what makes us as bad as we are; there wouldn't be much done if it wasn't for them."

"How many have the Push killed this year?" I whispered, presently.

"Three — two outsiders, and Tobin. We don't often get a chance at a cop. Tobin is the first for years."

"What did you kill the others for?"

"They gave evidence against a Dog in a trial over a year ago for burglary. It was to teach people to mind their own business."

"I never heard of it," I cried, shuddering. "Was anyone caught and hanged for the crimes?"

My uncle laughed grimly. "They was too well managed, boy. No one interfered with the boys at their work."

I watched him, fascinated with horror.

"What did they do?" I gasped.

"Oh, we planted the bodies well. They wasn't found for weeks, and the coroner's jury brought in suicide in each case. They thought they had drowned themselves."

"You buried the bodies at sea then?"

"Off the cliffs at Bondi, one; he was washed ashore at Coogee. The other we sunk off Garden Island, and the current took him to Watson's Bay. You see, it's this way — we never use any weapon, only boots; always kick 'em to death, Lucas, and then after a day or two in the water not a mark shows!"

The infernal genius of the plan dazed me. My brain commenced to swim, and for a while I thought I must be sick. But soon the mist left my eyes, and I could see again. I was tortured with a dreadful curiosity. I wanted to know all there was to know. I felt labouring under some terrible spell.

"Tell me," I muttered, "has my case been different from the others?"

"Nought a bit."

"They all had to go through the same?"

"Yes."

"We could all be hanged then if it was known?"

"We're not going to be hanged," said my uncle, firmly.

"How many men have the Push killed altogether?"

"Since I've been king, about two a year; that makes about forty-four."

"Do you like it, uncle?"

"Can't say as I do," he frowned.

"Why don't you stop it then?" I asked, fiercely.

He shook his head. "The boys won't. Them as is in for it's not likely to let in other coveys on the soft; it'd be too dangerous, there would soon be traitors croppin' up, and then the old hands 'd have to swing. There's no way out of it that I can see," he added, despondently.

"They are devils," I muttered; "just devils."

My uncle turned pale. “That's not for you to say,” he muttered, angrily.

I made a sudden desperate resolution. “Uncle,” I said, as calmly as I could, “you'd better kill me!”

He stared at me in the profoundest surprise. “What?” he stammered. “What?”

“I have done with the Push,” I said, slowly. I could feel the perspiration oozing out through all my pores.

I thought my uncle would fall in a fit. His eyes were blood-shot and glaring. “What's that you say?” he roared.

“Unless you swear to me that the Push will never commit another murder, uncle, I give you my word of honour as a gentleman — my father was a gentleman, uncle. I vow it by the memory of him, I shall kill myself the first opportunity I get. I would not turn traitor whatever happened, but I will not belong to a gang of men who are always plotting murder. What has been done is past, and no one can help the past; but we can control the future. Do you think I would work and devote my life to wretches like that? No, uncle, I'll die first.”

“You are mad, clean mad,” he stuttered.

“No, uncle, I have never been so sane, so quiet and cool. Look at my hands.” I lifted them for his inspection. A great and blessed calm had fallen upon my senses. Some inner voice — a sort of spirit — told me that I was doing well, and my heart was filled with courage and determination. It was like a wonderful benediction. I feared nothing any more; neither man nor fiend, neither life nor death. If my uncle had knifed me as I lay before him, I would have died with a smile upon my lips. My thin fingers were as moveless as stone.

“Think of the Uni., Lucas,” muttered my uncle. To my surprise he also was calm, he had suppressed his rage. Marvelling at him, I smiled and shook my head. “I shall be almost glad to die,” I said. “It will be a happy escape from a life of crime and terror.”

“How would you like to be kicked to death?” he asked, “like Tobin!”

I did not even shudder. “Please, uncle, stun me first,” I answered.

A look of terror crossed his face. He got up and paced the room, treading, in spite of his agitation, softly, like a cat. He stopped after a few moments and faced me. “I could never change the boys,” he said.

“Uncle, you know you could do anything with them!”

“It wouldn't be a Push any longer.”

“What do you want a Push to be; a political society, don't you? Is not that your ambition? You don't want to murder men for that, uncle.”

He buried his head in his hands. “I'll think it out,” he said, at last, and moved towards the door.

“Goodbye!” I muttered.

He paused, glanced at me, and of a sudden went ashen grey.

“What do you mean?” he cried.

“When you have thought out your thoughts I shall be dead.”

He gave a low, hoarse cry and rushed to the bed. “I'll strap you down,” he cried.

“That would postpone it a while,” I answered, calmly. Our eyes met, and it seemed to me that our souls spoke to each other.

“You mean it?” he asked, hesitatingly.

“Yes, you know I do.” I felt lifted from the earth. My spirit seemed already half released from its shackles. I experienced a sensation of measureless power and elation. of boundless indifference of life; and yet of profound and awful melancholy. With all my heart I wished to die.

“Boy, you don't know how much I care for you!” he groaned.

“Prove it, uncle!” A dream came over me. I felt my spirit completely detached from my body. I seemed to hover about the bed an invisible essence, all the weaknesses and temptations of the flesh things of an inexpressibly distant past. I thought I must be dying.

“Lucas, I'd do anything for you.”

“Uncle, you know what I want you to do.” My eyes were gradually closing, my lips moved of their own accord.

“I'll do it,” said my uncle.

“Swear!”

“I swear!”

“By God?”

I heard a faint echo repeat the words “By God!” I heard footsteps, and the bang of a sharply-closed door. Then I floated dreamily into a maze of soft, sweet shadows, which gradually enclosed me, growing dark and ever darker. I had swooned.

I was awakened with passionate caresses. Judith Kelly was raining kisses upon my lips, my eyes, my cheeks, eating my face with her kisses. Quite suddenly I was strong. I pushed her from me, regarding her flushing face without either pleasure or resentment.

“Jim's killed a cop. He'll be hanged,” said Judith; “then I'll be free again, and we——” She paused, frozen by my glance, I think. I shrank from her outstretched arms, loathing her for her callous heart, and passed swiftly from the house. Breakfast I could not touch. I worked that day like a slave.

The police did not visit Jack Robin's workshop; he bore too respectable a name, and was not known to them as a Dog, so I, too, escaped their attentions. The afternoon papers told us that McGrath had been committed for trial for wilful murder; he had reserved his defence. The trial would take place within the month; meanwhile many further arrests had been made. I scanned the police report, shuddering to read the terrible words which the journal used in describing the crime which I had so involuntarily witnessed. They appeared to apply to me. All the Dogs I met stared at me curiously; many came up and shook me by the hand. I

hated them all, and in the evening hurried home in order to escape their attentions. The quarter was alive with police, but I was not stopped. None visited our house. I afterwards discovered that in consonance with a time-honoured Push precedent my uncle had taken care to establish an unquestionable alibi so far as he was concerned, in order to preserve his kingship untainted by suspicion. For that purpose, he had at the time poor Tobin was being murdered, visited the nearest police-station in order to lay some imaginary complaint before the officer in charge. As a consequence the police gave him no thought, and he was free to work for McGrath's defence. This he managed very cleverly through his councillor's mother, and made no public appearance in the matter at all. Before the day was over the best obtainable solicitor, and one of the most eminent pleaders at the Sydney Bar, had been retained, under great expense, to conduct the prisoner's defence. I wonder from what source the lawyers could have fancied that their big fees were derived. Surely they might have guessed that a simple boiler-maker could not have found them of himself. That night the funds of the Push were depleted by two hundred pounds. When my uncle told me, I said to myself, “With half that sum I would count myself blessed indeed. I would steal away and hide myself at the world's end!” But then I remembered my uncle's promise to me, his sworn promise, and I tried to rest satisfied.

X Amber Eyes

THE old saw is fallible — “murder will out.” Murder does not always out. Jim McGrath, when brought to trial, stoutly protested his innocence, and for the rest maintained that he knew absolutely nothing of the crime. He had been offered a free-pardon if he would turn Queen's evidence, but had doggedly refused. After all, the testimony against him was purely circumstantial. He had been caught within fifty yards of Tobin's body, lying on the ground half-stunned from a fall, stretched out at full length, his feet pointing in the direction of the victim. Then on arrest he had failed to give any satisfactory account of his presence in that locality. It was far from his home, he had no apparent business there. He elected to give evidence on his own behalf, and asserted that he had been quietly strolling along, when he suddenly heard a revolver shot, and the moment afterwards had been knocked down by running men, whom he could not see because of the dark. Cross-examined, he denied having heard any previous out-cry, a policeman's whistle, or groans. He swore that he had simply gone for a stroll because he had found himself unable to sleep. He failed to explain the reason of the direction in which his body was lying when he was discovered by the police, but vigorously protested he had been walking towards the scene of the crime when overthrown. Counsel for the defence smoothed this difficulty, and demonstrated that the direction of his body might just as easily be accounted for by a sudden assault, as the theory put forward by the prosecution that McGrath had stumbled and fallen in his flight. The defending barrister, an eminent Q.C., made out a very strong case for his client, and succeeded not only in shaking the minds of the jury, but in disturbing the opinions of the Sydney public. Judge Windeyer, however, summed up dead against the prisoner, laying special emphasis on the extraordinary fact that McGrath had sworn he did not hear Tobin's whistle for assistance, when at the time it was blown he could not have been far off, and two constables had heard it from a much greater distance. The jury, after a lengthy deliberation, brought in a verdict of guilty, but nevertheless strongly recommended the prisoner to mercy, and their rider had the effect of unsettling even the judge's strong opinion of the case. Sir William Windeyer put on the black cap, and sentenced James McGrath to be hanged; but on the following day made such representations to the Executive Council that the sentence was presently commuted to one of

imprisonment for life.

Thus Jim McGrath passed from the world of freedom, to expiate the brutal crime in which he had participated, in the solitude of a cell. The Push to which he had been so faithful — to the point of his own annihilation — regarded his fate with mournful gratitude. He was looked upon as a hero and a martyr, and to this day his memory is revered among them. His old mother was voted the sum of twenty-five shillings weekly for her maintenance, but in a few weeks she died of a broken heart; she had idolised her son, and had never believed him guilty. The whole Push attended her funeral; their faces were very grave, almost sorrowful. Afterwards many got drunk without permission; but my uncle paid their fines, and never sought to punish them for the breach of Push law involved. It was a very sad and dreadful time, and made a deep impression upon us all. Even Judith Kelly, who was secretly glad to be rid of her lover, went about with a downcast countenance, discreetly garbed in black. But as McGrath's widowed sweetheart, she was looked upon with great and universal pity, and I think she extracted a good deal of quiet pleasure from the attentions that were paid her, and the many consolatory presents she received from various members of the Push. McGrath was always alluded to as a dead man, he was called “the late,” and voices were hushed in naming him. So deeply was he regretted, that it was resolved to allow his place in the council to remain vacant for six months as an appreciatory tribute to his Push virtues. Speech-making was forbidden, no picnics were undertaken, and the Push-met only in secret conclave. One evening my uncle informed me that he had broken to them his new resolve, and informed them that he would no longer countenance the murder of their enemies. He said that they had accepted his determination without a murmur. In a queer depressed fashion I was glad, but I had suffered so much that all news was good. If he had told me that my death had been decreed I should, I think, have welcomed the knowledge with equal joy. Through the days, and far into each night, I sedulously worked at my studies. I had purchased the text books required for my first year at the University, and in three months knew them almost by heart. In work was my only solace, my only respite from black, haunting thoughts. I wonder if I was singular in this; — sometimes after a wretched night spent in hopeless brooding, my feelings would grow so dull that I would say to myself, “At last the limit is attained, I have not the capacity to endure further pain; I am at peace.” Then for many hours I would be callous, indifferent, heavy. But some trivial thing would happen; a look, a cough, a hand-clasp, and the whole agony would recur with renewed force, if with slightly altered pain-tones. For instance, if for a time I had sorrowed because of my unwitting guilt of knowledge, and a respite came, I was never so hardened that a hoarse voice could not recall Tobin's dying groan. Over and over again I would hear his groans. I

would grow used to them, listen to them so long that at last I could hear them almost unmoved. Another respite, then a sigh would send me into brooding on my cowardly inaction. I felt myself an unspeakable thing that I had not gone forward and shared McGrath's fate, confessed my companionship with him on that night of horror.

The ban upon my wanderings had been removed, but I did not avail myself of my new freedom. I lacked interest in anything but work. My uncle often turned me out of the house, forcing me to take exercise. I would take a book, wander to some secluded spot very near the sea, read and brood. I have seen Tobin killed a hundred times a day, a thousand times a night. Not as the crime was actually committed, shrouded in the gloom of Erebus, but in a faint leaden twilight, through which I could mark his death struggle, his pitifully extended arms, and see the wild anguish of his upturned eyes. Then again I was often forced to take part, a real part. I would kick him in the ribs, fiercely, brutally; feel the shrinking shudder of his frame, hear the dull thud of my shod foot on his mangled flesh. And this repeated so many times, that I would sometimes lose control of my reason, and ask myself the dreadful question, “Did you not in reality take part? are you not in reality guilty of his death?” I am unskilled in the art of relation; emotions are often so intangible, however painful, that they are hard to describe; but it may be understood that I suffered much, even though I fail in explaining how, or why. In the cooler light of added years I feel sure I suffered causelessly. I was never to blame for Tobin's murder, but nevertheless I am glad I suffered. My suffering distinguished me from the real murderers. They did not care; they had no remorse, no perception of a need for it. They were for a time shocked while the danger lasted of McGrath betraying them, but after that had passed, they plucked up courage, and, although deprived of picnics, sang, laughed, danced, and paraded the lanes with mouth-organs or concertinas as in days of old. They spat on the ground if ever Tobin was named before them. I would follow the direction of their unmanly contempt, expecting to see a vengeful spirit rise like a blighting humour from the earth. But how I envied them! Such a callousness, such a lack of conscience and remorse, I told myself, must be the greatest of all heaven's blessings. But I was cursed, and could not avoid my curse.

One night I resolved to escape it all. I left the shop a little after nightfall, and made my way to the barren rocks before the observatory hill. There the workmen, who had been mending the old sea-wall, had left a great pile of cut freestone at the very edge of the sea. Now it is my habit to compose myself to sleep lying on my left side, and after a little while I always unconsciously turn and sleep upon my back. I therefore climbed to the summit of the stones, and stretched myself upon my left side, facing the land, at the extreme verge of the precipice. I knew that I should sleep soon, for I was very weary. Then after a while I would turn

in my sleep, and fall into the sea. I could not swim; the water was deep, the sea-wall slippery; thus would come the end, for boats were far, and probably no one would hear my drowning cries. The resolve gave me a blessed sense of relief and joy which I had not known for months. I felt it was an evil thing to commit suicide, but I appeased my conscience with this reflection: should I fall as I hoped and die, it would not be suicide, seeing that it would take place in my sleep. I stopped just there, fearing argument, for conscience is an untiring debater. I put the whole responsibility upon Providence. I said to myself, "As God wills, so it will come to pass. If He wishes me to live, He will not let me turn."

So it fell out. Before many moments I was wrapped in sound and (Unclear:)dreamless slumber. I awoke without a start. Hours had passed. Something soft but firm circled my body. A great full golden moon had risen, which bathed the world in a flood of amber radiance. It was almost bright as day. A woman held her arm about me to prevent me falling, with her other hand she clutched an escarpment of rock; she was kneeling on the stones. Another woman held the lapel of my coat with both hands; she was also kneeling, but her body was bent backwards to give her leverage. They had evidently determined to save my life. I thought at first one was Judith Kelly, but her voice swiftly dispelled the illusion; a beautiful voice, which, although full of anxiety, was nevertheless deep toned, musical, and sweetly modulated.

"Are you awake?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Do not stir yet, I want you to realise your position. You are lying on the edge of a precipice, the least movement away from me will precipitate you into the water."

I lay quite still for a moment, thinking how beautiful her voice sounded. I had never heard a lady speak before. I knew at once this woman was a lady. I wished she would speak again.

"Do you think you could roll over a little towards me?" she asked.

I opened my eyes wide, and saw her face. It was very white, the skin like cream. Her eyes were a wonderful deep amber colour, and, radiating from the pupils, struck a shower of darker bars. I gazed into them entranced.

"I think so!" I said, and slowly turned over until I rested on my face, then quickly I arose. The women, too, fell back, and got to their feet. We stood regarding each other on the pile of the stones. I saw that they were both young. She who had spoken was no more than eighteen, the other seemed even younger.

"How did you come to go to sleep there?" asked the amber-eyed woman.

I shook my head; I could not tell her the truth, but I would not lie to her.

“Well, you are alright now,” she suggested.

“Yes, thank you.”

“Come, Edith!” she said, and turned to her companion, a slim childish figure of a girl, pretty, but with rather an uninteresting face. She suddenly stooped and picked up a book. “Is this yours?” she asked me, and glanced at the title page. The print was perfectly legible in the splendid moonlight. She read it aloud, “Euripides.” “Oh, it's yours, May.”

“No,” replied the other, “I had no book.”

“It is mine, I think!” I muttered, hesitatingly. It was a text book which I had from mere force of habit taken with me on my errand of self-destruction.

The girl handed it up, and glanced at me with sudden curiosity.

“Do you read Greek?” asked the girl Edith.

“Very imperfectly,” I replied, receiving the book from her outstretched hand.

“How strange!”

“Edith!” cried the amber-eyed woman, reprovingly; then in a moment, “Come, dear, we had better go; goodnight, sir.”

I looked at her. I noted that her nose was good, straight, and strong; her mouth large, but firm; her brows were broad and beautiful.

“Good-night,” I answered.

They left me and descended the stones, carefully picking their steps. Then they crossed the road in the direction of the observatory garden. I noted that neither wore a hat, that each was in evening dress.

“Guests of the astronomer, I suppose,” I mused. The amber-eyed woman was the taller; her hair was dark brown, almost ruddy, to match her eyes. Their shoulders gleamed milk-white in the moonlight; they seemed to me very lovely and worshipful, like two beautiful spirits from another and more lofty world than mine. I gazed after them in a sort of delightful dream, for I thought, soon I shall be going out into the world where I shall be able to meet and know many women like those; perhaps, even, some day I shall see her again. I watched them open a gate and enter the observatory grounds, climb the sloping lawn, and pause for a moment on the terrace. It must have been while standing there that they had observed me in the first instance, before they came to my rescue. The amber-eyed woman turned, and seeing me still standing on the stones, waved her hand. I was glad she had saved me from death. I immediately attributed the act solely to her. I lifted my hat, and the women disappeared. Then I realised what I had done. I had permitted her to depart after she had saved my life without one word of acknowledgment or gratitude. I had not offered even to assist her down the stones, which were steep and difficult to climb. I was overwhelmed with shame. My face burned with a sudden rush of hot blood. I almost cursed my

boorishness, and, scrambling to the ground, ran from the spot as fast as I could, all the while feeling measuring, condemning eyes fastened on my back, eyes which said, “Is he not a thankless, unmannerly wretch!”

Judith Kelly was lounging in the porch of the shop, which, to my surprise, was still open and lighted up. “Where have you been? Dada has been waiting for you this long while,” she said.

I compared her mentally with the woman who had amber eyes, and shivered to mark the unbounded gulf between. I felt sorry for Judith.

“I have been detained!” I muttered.

“What by?” asked Judith, jealously, it seemed to me. Judith still loved me, that was plain to see.

I was preoccupied with my thoughts, and stupid. I answered her at haphazard, scarcely knowing what I said, “Eyes.”

“Idiot,” she said, with scorn; “what eyes?”

“Amber eyes,” I replied; “great big ones, with bars of black running from the pupils, like spokes from the hub of a wheel!”

I must have been mad for the moment. At a later day I paid the penalty.

Judith turned white with passion. “So you've picked up a girl!” she muttered in a low, grating voice that jarred on all my nerves.

I pushed past her, but the creature of impulse caught my arm, and buried her teeth in the flesh, for all the world like an enraged wild animal. I tore myself free, and left her immersed in repentant tears, imploring forgiveness, and intermittently calling herself by the most dreadful names. Poor Judith!

In my bedroom I found my uncle awaiting me, seated in the midst of his four remaining councillors.

XI “The Push Book”

MY uncle received me with some show of ill-temper. “Was I not ashamed to keep the council waiting?” he demanded. I replied in such a manner as to soothe his mood, but secretly I mocked his anger with a reflection on the fact that he stood in debt to a woman with eyes of amber that he had not had to wait for me for all time. It is a strange world, and the machinery of fate is curiously complicated. Those five men sitting round my table were full of life, and glad to live, hopeful, too, to live long. They had been resolving my future, while I thought of nothing but death, or slept awaiting death. An unexampled chain of dreadful happenings had left them undisturbed, but had robbed me of the joy of life, and had filled my mind with tortures keen enough to make me plot my own destruction. A single glance from a woman's eyes had given me back my fortitude, and touched me with ambition. I contrasted myself with Temple's guardsman, who fought unscathed through a score of battles, and came to death through a piece of orange-peel. Perhaps I, having escaped the orange-peel, would die in a more romantic fashion. At all these thoughts I could not help but smile.

“Attend to me, sir. What are you thinking of?” asked my uncle, angrily.

“Orange peel,” I answered, laughing bitterly.

He regarded me with some anxiety. “You are not ill, boy?”

“No, uncle, but awhile ago I slipped on the rocks and almost fell. Had I fallen I would have been food for fishes by now. The thought of it made me laugh.”

The councillors looked at each other, nodding their heads like Chinese figures.

“He needs a change,” said Daly.

“Time he went,” observed Dave Gardner.

“Looks like a ghost,” commented Robin.

“Strikes me he ought to get away to-morrow,” said Jerry Brown.

The councillors were full of sympathy with me; their eyes were pitiful, proprietorial perhaps, but infinitely kind. I shuddered to remember how cruel they could look, perhaps in kicking a defenceless man to death, and forbade myself to be grateful.

“Lucas,” said my uncle, “attend to me. To-morrow you've got to clear out, pretty early in the mornin', and without any fuss. We'll have no speech-makin' or leave-takin', as we don't want the cops to get a hint of

our ideas, nor nobody else, yet. After you've gone I'll put it about you've come into your fortune."

I felt warm and good all over. It was comfort, this. I nodded.

"It's for your health's sake most," said my uncle. "You need a change, as any fool can see with half an eye; but anyway it's best. It wouldn't do for you to leave here and go straight to the Uni.; someone might drop to our little game. You'd better go somewhere up the mountains for the next few weeks, and then start on at the Uni. in March."

"Yes, uncle."

"First, you'd better go to some pub for a day or two, and fix up about lodgings, though. I'll give you £50 when you're goin', and the same every quarter-day. You'll come here for it, and each time you come, I'll arrange a quiet little meeting, so the Dogs can see how you're gettin' on, and you can make them a speech; that's right, boys, ain't it?"

The councillors expressed their approval.

"Well now, Lucas," proceeded the king, "there's only one thing left to do before you go, and that is for the protection of the Push who are puttin' so much trust in you, and spendin' so much money on you."

"What is that, uncle?"

He cleared his throat, and looked at me steadily. "Sign the Push Book," he replied.

"But I have already. I did when I joined."

My uncle crossed his legs, and spread out his hands with a gesture of impatience. "Ye see it's the rule, boy; you're goin' away from our district, and the Push must have some hold on you — a sort of guarantee of good conduct like. You see?"

"What do they want me to do?"

"Sign the Push Book."

"You said that before; I don't understand."

My uncle undid his coat, and abstracted from beneath his vest the portfolio which I had once before seen and signed. As he did so Jerry Brown and Dave Gardner got up and put their backs against the door. To my astonishment each held a cocked revolver.

"What is this?" I cried; "you threaten me?"

"Don't be a fool, boy!" said my uncle, very gruffly. "There's no sentinels posted, and we've got to take precautions for the book. It's got nothing to do with you."

"I'm glad to hear it," I retorted. "I thought it was for me."

Everyone laughed. "Blimey, Lucas," said Jerry Brown, "you'd ought to know us better; why we wouldn't pull a hair off yer nut for a river full of rot-gut (colonial beer); you're vallable, yer are!"

"I should think not," said my uncle, who was busily unfastening the portfolio. He presently selected a sheet of paper, and, taking up a pen, laboriously commenced to write. When he had finished he leaned back in

his chair, looked sharply about him, and in a low, thick whisper read:

"I, Lucas Rowe, for some months member of the Dogs' Push, being about to quit, am desirous of exonerating all members of the Dogs' Push of having had a hand in the killing of senior constable Tobin. Jim McGrath and I killed him between us. I unreservedly, and of my own free will, and without force, threat, or persuasion, make this confession, which I leave in the hands of the Dogs' Push for the sake of clearing themselves of suspicion after my death, but not for use beforehand, unless I ever try to do anything against the Push in the meantime. Signed and confessed by me."

Hardly had my uncle finished this infernally obvious recital when the councillors rather heatedly broke in.

"Why's Jim McGrath brought in?" cried one.

"Why's 'not for use beforehand' in it? It's irregular!" objected another.

All had a grievance to put forward.

"Boys," explained the king, "poor old Jim's dead to the world, he don't count; besides, can't you see it would be rot to say that Lucas had cooked him alone. Didn't the coppers see the body? one man couldn't have done all that kickin' in half a day. Then 'not for use beforehand, unless he goes against the Push.' That's only fair for the boy's sake; he's not leaving us for good, like the others did. It's irregular certainly, but the circs. are different."

The councillors subsided. I had never before been presented with such a convincing object-lesson of their complete and profound ignorance. It suddenly struck me that a confession of this sort would be, after all, quite as dangerous to themselves as to the person upon whom they sought to fasten the whole burden of their common crime. I had recently read the report of a case in which a man was convicted for felony as an accessory after the fact, and his only fault had been to know who committed the crime, and to conceal his knowledge. Surely such a precedent would apply here. I remembered the confession of James Rayne, which my uncle had read to the assembled Push on the night of my initiation. I wondered, in the light of the happenings of the last few moments, was that a more truthful document than the one which my uncle evidently expected me to sign. I moved to the table upon which the Push Book was lying open. "May I look at the Book?" I asked.

"Yes!" said he; "you are a confirmed member, you have the right."

I glanced through the pages. It was not a bulky volume, but it contained at least eighty separate confessions. Many of them referred to the same murder, and in one case six different men had individually declared themselves solely responsible for the death of a man named "Codrington."

The secret of all this was in my grasp. I realised that the Push treasured these ghastly memorials, fatuously supposing that their united guilt was

by them transferred to the shoulders of absent individuals. I realised also the inner meaning of the scheme. The men who made the confessions were no doubt guilty of having shared in the crimes confessed, and just as ignorant of law as the remainder of their companions. They all apparently had signed these confessions on the eve of departure from the Push district. Conscious of what they had done, and believing themselves rendered solely punishable for the crimes confessed, the confessions must have represented in their understanding, Damocletian swords suspended over their heads, as permanent guarantees of their fidelity and rigid observance of secrecy, so far as Push secrets were concerned. No exiled Dog could ever be tempted to turn Queen's evidence, and betray his old companions, while he knew that in their hands such an admission of his sole guilt reposed. I thought to myself, “This book once in the hands of the police would hang every member of the Push as murderers and accessories; but while in the possession of the Push it is an awful weapon of terrorism, and a dangerous instrument of self-preservation.” It reminded me of an incident I had witnessed in a circus. Two men, in consequence of an accident, became suspended at a great height from the ground by a single rope drawn across a beam. Each held a free end of the rope, and their bodies balanced. They swung thus, staring into each other's pallid faces. While each retained his hold, both were safe; but if the grasp of either relaxed, both must inevitably fall, and be dashed to pieces. The Push Book intimately resembled that piece of rope. Thus, if the Push were to attempt to use any of its confessions, or any confessing member turn traitor, both the Push and the subscriber to the confession must be destroyed. But the Push did not know this, I felt sure; and would probably never learn it, save in some day of giant folly, when one or other of those mentioned possibilities should realise itself.

Besides the confessions, the Push Book contained a register of all members past and present, and the signatures of subscription. I saw at once that these signatures disposed in that portfolio would constitute every member an accessory after the fact to all the crimes mentioned in the confessions. The idea gave me a thrill. I understood that already I was liable at law to be hanged as an accessory for crimes I had never heard of till that moment. The knowledge made me reckless. I turned to my uncle. “Have you ever made use of a confession?” I asked.

“No.”

“Never had cause to,” said Jack Robin. “No Dog, past, present, or departed, has ever been a traitor.”

“What if one were to?” I asked, quietly.

“How do you mean?”

“Supposing someone were to go and turn Queen's evidence about Tobin's murder, what would you do?”

“Kill him.”

“But reflect, my friends, in the case I have suggested you would be all immediately arrested, arrested before you knew who had betrayed you!”

“We'd wait till afterwards.”

“After you were hanged, eh?”

“They couldn't hang us. They'd have to prove it; how could they?”

“The traitor's evidence would be sufficient.”

“To hang the lot of us!”

“I think so.”

They laughed heartily. “I guess we'll chance that,” said my uncle, with a derisive smile. “We're not afraid of anyone turning traitor while he's in the Push; we can look after ourselves for that. It's when they clear out we get nervous; then we've got no holt of them, 'cept with one of these,” and he significantly pointed to the confessions.

“But,” I pursued, “suppose in defiance of having signed a confession someone turned traitor. In that case what would you do?”

“Hang the cow!” cried all in a breath.

I was satisfied. Their ignorance was perfect; I decided not to enlighten it; a glance indeed assured me that any trouble in that direction would be thrown away, so doggedly did they appear to be set in their opinions. My uncle pushed the paper he had written out before me, and offered me a pen.

I signed the abominable thing without hesitation. I argued that the confession did not make me guilty, since I was not guilty, and in any case it scarcely increased my criminal liability as a member of the Push.

“Supposing I had refused to sign!” I asked, curiously, as I pushed the document across the table for the witnesses to examine.

“Blimey, you're as bad as a woman,” said my uncle. “You're full of questions as an egg's full of meat.”

“Nevertheless, answer me!”

“You're very high and haughty.”

“Please, uncle.”

“Ask Jack.”

“Tell me, Jack!”

Jack Robin shrugged his shoulders. “You ought to know, Lucas; you have a head on your shoulders.”

“I want you to tell me, Jack; I hate guess work.”

“Well,” he replied, with a frown. “There would have been another disappearance; pretty soon, I reckon. Are you satisfied?”

“Quite.” I could smile, for my old dread of death had vanished, though my horror of murder had intensified.

“Now!” I said, presently, after the witnesses had signed; “I want you all to promise me that the Push will never be allowed to kill another man on any pretext whatsoever!”

I had entertained a faint doubt that my uncle had not told me the truth

in saying that the Push had willingly agreed to his proposal in this regard. I fancied he might have lied in order to cajole me; but I had done him an injustice.

The councillors unhesitatingly gave me the required promise, making, however, a reservation in the case of treachery, to which I consented. My uncle then took from his pocket a roll of notes, which he put into my hands. “Your first quarter's allowance,” he said.

I thanked him very gravely. He made no reply, but gathered up his papers, shut up the Push Book, and, after hiding it under his vest, opened the trapdoor.

“Go early!” he said, while pausing on the ladder, “before nine if you can!”

His voice was strangely husky. I wondered at him. “But I'll see you again, uncle!” I cried.

“No, you won't.”

“Won't you be back to-night?”

“No.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Get drunk!” he answered, fiercely. He gave me one strange, half-wild, half-despairing glance, then hurried down the ladder.

I turned in astonishment to the others.

“Don't notice!” said Robin; “he's cut up at losing yer!” From the cellar issued a queer, raucous noise.

“He's sobbing; he's all broke up,” said Jerry Brown. “Poor old cove, he takes it hard.”

I rushed to the trapdoor, my heart on fire. “Uncle, dear old uncle!” I cried. But only silence answered me, and the councillors roughly pulled me back. They shook hands with me in turn as each passed down the ladder.

To my wild amaze they were all blubbing. Could they then have human hearts, I asked myself, these brutal murderers? This is how they answered me:

Pat Daly, first to go, put in my hands a small but handsome gold watch. “God bless you!” he said, and the tears streamed down his face.

Jerry Brown slipped into my pocket a lot of jingling coins — “for cigarettes,” he muttered, greeting like a babe.

Dave Gardner forced on me a pencil-case of solid gold; he said nothing, twice he gasped but could not speak, he descended the ladder biting his lips.

Jack Robin gave me a ten-pound note. “If you get hard up, write to me; don't worry the king,” he whispered.

“Don't forget us, lad, and don't fag too hard. Good-bye. God bless you!” and he wrung my hand, but looking hard away, for his eyes were wet. I might have been going for ever from them. I did not answer any. I

was deeply moved, and stood for a long while gazing at the trapdoor, and the yawning hole before it, but I could not weep. That was the single occasion on which I have heard any members of the Dogs' Push use the name of God legitimately. It seemed most strange. I knew then, as I know now, that no man has ever been created either entirely good or entirely wicked. The conviction soothed me like a charm. After all, these murderers were capable of love; seeing that they loved me; it was, indeed, impossible to doubt it; how then could I hate them? I made a resolve. I determined to devote myself to their regeneration. I did not know how to set about the task; I did not seek to know, but full of emotional wonder, and in a turmoil of conflicting thoughts, I threw myself upon my bed. Before I slept my heart went out in a wave of warm feeling to the woman with the eyes of amber, because she had saved my life. For my life was no longer a meaningless and empty dream. It was suddenly touched with purpose, irradiated with an ambition not all selfish and not all unworthy.

XII The Temple of Learning

ON the following morning I rose very early, packed my clothes and books into two large boxes which had mysteriously arrived during my sleep, then slipped out of the house to look for a conveyance. As I did not wish any of the Push to know the exact direction of my movements, I strolled right into George Street before I selected a van. In this I rode back to my uncle's shop, and before seven o'clock my belongings were all quietly transferred to the street. I was very excited, but strangely miserable. I was about to face an unknown world. It was no use telling myself that it was the world for which I was most suited; the fact remained, I viewed my departure with the keenest regret. This was the only home I remembered, and the word “home” has such an inherent charm about it that I was overwhelmed with vague sorrow and an unspeakable loneliness when I thought that for many months I should visit it no more. I felt myself an exile, and found myself unable to remember the miseries I had endured within its walls. I crept back for one last look. Dearly I should have liked to say goodbye to all its inmates, but although growing late the house seemed wrapped in slumber. Not even Judith was astir. I recognised my uncle's hand, however, in the stillness, and from long habit of obedience deferred my wishes to his will. I climbed into the van, and sitting on one of my boxes gazed back as we departed, my eyes blurred with tears.

“Where to, sir?” asked the driver as we turned the corner of the lane.

I explained to him that I wished to go to some quiet hotel near the University.

“The Kentish is the place for you!” he replied, and I assented.

In an hour we stopped before a small and very clean-looking public-house, standing at the corner of Derwent Street and the Parramatta Road, and right opposite the University gates. I liked the look of the place, it seemed quiet and respectable. I entered, and made a bargain with the landlord, who agreed to give me good board and lodging for £2 per week. That night, armed with a portmanteau, I took train to Leura Falls, where I remained for three glorious weeks. It was my first visit to the country, and amazingly did I enjoy it; wandering throughout the peaceful summer days through leafy coverts on the hillsides, climbing rocks and gullies, or lying in the shade gazing out over a prospect as varied and magnificent as the imagination can conceive. But it is not the purpose of

my narrative to describe the beauties of the mountains, though I could linger for days dreamfully weaving word-pictures of the fern-clad slopes of Leura: its quaint village, and its silent, incurious inhabitants; its giant valleys, and its numerous cascades — one of which, the largest, falls in broken fashion from the mountains to the plains in leaps of seven hundred feet or more, over hollow rocky caverns which reverberate the music of the rushing waters, in deep magically booming notes, like the voices of imprisoned monsters, who ceaselessly complain.

I returned on the 13th of March, and proceeded on my first invasion of the University in great fear and trembling. However, Mr. Barff, the registrar, received me very courteously, explained to me my curriculum, and gave me a receipt for my first quarter's lecture fees, which I thought were ridiculously small. I entered as a classical student of arts, signed my name in a great book, and was informed that I must attend on the morrow at the commemoration, to take the necessary oath, and be formally received as a member of the University. Mr. Barff then gave me into the hands of a lackey, who took me over the building. It seemed to me a stately but unfinished pile. Viewed from the front it covered a wide area, and suggested, with its central tower and wide extended wings, the form of a mediaeval fortress. In the rear was a huge quadrangle, but incomplete; the hinder walls terminated at the angles, and on one side were women's quarters built of wood, with tennis courts before them; on the other stretched men's common-rooms, queer little buildings of white pine; while beyond, the continuity was entirely broken and defaced by incongruous stone edifices, used as laboratories, engine houses, and store-rooms. Far to the left rose a huge stone building, which I was informed was the medical school. From the tower itself I obtained a magnificent view of the park surrounding the University grounds, the various colleges — Paul's, Andrew's, and John's — great, weird, ugly structures three-quarters of a mile away, and in the farther distance all around, almost the whole of Sydney. Well, at last, I reflected, I stood in the temple of learning, which I had so often vainly sighed to visit. But my first impressions were dreary. The classrooms were public schoolrooms, pure and simple, unglorified by any sign of advanced arrangement. Their furniture consisted of plain plank desks, wooden benches, and a lecturer's cedar desk. The floors were even uncarpeted. The great hall was splendid, but gloomy; its only relief a big organ near the roof, whose burnished escaladed pipes reflected the glories of a stained-glass window in a distant wall. I left feeling depressed and melancholy, and to cheer myself visited the city to purchase my cap and gown. I think I spent that night almost entirely before a mirror, indulging in queer antics, and making speeches to the furniture. Shall I confess it? the absurd alpaca gown and not unbecoming trencher made me indescribably happy. I decided that I had already, by means of it, become

a learned, grave, and reverend seignior. I thought myself extremely good to look upon, and resolved to have myself photographed at the earliest possible opportunity for the benefit of my uncle, Judith, and the Push. You see, in my loneliness, I had grown to regard those people as my home-circle, and yet for years I had loathed my life among them, and longed to escape it, even through the halls of death.

Have you ever felt nervous, felt that the eyes of an unknown and unfriendly people were bent critically upon you? Can you understand my feelings when, arrayed in cap and gown, I tremblingly advanced on the morrow to the great hall? They were terrible. I knew that I was ghastly white. My knees knocked together as I walked, my teeth chattered in my head. I felt undressed; nay, completely naked! I became bitterly conscious of little spots and blemishes on my skin; a small mole underneath my right arm gave me infinite discomfort. Every now and then I furtively tugged at my garments to reassure myself that they were still about me. Deathly chills chased each other over my frame, intermittently succeeded by burning flushes. The hall doors were barred. Involuntarily I had arrived too early, but a great crowd of graduates and undergraduates was gathered on the terrace. Among them were their relations — fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, cousins; all beautifully dressed, happy, and smiling. A long row of handsomely equipped carriages was drawn up on the terrace by the arch. The coachmen sat upon the boxes, grasping reins and whips, their lips curled with immeasurable disdain; the footmen stood beside the carriage doors, nonchalant and insolent as princes or puppies. I bowed my head as I passed them, in humble acknowledgment of their crushing superiority. Feeling that with each step I took I committed an unconscionable crime, I tremulously approached the crowd, staring in meekest deprecation at the ground. I did not gather confidence even when I realised that no notice was taken of me, for I stupidly imagined that their lack of attention sprang from the indifference of contempt. I waited for the doors to open in an agony of stretched sense, which gradually merged into a mood of defiance and recklessness. At last I tore my glance from the ground, and in response to an attack of fierce resentment of imagined grievances, threw back my head and glared around. I was astounded to observe that everybody was minding his or her own business. They were laughing, chatting, shaking hands, and indulging in all manner of innocent conventional frivolities. B.A.'s and Masters of Arts, in their furred robes, were receiving the congratulations of their friends, and returning the good-natured chaff of experienced undergrads. Beautiful women, collected in groups, discussed each other's gowns. Some of them glanced at me with not unapproving eyes, but their glances overwhelmed me with shame. My relief was intense when at last the door opened, and the rush for seats commenced. The students massed themselves on a daïs,

the visitors about the body of the hall. In a few moments the place was thronged and packed to suffocation. The Chancellor, accompanied by the Senate, entered, took his place, and bowed. Instantly pandemonium reigned supreme. It might have been a Push picnic, but certainly not a meeting of the Dogs' Push, for they behave most decorously in their assemblies.

A great skull, with a pipe thrust between its fleshless jaws, stuck upon a pole, was reared up from the medical contingent — a fitting emblem of their calling — and wreaths of smoke presently issued from its hollow eyes. Soon a mighty chant broke out, led by an arranged choir, and “Who Killed Cock Robin?” was howled by three hundred throats. The Chancellor read his speech, interrupted by frequent cat-calls and weird cries. The Governor of the Colony, Lord Jersey and his wife, made their appearance, and were presented in turn amid a thunder of applause. “Trot her out!” yelled someone, when Lady Jersey was referred to by the Chancellor, and the sentiment evoked a storm of approbation. I quickly lost my nervousness in these proceedings. I thought to myself — “there is, after all, very little difference between larrikins and gentlemen; gentlemen are more noisy, impertinent, and better educated, but less brutal; that is all.”

The Governor made a speech which was not the least attended to, and no sooner had he finished than another song was sung. The oath was administered, and the new undergraduates received, amid an uproar that never ceased; and finally, the ceremonies complete, I left the building with buzzing ears and an intimate conviction that anticipation is at all times preferable to realisation. How I had dreamed of that day!

At the gates an open victoria passed me; seated therein were three ladies, and one of them was Amber Eyes. She saw me, smiled, and slightly inclined her head. I swung off my cap, astonished and charmed beyond words. I thought the meeting the best of omens.

XIII Edward Shaw

I SOON discovered that my fellow students regarded the professors as bores, and their lectures a dreary farce. Attendance was compulsory, and enforced with fines and other penalties; otherwise the classes had become presently extinct. I make an exception in favour of the women. They always regularly attended, and seemed to put up with the infliction cheerfully. To them were assigned the front rows of benches, and it was noteworthy that most of the lecturers frankly addressed their discourse to the front benches alone. The men “cut” lectures whenever they could afford it, and lounged about the common-rooms smoking and gambling at cards. The few who seemed to take life seriously, and to be students with a purpose, were left completely to their own devices, and were looked upon by the remainder with good-humoured contempt. There were about 200 freshmen in the first year. Of these a third resided in the various colleges, and the others, like myself, boarded out or lived with their relations in the city. At first I tried honestly enough to acquire whatever benefit might be derivable from the lectures. I paid the greatest attention to all that passed, and took copious notes. With the exception, however, of Mathematics and English, two subjects presided over by really eminent speakers and able scholars, Professors Gurney and McCallum, I was presently obliged to concur in the opinion of the majority, that time was wasted in attempting to absorb addresses which were no doubt profound, but unhappily obscured with verbiage, stilted and halting. The trouble was that each lecturer had a different system of delivery, which he made no effort to render either interesting or intelligible, and, saving the exceptions I have mentioned, they appeared to consider their offices as sinecures. Perhaps they were very learned and earnest men; they were certainly dry as dust, and only occasionally comprehensible. I unhesitatingly declare that from any ordinary examination coach could be obtained more purposeful information in a week than from the lectures of all the professors in a quarter. In spite of my resolute desire to profit, I very soon adopted the plan of conducting my studies in my bedroom, and reading novels during hours of class. These methods of mine rendered me an acceptable companion to the unstudious spirits, and for a week or two I enjoyed a sort of quiet popularity. But when it was ascertained that I was unwilling to disturb the professors by blowing horns, stamping feet, whistling, and making

other idiotic noises during class, and, moreover, when one day I inconsiderately confessed that I cared nothing for either football or cricket, games for which the majority appeared to exist, I was voted an undesirable, and avoided.

This, however, was not to my fancy. It was to my advantage to make as many friends as possible, both in order to render my University life agreeable, and for the sake of my future career.

The question arose, how to achieve this object! Nearly every freshman was either a footballer or a cricketer; most cricketers were also footballers. They were, for the most part, uncouth, recently emancipated schoolboys, who cared for nothing seriously, except sport, cutting lectures, and larking with rowdy girls (not students); two of which amusements I heartily disliked. Very few of them were gentlemen by birth, but nearly all sons of tradesmen, publicans, or wealthy parvenus. The gentlemen's sons, with one or two exceptions, formed a coterie apart, and only mingled with the others for the sake of football or cricket. Oh, that eternal football and cricket! I grew to detest the very names. But I foresaw that if I wished to make friends I must conquer my aversion, and learn the wretched games; for no one would consent to converse for longer than five minutes upon any other subject under heaven. I took the plunge at last, joined the sports' union, and paid a year's subscription. The football season had just commenced. I was put into a junior team, and obliged to spend all my afternoons practising among a lot of shouting hoodlums. Fortunately, I had a turn of speed, and good staying powers, in spite of my spare and weedy frame. These facts induced John Voyce, the captain of the III. B's, the name of my fifteen, to take a rather special interest in me. He explained at length the Rugby rules, and taught me how to smuggle a try, sneak the ball out of a scrum, punt, fend, and collar; “always collar low,” was the advice he particularly strove to instil. Poor man, if he had but known; the very idea of tackling a running giant, all bony knees and elbows, made my very marrow freeze. But I advanced; I skilfully concealed my cowardice, and was actually picked as quarter-back for the first match that we played. It took place at Ryde. Our opponents were miners, all heavy, full grown men, twice our size and weight. But we beat them, and by great good luck I secured two touches. I was the hero of the hour, and so delighted that, although my pockets were picked during the game of a couple of sovereigns, I did not regret the loss.

Next morning, my appearance at the common-room was greeted with a shout, and crowds clustered round me wherever I went. My next bid for popularity was at the card table. The favourite games played were euchre, solo whist, and “kitty nap.” I was fairly skilful at all three, from having often watched members of the Dogs' Push playing. Larrikins prefer gambling and dancing to all other human pleasures. Now, from

long experience I knew that men love to win and hate to lose, larrikins at all events, and somehow I did not rate my new companions very much higher than the old. I therefore resolved to lose. It was quite easy. Luckily the stakes were trifling; a shilling a game for euchre, and a penny per point for whist and “nap.” I discovered that my loss of a few shillings put my opponents in the best of humours with themselves, and delighted them with me. They loved to play with me. Naturally I took good care to lose very little, and gradually less and less. Many of them were cheats. Often in a game of nap, when several were playing, two would be secretly partners, and play into each other's hands. I pretended to notice nothing. I grew quickly popular, but made no real friends; why, I do not in the least understand even now. None of the town students invited me to their homes, and although I was always made welcome at the colleges, particularly at John's, there was no pretence at inviting me for any other purpose than to play cards or billiards, and I believe that had I commenced to win, even these invitations would have ceased. I became very weary of attempting to please everybody. In three weeks I made so little progress that I almost despaired. I wanted to conquer at once, and I foresaw that I should not conquer at all. At last I determined to ingratiate myself with the gentlemen if I could. There were not more than a dozen in my year, but I fancied they enjoyed more real influence than the rest; for although they were not popular — in fact, the others professed to regard them as “stuck up” snobs — I noticed that everyone did their best to enter the exclusive little clique whenever occasion offered. But it was hard; they were standoffish and suspicious. I used to engage them separately in conversation. They would talk to me courteously enough, until one of their own set arrived; then stroll off arm in arm. One of them sat next to me in the Greek class, a man of twenty-five or six, named Edward Shaw. His father occupied an important post in the civil service of the Colony. He was a tall, rather good-looking fellow, who rejoiced in a pair of dark moustachios, which were the envy of the whole University. He looked physically experienced and intelligent rather than mentally, but he was in reality a clever fellow. I admired his eyes, which were bold and insolent, although kindly in expression. He was very formal in his manner towards me; always polite, but cold. He seemed to be a society man, and to have built around himself a prickly hedge of polished habits, which suited him perfectly, but which I found very irritating. I wanted to climb the hedge, but I did not know how without hurting myself. All the conventionalities which I daily made acquaintance with annoyed me beyond words. We had no conventions in the Push. One day I said to Shaw during class, “Are you doing anything this evening?”

He shook his head. “Why, may I ask?”

“Will you dine with me, and go to the theatre afterwards?” It was in

this manner that I first attacked the hedge.

“I haven't the honour of your acquaintance!” he replied, civilly, but —— Bah! was it not ridiculous? I knew it was absurd and nonsensically high-flown, but that did not prevent me from feeling snubbed. My cheeks flamed as I muttered back: “Forgive me; I forgot your sex!”

The colour mounted into his face. He looked startled, and twirled his moustaches as though to reassure himself about the sex upon which I had reflected.

“What do you mean?” he demanded.

“The answer of a woman!” I retorted.

He flushed and paled, then lost his temper. “I'll punch your head for you afterwards!” he said.

“The threat of a child!” I muttered.

He was silent for some time, then, during a lull in Professor Scott's remarks, he turned and whispered, “Who the dickens are you?”

“Lucas Rowe.”

“Where do you come from?”

This was the first time I had been so questioned. No one had before evinced the least curiosity in my antecedents. But I had long been prepared.

“England,” I replied.

“Do you live with your people?”

“I have none; I am an orphan!”

“Why did you come out here?”

“For my health. I could not stand the English climate.”

“What was your father?”

Oh, these gentlemen! “A great musician!” I replied, and it was true, though then I did not know it; but all my vague memories of my father were indelibly associated with music.

Edward Shaw appeared surprised. “Queer!” he observed. “I don't know the name.”

I shrugged my shoulders, and muttered insolently, “He was a rich man, and a gentleman; he did not play to amuse the crowd!”

“Oh!” said Edward Shaw.

Afterwards he did not offer to assault me; but next day he asked me, Could I play the piano?

“No,” said I, “but almost anything else.”

“What, then?”

“The concertina!”

He looked shocked. I went on, “The violin, the tin whistle, the cornet, the mouth-organ, the kettle-drum, the Jew's harp. Is that enough?”

He raised his eyebrows. “Quite!”

“You know you are a snob, don't you?” I enquired, softly.

He started back as though he had been struck. “Eh, what!” he cried.

“You and your friends!” I proceeded, tranquilly. “You affect to contemn people of doubtful origin, and utterly despise the offspring of trade. Do you think I haven't noticed the way that you, who think yourselves ‘swells’ no doubt, keep aloof from the crowd as though you were fashioned from another sort of clay? Go back a little. Take yourself. Your father is in a gentleman's position. But what was your grandfather? a convict, perhaps!”

Edward Shaw turned white to the lips with fury.

“What was your grandfather?” he muttered.

“Did it hurt?” I asked, with a smile.

“Who told you?” he demanded; he had recovered his composure.

“Do you mean to say I struck home?” I gasped.

He nodded.

I felt myself an utter brute. “On my honour, Shaw,” I whispered, “I knew nothing. I wouldn't have hurt your feelings for the world.”

“Oh, come off!”

“I have given you my word!” To be truthful, I was covered with remorse. I cannot bear to hurt anything that lives. I am so much a coward of pain that even reflected pain hurts me.

“He was a political prisoner,” muttered Shaw; “not a common lag!”

“I am sorry.”

“No need. I have nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Believe me, I intended no insult!”

He looked into my eyes. “Yes, I believe you!”

“Then shake hands!”

He smiled, and we shook hands underneath the desk. “I felt like murder just now!” he whispered.

“I don't blame you.”

“You are staying at the Kentish, are you not?”

“Yes!”

“Well off?”

“Fairly.”

“What do you intend to do afterwards?”

“How do you mean?”

“What are you going to be?”

“I hope to enter politics! And you?”

“Medicine.”

“Silence in the class!” shouted Professor Scott, and the ladies in the front benches glanced at us reprovingly.

Shaw wrote upon a piece of paper, and passed it to me. I read:

“Why do you waste your time with the riff-raff? Cards and so on. You always lose; and you'll never make a footballer. I've watched you play. You funk like the deuce. They all say so, too, behind your back. Voyce only keeps you in the team because you can run!”

I coloured to the eyes. Shaw was attentively studying his book. I mentally thanked him for his delicacy.

I wrote: “I know no one in Sydney. I must have something to do to pass the time. But thanks for your hint about football. I'll cut it.”

Back came his answer: “What about cards? It does you no good to play; you'll get the name of being a gambler, possibly that of a cheat.”

I replied, “Perhaps you can suggest a better occupation?”

He turned and looked at me. “Study!” he muttered.

I shrugged my shoulders. “I read a great deal.”

“Society?”

I smiled. “How? I need a cicerone.”

“I am at your service.”

“Thanks.”

“Lunch with me after class!”

“I can't; I have promised to take a hand at euchre in the common-room.”

He shrugged his shoulders, and said no more. But I was palpitating with pleasure. I felt that at last I had won a friend.

When class was over, I made my way to the common-room, where I found three medical students awaiting me — Burn, Somerset, and Graves. We immediately sat down before a table, and the cards were dealt. Edward Shaw strolled into the room, and stood behind my chair. In the very second round Burn revoked. It was passed by in silence by the others; but it struck me as an opportunity, if properly managed, to end the game. In reality I wanted to get away with Shaw. I looked at Burn. “You revoked!” I observed.

“No!” he cried. “I did nothing of the kind.”

“Yes!” I insisted.

“You are a liar!” he retorted, and threw the cards into a heap, so that the issue could not be determined.

A crowd instantly collected. Burn bent across the table and struck me in the mouth. “He accused me of cheating!” he explained, addressing the others.

I stood up shaking in every limb. Already Burn had thrown off his coat. There was a deadly silence in the room. The door was locked, the window blinds were drawn, and a ring formed, all with the noiselessness and speed of magic. But Edward Shaw stepped forward.

“It's not fair,” he protested. “Burn is twice Rowe's weight and size.”

“He called me a cheat!” shouted Burn. “Besides, he's taller than me.”

“You are a cheat,” retorted Shaw, “I saw you revoke distinctly. What I have to propose is this: I'll take Rowe's place. You can fight me!”

I was thrilled with wildest gratitude. My terror was so great that I was perfectly willing to let anyone take my place. But Burn was not! He growled out, “You mind your own business. I have nothing to do with

you!”

“You are a coward!” said Shaw, contemptuously; “a cheat and a coward!”

But the room was at that cast into a commotion. They were nearly all medical students present; second year's men; and they did not like to see one of their set baited by a freshman in arts. None of them had seen Burn revoke, and opinion was much divided as to the merits of the case. In a moment, however, Shaw was offered a dozen opponents who vociferously expressed their unselfish willingness to blacken both his eyes. In the confusion I found time to think. I perceived that if I did not stand forward, and take my own part, Shaw must think me cowardly. For the opinion of the others I cared very little, but for Shaw's, much. I wished to attach him to me as a friend, and I decided that he would not respect me if I failed in manliness. With a terrible effort I forced my fainting courage to the front. I felt that I was going to execution, but it was necessary. “Gentlemen!” I cried, as loudly as I could.

They ceased their clamour to attend to me.

“This is my quarrel!” I said, trying hard to subdue the tremors of my limbs. “My quarrel entirely. It was no doubt kind and chivalrous of Shaw to take my part, but I cannot thank him for his action. He appears to think I cannot take care of myself. I can! If Burns will step out I shall show you. He may beat me, for he's bigger than me, but that won't make him any the less a cheat. I did not call him a cheat till now. I merely said he had revoked. I thought perhaps he might have revoked accidentally, but his conduct has proved that it was not an accident. He gave me no opportunity of proving my accusation, for immediately I had spoken he mixed up the cards. Was that the act of an innocent man?”

“Liar!” cried Burn, and sprang into the ring.

Somerset, who had been my partner in the game, came to me. “I'll second you!” he said.

“You be hanged!” said Shaw. “There'd be no occasion for this if you and Evan had spoken out.”

“I did not see him revoke!” protested Somerset.

“Nor I!” cried Evan.

“You did not see him mix the cards, I suppose?”

“No.”

“Bah!” said Shaw, “you were blind, then!”

“Look here, Shaw. If fight's your game, I'm ready for you.”

“Wherever and whenever you please!” replied Shaw, with frank contempt, and, turning to me, helped me off with my coat.

The ring had re-formed, and I stepped forward, white to the lips, and shaking like a leaf. I prayed that the others would think my agitation caused by rage, but, as a fact, I was in a panic.

Burn rushed at me. I fell back before him, with clenched hands

outstretched, not even striking, so deep was my preoccupation, until I at last fell against the clothes' cupboards.

Time was called, and I felt like death. I had been badly punished on the body, but my face was not touched. Burn, a big, red-headed fellow, was panting with fury.

Again we stood face to face. Again he rushed at me. Something forced me to extend my left hand. I drew it back bruised. A blow on my neck made me choke. In a sort of desperation, fighting more for breath than against my adversary, I struck out wildly. How it came to pass I do not know, but in a few seconds I found myself standing alone, oppressed with a sense of unreality. The whole affair seemed to be happening to another man. I thought I was reading and trying to realise the feelings of another man situated like myself. I was dazed and dreaming. I wondered why the attack had ceased, then, looking slowly to the floor, perceived Burn lying quite still, covered with blood, and breathing heavily.

"Time!" cried someone.

Burn did not move. Somerset and Evan went to examine him.

"His nose is broken, simply smashed," said Evan.

"The work of a ring!" said another.

"No!" I cried, waking to sudden life; "I don't possess a ring."

"A fist like a leg of mutton!" said Somerset.

I looked at my hand. It was small and delicately formed; but there was blood upon the knuckles. I shuddered. Everyone watched me in a sort of vague awe.

"Better carry him to the bath room," said Shaw. "Come, Rowe, put on your coat."

"But——" I objected.

"The fight is over, man. You don't want any more, do you?"

"No."

"Come, then!"

The crowd melted, following the unconscious Burn.

"He's not dead, is he?" I asked, shuddering violently.

Shaw laughed. "No, old chap. Let us come to lunch," and he led me away. "Do you know," he said presently, "I believe it was an accident that you floored him. You can't fight a bit."

"Shaw," I muttered, "I don't know how it happened. I feel like death."

He put his arm round my shoulder. "You are shaking. Don't faint!" he cried.

"No, I won't faint"; but as I uttered the words, I swayed. He hurried me into a waiting hansom; presently the air revived me.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Home."

"To your house?"

"My father's."

“Why are you taking me there?”

“Do you mind? My cousin wants to meet you.”

“No, I do not mind. But for yourself, Shaw — are you not rather venturesome?”

“How do you mean?”

“You know nothing of me. I may be a wolf in sheep's clothing.”

He laughed gaily. “Was your grandfather a convict too?” he asked.

His frank and manly reference to his own family misfortune taught me my duty. I could not help deceiving him in part, for I was not my own master; but I could not bear to be an utter hypocrite. “Stop the cab!” I said suddenly.

“Why?”

“Do you know what I am?”

“Tell me!”

“I have only a Roman right to the name I bear.”

“You mean?”

“It is my mother's.”

Shaw smiled. “I like you for telling me that, Rowe. I thought you had a story the first time I ever set eyes on you. Something in your face——”

“Shaw,” I urged, “you have not stopped the cab!”

He smiled again, and answered musingly, “The bar sinister is not a great thing, Rowe. Our governor is sprung from Nell Gwynne.”

“He is an earl!”

“You could not help yourself, old boy.”

“Shaw, I am commencing to think you are broad-minded.”

“I am beginning to think the same thing myself,” he answered. “Have you a cigarette about you?”

XIV May Denton

WE drove into the city, turned down William Street, and thence struck into the Yarrannabbe Road. It was all strange territory to me, but from the heights I presently caught sight of the harbour and realised the position.

"You live at Double Bay!" I cried. It was the most fashionable part of Sydney.

Shaw smiled. "We'll be late for lunch," he said.

I felt very nervous, not of meeting strange faces, but of the lunch. I suddenly remembered that I had encountered in several novels scathing reflections on the table manners of parvenus. I had never yet dined with gentlefolk, and wildly wondered if they ate very differently from larrikins. I tried hard to recall all I had ever read on the subject. Mark Twain was helpful, but Max O'Rell almost instructive. Swiftly reviewing — luckily I possessed a prodigious memory — certain sarcastic quips of the anglicised Gaul occurred to me. "He swallowed his knife, but to my astonishment recovered it with magical celerity." Ergo — do not let a knife pass your lips, Lucas Rowe! "She cut her bread piece by piece, unmindful of my shudders!" Ergo — Lucas Rowe, *bite* yours! It will be perceived that my conclusions were not always happy. One recollection was most disturbing. "Let me see you eat, and I shall tell you what you are!" I resolved to eat very little, and do nothing upon my own initiative. I determined to take Edward Shaw as my model, and slavishly follow his example in everything.

We drew up at last before a large house situated upon the cliffs, enclosed in a spacious garden, which ran down in rows of terraces to the bay. It was a very pretty place indeed, and surrounded by others of similar pretentiousness. The house was two-storeyed, containing perhaps fifteen rooms, square in shape, built of brick, but cemented over to resemble freestone, and was encompassed with wide verandahs and glass-enclosed balconies. The garden was bright with dahlias, roses, chrysanthemums, and hibiscus; it was not laid out in any fixed order, but appeared wild and straggling. Maize, poppies, and rock melons grew undisturbed among the shrubs, and half a score of big red-berried pepper trees supplied a welcome shade. It seemed to me a perfect paradise of homeliness and beauty. Shaw opened the front door with a latch key, and led the way upstairs to his bedroom. I obtained my first experience of

luxury. I trod on velvet pile carpets, I looked on real oil paintings, on tinted wall papers and tasteful ornaments, with a sense of awakening rapture. I saw many things whose names and uses I did not know. I said to myself, “What happiness it must be to live in a place like this!”

I washed from my hands the stains of Burn's gore, then watched Shaw dress. I saw him attend to his finger-nails with a peculiar instrument, and, realising a new duty, surreptitiously glanced at my own; they were — *horribile dictu!* — black! With a sense of a terrible danger narrowly averted, I remedied the defect with the aid of my pocket knife. (Since that day my hands have been cared for most tenderly.)

“What a careless beggar you are!” observed Shaw. “You dress abominably; the cut of that suit is too awful for words!”

“You see, I never have had anything to do with women,” I shamefacedly explained. “I'm sorry, though, for your sake.”

“Oh, I don't care, Rowe. As a matter of fact, I hate a dandy. One thing, you always wear clean linen. Till I found that out, I took you for an utter Bohemian!”

“Are Bohemians dirty then?”

“Most of them. How women can suffer them, I don't know!”

“Do they?” I discovered a sudden thirst for information.

“Sydney girls just adore them!” he replied disgustedly.

This was most interesting to me. If Bohemians so much resembled larrikins, it seemed to me that I stood a chance of passing muster. I resolved to pose as a Bohemian. Not that I was dirty in any of my habits; indeed, I possessed a natural predilection for cleanliness; but I thought that if society could bring itself to pardon filth for the sake of Bohemianism, lesser derelictions and solecisms ought to pass unnoticed. For a month past I had devoted a good deal of study to “Bailey on Etiquette.” I knew how to bow, how not to cross a room, when to sit, stand, and open a door. I had practised speaking in a low voice, and believed that a loud laugh evidenced a total lack of breeding.

Hastily running over the list of my recently acquired accomplishments, I followed Shaw downstairs and into the dining-room. The lack of ceremony in his introduction astonished me.

“Mother, this is my friend Rowe. Rowe, my mother. My cousin, Miss Denton, Mr. Rowe. Hum — er — ah — Mr. Percival, Mr. Rowe. Where's father, mater?”

Mrs. Rowe extended to me a hand, while answering her son. “He is detained in town, Ned. I scarcely expected you. Lunch is almost over. Touch the bell, Rupert, will you?”

Mr. Percival nodded to me, and clanged a gong with hearty good will. Shaw drew me to a chair. I sat down hastily, and looked up to meet the smiling gaze of Amber Eyes.

“I think we have met before, Mr. Rowe,” she said demurely.

I blushed furiously, an absurd trick which I have never been able to this day to cure. “Yes,” I replied.

“My son tells me you are an Englishman,” observed Mrs. Rowe.

She was a stout and handsome woman, with a bold, florid face, very like Shaw's. She looked comfortable, good-natured, and perfectly self-satisfied. I liked her.

“Yes, madam,” I replied.

“Have you been out here long?”

“Not very long — a good while.” I was confused, and answered at random.

“Do you like the Colonies?”

The whole table was listening to the catechism. A servant put before me a plate of fried fish, then served Shaw. I glanced at him furtively, and observed that he attacked his with a fish knife and fork. I confidently selected similar instruments from beside my plate, and answered, smiling, (Bailey advises a fairly constant employment of smiles), “Well, madam, as yet I have formed no very definite opinions. I came here without introductions, and have in consequence met only a limited number of people. But I like the place extremely; the climate suits me.”

“What part of England do you come from?”

“London. I am a Cockney.”

“Oh, indeed! Have you any relations here?”

“None. I came out simply for the sake of my health.”

“Will you stay long, do you think?”

I commenced to doubt the perfection of Mrs. Shaw's breeding. Following Bailey's advice, I slightly raised my eyebrows in deprecation of her curiosity. “Always, I hope,” I said slowly. I took a mouthful of fish, and, after mastication, discovered a bone. I did not know what to do with it. I looked at Shaw, but could glean no assistance for my dilemma there; he ate gaily on, and bones did not trouble him. I wanted to spit the nuisance out, but feared to compromise myself; finally I bit the brute in half and swallowed it. By the mercy of providence I did not choke. Afterwards I took greater care to separate the particles upon my plate. Once I was on the verge of dipping my knife into the salt; but fortunately just in time observed Shaw use a spoon. I had the same experience with the butter, and when roast beef was set before me, I recklessly applied my new experience to the mustard. I gained confidence with the passing moments, and although at first I felt that everyone was searching me for flaws, I soon realised that my fears were groundless. Mr. Percival was of great assistance to me; he was a most didactic young man, who appeared to love the sound of his own voice. He kept telling funny stories one after another, which made the others laugh. I did not consider them very funny, for I had heard them all before, but I judged it best to laugh too. He had rather a clever-looking face; he was dressed elegantly, and wore

an eyeglass, which gave him a supercilious expression. When he laughed, he opened his mouth very wide, and his upper lip, which was long and thin, shot out at an angle from his teeth like the flap of a leather fly trap.

Amber Eyes, whom I looked at whenever I dared, seemed to hang on his words; she paid me very little attention.

“Is it going to rain to-morrow, Rupert?” asked Shaw, during Percival's first pause.

“Ah!” he cried, “that reminds me of my last visit to Katoomba. It was this way——”

“Oh, bosh!” said Shaw, rudely. “I'm more interested in the question I propounded. I am thinking of the picnic.”

“Ah, indeed. Well, make your mind easy. We'll have a thunderstorm before midnight, but bright skies tomorrow. Well, as I was saying, I was at Katoomba last spring——”

“He's the *Daily Phone's* weather prophet,” muttered Shaw in my ear.

I nodded. Percival went on.

“And whilst staying at the Carrington I used to go out for long walks every morning. Well, the head waiter there seemed to know all about the weather, a chap named Jim. People all consulted him upon the matter of what to wear, and he was perfect. If I took his advice, I was right as the bank; but if I relied on myself, I would either return home drenched, lacking a waterproof, or else be burdened during my stroll with a useless great-coat. You may guess that I was pretty staggered at the unfailing accuracy of his predictions, and vastly curious. Before I left Katoomba I resolved to purchase his secret, so one evening, showing him half a sovereign, I besought his confidence.

“ ‘It's this way, sir,’ he explained. ‘There's a cove in Sydney named Percival, who is meteorologist for the *Daily Phone*.' ‘Yes, yes,’ I cried, bucking up, you may be sure, in expectation of a complimentary reference to be unconsciously addressed to myself. ‘Well, sir,’ said Jim, ‘he’s the worst guesser in the world, worse than Russell or Wragge by a long chalk, so when he says it's goin' to be fine, I bet my pile on rain, and vice versa. I always come out on top.’ ‘Yes, yes,’ I cried, bucking up, you may be sure, in expectation of a complimentary reference to be unconsciously addressed to myself. ‘Well, sir,’ said Jim, ‘he's the worst guesser in the world, worse than Russell or Wragge by a long chalk, so when he says it's goin' to be fine, I bet my pile on rain, and vice versa. I always come out on top.’ to be fine, I bet my pile on rain, and vice versa. I always come out on top.' ”

“What a horrid man!” said Amber Eyes.

Shaw laughed. “I guess I shall take a mackintosh with me to-morrow,” he remarked.

“Most unfair!” cried his mother. “Rupert told the story against

himself.”

“Oh, I don't mind,” said Percival, with a shoulder shrug; “I am used to being jeered at. Which reminds me——” and he at once embarked upon another story, which I did not listen to, but for which I was grateful, because it covered the introduction of fruit, and enabled me quietly to discover a new mode of eating apples with a knife and fork.

After lunch we withdrew to the garden, and, seated beneath the shade of a large pepper tree on an upper terrace, which commanded a magnificent harbour view, were served with coffee and cigarettes. Mrs. Shaw smoked; but Amber Eyes declined. Mrs. Shaw explained to me that her system required nicotine, and that her doctor had ordered her six cigarettes a day. I did not believe her, and was frankly horrified. Even larrikinesses did not smoke. Percival launched straight away into a discourse on the habits of the ladies of Brazil; apparently everything reminded him of something. I commenced to think him a great bore, especially as he monopolised the attention of Amber Eyes.

Mrs. Shaw at sudden intervals renewed her examination of me.

“Could I play the piano? Did I like dancing? Was I fond of tennis? She hoped I did not play that horrid, rough game football? Had I weak lungs? Had I been to the opera? Did I know Lord Jersey? Had I been to the last ball at Government House? Was I going to the next garden party? Was I a protectionist? What did I think of Mr. Reid? Did I think it proper for unchaperoned girls to go to theatres with casual male escort before they were engaged? and after? She hoped I did not agree with the practice of partners indiscriminately kissing each other at balls between the dances. Did I like ‘doing the block’ in King Street of an afternoon? Did I think Australian girls freer in their manners and faster than English girls?”

I strove to satisfy the lady, and from the very trend of her questions gleaned a considerable insight into the customs of society. She approved me at last with a smile which just escaped being condescending.

“I am sure you will get on very well out here, Mr. Rowe,” she declared.

I told her that I sincerely hoped so, and at that moment Mr. Percival took his leave. Now Bailey says that a first visit to the house of an acquaintance should be cut as short as possible. Conceiving that I had stayed quite long enough, I, too, rose to go; but Shaw pushed me back into my chair. “You have nothing to do,” he protested; “besides, May — Miss Denton — won't forgive me if you go so soon. She wants to have a long chat with you.”

Miss Denton coloured a little, and Mr. Percival favoured me with a sharp glance, which I thought unwarrantably critical. He sneered as he bowed to me. I wondered why. Could he be in love with Amber Eyes? Hardly so, I thought; she seemed more interested in him than he in her.

Mrs. Rowe strolled with him up the path. Shaw also went off with a cheery “Excuse me, old chap; back soon.”

Amber Eyes and I were thus left alone together. For the first time that day I seriously regarded her. She was very pretty, and beautifully dressed. I confessed to myself that I had never seen a woman more beautiful or more bewitching. Her eyes were wonderful, her brows were mysterious, her whole face strong, but arch and most inviting. She was not at all unapproachable, for while her lips smiled, there was a sort of challenge in her eyes. “As soon as I knew you were English I wanted to know you,” she said. “I love English boys.”

This declaration much disturbed me. I hated to remember that I was not English. I discovered a feverish anxiety to change the conversation.

“Is Mr. Percival engaged to you?” I demanded.

She laughed outright. “What a queer thing to ask! How direct you are! Why do you want to know?”

“You answer my question first!”

She looked surprised, and almost imperceptibly frowned. “You forget I am a girl.”

“Now,” said I, “you can't believe me such an idiot, can you?”

She looked aghast. I had evidently made some mistake. “You are strange!”

I felt afraid of I knew not what. “Do tell me?” I pleaded.

“No — you are rude.”

This made me reckless. “It's you — who are rude!”

“I!” Her eyes opened wide.

“Yes, you! You answered my question by asking another.”

She smiled. “I am not engaged to him. Now tell me why you asked.”

“Because I wished to know.”

“But why?”

“I am interested.”

“How much?” The challenge in her eyes, which had disappeared for a moment, now returned, and became twice as definite. I completely lost my head; she looked so entrancingly pretty that I did not know what to do. I felt a queer, uncanny sort of hunger run through my body.

“Everything!” I cried.

She looked very demurely at her feet. They were shod in patent leather shoes, whose trim and tiny neatness matched the rest of her uncommonly. She seemed soft all over. I wondered if it was the dress or really herself. Her gown was fluffy and silky. It was of very thin stuff; she seemed to fill it, but, oh, so tenderly! She said, or rather she murmured, “What does ‘everything’ mean?”

“The whole world,” I answered, quickly.

She glanced up and glanced down. “What big eyes you have!” she muttered.

“Do you like me?” I demanded.

“I don't know yet.”

“When will you?”
“How can I tell?”
“You saved my life, I believe, that night. Do you remember?”
“Perhaps.”
I sighed.
“What are you sighing for?” she asked.
“Because you are a flirt.”
She laughed merrily. “You wouldn't have me otherwise, would you?”
“No — not yet.”
“When, then?”
“Some day you will have to change, for some one's sake.”
“For yours?” she flashed.
“Why not?” I asked.
“Have you ever been in love?” asked Amber Eyes.
“No. Have you?”
“Not really.”
“Where do you live?”
“Here. Mr. Shaw is my guardian, you know.”
“Is he? Have you no parents?”
She shook her head. “They died when I was very young.”
“So did mine.”
“Poor boy!” said Amber Eyes.
I lighted a cigarette. “It is strange our meeting again, is it not?”
She smiled. “Not so strange. I arranged it.”
“But how?” I demanded. “How did you know even my name or where I was?”
“Edith Glasson read your name in your book that night, and on Commemoration Day I saw you in cap and gown. The rest was easy.”
“Shaw——” I began.
“Quite so. Edward wouldn't hear of it at first. He thought you were a regular outsider; but he changed his mind.”
“Or you for him?”
“No. I had quite lost hope.”
“You mean to say you hoped?”
“Of course I hoped. Nothing wrong about that, is there?”
“You are a queer girl. You are not a bit like what I expected.”
“What did you expect?”
“I scarcely know. Someone utterly unapproachable — miles above my reach.”
“Disappointed? she asked, with a flash of her amber eyes.
“A little.”
She bit her lower lip to repress a laugh. “I am so sorry,” she said, demurely. “Shall I be stiff?”
“Please not,” I cried; “you are altogether delightful as you are.”

“Do you mean that?”

“Thoroughly.”

“But nevertheless you would have preferred me to be cold and stately?”

“No,” I answered, doubtfully; “you are natural, aren't you, as you are?”

“I believe so; but it is only fair to tell you that Aunty and Uncle, and even Edward, think me the most conceited girl alive, and the most affected.”

“Is he, Shaw, in love with you?”

“I live in the same house with him!” replied Miss Denton, in the greatest surprise.

I laughed heartily. “Is that the only reason? Don't people who live together ever fall in love?”

“I should say not,” she replied with much decision. “How old are you, Mr. Rowe?”

“Almost twenty-one. And you?”

“Eighteen last month. I think our eyes match beautifully, don't you?”

“You are laughing at me?”

“I am not. Why do you think so?”

“Do you mean to suggest that you might ever possibly care for me?”

“I might.”

“But — but — marry me?” I muttered.

“I guess,” said Amber Eyes very seriously, “I guess I shall marry the man I care for, whoever or whatever he may be.”

“Supposing he were a bad man?”

“Supposing he were the worst man on earth!”

I uttered a little cry of astonishment and delight. I felt at the same time elated and depressed. I was consumed with curiosity to know more about her. I wanted to leave her and be alone, wanted to stay with her, wanted to be sure of when I should see her again. All this at once.

“Are you ever serious?” I asked.

“I was just now.”

“How many men have kissed you?” I demanded suddenly.

She blushed to her eyes. “How dare you!” she gasped.

“Here comes Shaw!” I muttered. “Answer me?”

“I shall not.”

“You will!”

“No.”

“Very well. I shall never speak to you again.”

She laughed mockingly. “You will drive me to despair.”

“Please!” said I.

She counted on her fingers. “One, two, three, four, five, six. Six, Mr. Rowe.”

“I have six new enemies,” I muttered.

“Six new enemies!” cried Shaw, who had caught the words; “how comes that?”

“We were discussing the senses,” explained Miss Denton. “You know that there is a new sense now — weight — and I have been explaining to Mr. Rowe that our senses are our worst enemies. It was hard to convince him!”

Our eyes met, and she blushed.

“Well, Rowe, have you been persuaded to come to the picnic to-morrow?” asked Shaw.

“Oh, do come!” cried Amber Eyes.

“I ought to do some work, I fear.” I wished to be persuaded.

“On Saturday! Surely, not on Saturday!” she pleaded.

Shaw looked at me keenly. “You'll come!” he said.

“Yes.”

The girl clapped her hands. “You shall be my cavalier for the day. You must, for all the other girls will be strangers to you.”

“What about Percival?” asked Shaw.

“Oh, bother Rupert!”

Shaw laughed. “You'd better come with me into town now, Rowe. I have to do some shopping.”

“Bother your shopping!” said Amber Eyes.

“You little wretch!” he cried. “Rowe is my chum, not yours.”

“Yet,” she flashed.

For answer, Shaw slipped a hand under my arm, and drew me off. She cried out “Au revoir!” and stood waving her hand until we entered the house. After I had bidden adieu to his mother, and we had reached the street, he turned to me.

“You must look out for yourself there, Rowe.”

I flushed. “Why?”

“She is the most dangerous little flirt in Sydney. She just lives for it. She has neither heart nor conscience.”

“She won't waste much of her time on me, I think.”

“Don't make any mistake. You are new! The new broom sweeps clean, my boy.”

“Thanks for the warning, in any case,” I muttered. Thereafter we chatted on other subjects; but his advice had horribly depressed me. It was as much as I could do to hide my feelings. Shaw made me buy a flannel picnic suit, and gave me the benefit of his taste in the choice of ties, hats, and shoes, for I took this opportunity to replenish my wardrobe. Afterwards he introduced me to his tailor, and I ordered several new suits. I returned to my hotel, dreadfully in debt, and profoundly miserable. I wished to heaven that I had never set eyes on May Denton, for I did not believe that I could withstand her methods long. She had already half bewitched me.

I found a registered letter awaiting me. It was from my uncle.

“MY DEAR NEPHEW, — I have been thinking that, as this is your first quarter, and you ought to flash it a bit to get popular, you'll want more cash, for close and such things. I send you £25; but you mustn't expect more than the ordinary allowance for any other quarter. I've heard as how you've been losing a pile at cards, and had a fight to-day in the common room. I feel proud you downed your man, and the Push'll be proud of you when they hear of it, and you may be sure I'll let 'em know. Don't lose too much at cards, and when you play make it a square game. Cheats never thrive, and you know how we clip cheats' ears in the Push when they are found out. I'm glad you've made up to old Shaw's son; he's a real tip topper. Stick to that sort! If by any chance you want more money, don't be frightened to write for it, though it'll have to come out of my pocket. Judith sends her best love. She thinks you looked a real toff the other day when she saw you at the Uni. rec. She says you're to be true to her.

“Your affectionate uncle,

“D. ROWE.”

This letter upset me very much, although its enclosure was most acceptable. It proved to me that all my movements were closely watched by my uncle's spies. I felt as though I were fettered in every limb with unseen chains. As for Judith, I detested her, and loathed her message.

XV The Picnic

EDWARD SHAW called at my hotel early in the morning, and took me to the rendezvous, which was at the corner of Elizabeth and Park Streets. I wondered why he had incurred the trouble, and asked him the reason.

He answered, rather nervously, “You have never mixed much with people; have you, Rowe?”

“Very little!” I replied, surprised. “Why?”

“I watched you eating yesterday — there, I'm sorry I spoke; you look distressed.”

“No — I am not; go on.”

“Well, you did several little things wrongly. I wouldn't mention it, only I take an interest; I don't want you to be laughed at — do you see?”

“What were they?”

“Trifles; no doubt they arose from carelessness more than anything else. But still——”

“Look here, Shaw,” I interjected, “I have never had any training; I don't want to pretend I have, to you. I have been all my life at a public school; my father died when I was a kiddy. It's only natural that I shouldn't know lots of things. How could I? If you are good enough to help me with hints, I'll be eternally grateful.”

Shaw looked much relieved. “It's what I came out for,” he replied. “I wasn't game to tell you yesterday; I did not know how you might take it — as an impertinence, perhaps.”

“You are a brick!” I cried.

“And you are a sensible fellow. I foresee that we shall be very good friends. And I tell you straight, if you suit me as well as I hope I do you, we can be real chums. I'm not the sort to spread myself. At school I had only one chum, and he died. It's hard for me to like people; I don't know how you find it.”

He spoke patronisingly, but seemed to apologise for his patronage.

“I have never had a chum,” I answered, “but I should dearly like to.”

Shaw was apparently quite satisfied, and he occupied all the time of our stroll to Park Street in giving me a useful lesson in social manners. I found him very much more instructive than Bailey, and entertaining into the bargain.

At the rendezvous waited a huge five-horse omnibus and a crowd of

muslin-clad women and white-flannelled men. Shaw introduced me to his father, one of the handsomest old gentlemen I have ever seen. He was much older than his wife, but for all that, active and genial as a boy. He shook me heartily by the hand, and declared he was very glad to make my acquaintance. He said he had been told I was studious, and he hoped I would induce Edward to pay more attention to his books. I replied I would do my best; he laughed and said that Edward was the laziest fellow in Australia. “At his age,” he protested, “I had already been making my own living for several years!”

“Shut up, governor!” cried Shaw, laughingly. “It was only because you had to.”

The old gentleman pulled his son's ear, and told him to be off for a handsome idle dog! It was easy to see that a sincere affection subsisted between the pair. I liked the old man immensely.

“Isn't he a darling?” muttered Edward, as he led me away. “There is no one like my governor.”

“He worships you,” said I.

“No more than I do him,” replied Shaw, earnestly; “but here is May, now mind yourself!”

Amber Eyes came up to us arm in arm with a pretty, fair-haired girl, whom I recognised as “Edith,” the girl who had been with her on the night when she woke me on the sea-wall at Miller's Point.

They surveyed me from top to toe. I felt supremely glad that my clothes were new, and fitted me. Miss Denton gave me her hand. “This is Edith Glasson!” she cried, quickly; “she is to look after you during the drive, because I have to go with Mr. Percival. But, mind you, not a minute longer; do you hear?”

Miss Glasson blushed. “Oh, May, Mr. Rowe may not care.”

“Nonsense, Edith, he will care; what I am afraid of is that he'll care too much. Understand that he is my property after luncheon. You hear, Mr. Rowe!”

“Yes, Miss Denton.”

“And you, Edith?”

“Of course.”

“Then, don't you dare try to give me the slip!” With that she flitted off like a fairy. I am afraid that during the drive I did not pay Miss Glasson the attention which her prettiness deserved. She did most of the talking, and I answered in a preoccupied fashion for the most part, for my gaze was always wandering towards Amber Eyes, who sat upon the box-seat beside Rupert Percival, and seemed to be enjoying herself immensely. I wondered how she could bring herself to flirt like that with man after man. One seemed just as good as another to her. I asked Miss Glasson if all girls were flirts? She replied she thought so, till they fell in love, and then flirting lost its charms. I asked her, was she a flirt? She supposed

she was — and her eyes suggested that I should undertake a practical investigation. I had not the heart for it, though, and I am sure she thought me stupid; but for all that she showed no inclination to introduce me to any of the other girls who were sitting around us, in spite of several hints which were quite unmistakably advanced to her concerning me. Very few of the other girls were pretty; indeed, they were so plainfeatured that I asked Miss Glasson if most Sydney girls were homely. She raised her eyebrows, and said no, she thought them mostly pretty.

"There are only two pretty girls on the 'bus," I objected. She laughed. "May and I?"

"Yes; it's rather strange, is it not, if you are right in what you said? I have counted them; there are sixteen present."

She gave me a queer glance. "It's May's picnic."

"What of that?"

"Well, don't you think she would be foolish to ask a lot of pretty girls? Where would she come in?"

It was a revelation to me in feminine methods. "How is it that she asked you, then?" I blurted out.

"Now that is a compliment I appreciate," she replied. "I am her friend, you see; besides, she is dark and I am fair; we don't clash."

"You mean you would probably not be such good friends if you were both dark?"

"Or fair."

"And do you really like each other?"

"We love each other!" she replied, indignantly. "I would trust May to — to the death!"

"And she, you?"

"In anything!"

"She is a flirt."

"So is every girl who has a grain of sense in her head. Why shouldn't we have a good time while we are young? It's slow enough after——"

"After what?"

"Marriage."

"You said 'marriage' as if you regarded it as a sort of death?"

"That is just what it is."

"I presume that with such ideas you will remain single."

"And die an old maid. Oh, you horrid man, to suggest such a thing!"

I laughed. "Why marry, if you hate the thought of it? Why not have a good time to the end?"

She shook her head. "You don't when you grow old; that's the worst of it. Besides, it's nice to have a home of one's own after a certain age."

"How frank you are!" I cried. "Do be a little more so, and tell me something I want to know."

"What is it?"

“Do you girls find any real pleasure, I mean happiness, in being made love to — kissed, and that sort of thing?”

“It depends on who does it. If he's nice” — she paused.

“Well?” I demanded.

Miss Glasson smiled. “It's great!” she murmured, and her smile was evidently inspired by pleasant recollections, for she pursed out her pretty lips as though in the act of receiving a beneficent caress.

Further confidences were prevented by our arrival at Maroubra Bay. It was a small indenture of the coast of which I had often heard, because it was a favourite spot for Push picnics; but I had never before seen it. The waves washed in sheer from the great ocean upon a small esplanade of firm white sand, which was bound in by north and south by bold and sharply rising yellow sandstone cliffs. The sand merged on the landward side into a wide sward of turf some twenty acres in extent, level as a billiard table, which, for its part, was enclosed with scrub-clad hills. At the farthest edge of the turf reposed a little freshwater lagoon, grown high with tall, brown sedge and glittering green reeds. It is a beautiful place, and richly merits the distinction it enjoys as the best of Sydney's excursionist retreats. Tables, made of planks, stretched across carpenter's trestles, were spread out on the lawny green; they were draped with damask cloths, and covered with costly eatables. It made one hungry to even glance at them. The horses were quickly unharnessed from the 'bus, hobbled, and turned out to graze; and the party was presently invited to the luncheon. It was almost mid-winter, but the day was mild and balmy; there was not a breath of wind, and the great sun poured upon us his gentle golden beams, unhampered by a single leafy interruption. But the air was bracing in spite of him, and no one cried for shade. It was a very delightful function, that luncheon. There was no ceremony; there were no seats. Each person helped him or herself to what they wished, then sat upon the grass to eat at their pleasure. There was no conversation, but everyone chatted, laughed, jested, and enjoyed themselves.

I became separated from Edith Glasson, and totally lost sight of Amber Eyes; but I attached myself to Mrs. Shaw, and acted as her attendant. It was a wise move, and well repaid me for the slight trouble involved; for she was evidently charmed with my attentions, and every few moments gave me a new invitation to her house. Before it was over I had engaged myself to dine there on the following day, an dtwo evenings in the ensuing week. There seemed no limit to her hospitality; for no sooner had I agreed to this than she suggested a theatre party for the week after, and declared her intention of presently giving a ball. I noticed Edward Shaw seated at some distance, amongst a crowd of girls. He seemed to be enjoying himself, for they fed him as though he were a baby. Half the men were middle-aged and married; their wives waited on them hand and foot. Among the younger folk, girls were in a preponderance of

numbers, but they did not appear to mind. I had never seen such a crowd of smiling faces. Not one appeared to have a care in the wide world. I could not help feeling happy in very sympathy. The party broke up gradually, wandering off in all directions by twos and threes. Amber Eyes acted as master of ceremonies. With the exception of myself, she dismissed everybody, even Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, and finally we stood by the deserted tables alone. She then called the 'bus driver, and other servants, and after making them perfectly contented with eatables and a generous quantity of bottled ale, she took my arm, and led me towards the northern hill.

"Why in this direction?" I enquired. "The others are on the beach."

"The very reason," she cried, merrily. "I am going to take you to a cave I found last year. No one else knows about it. But you must be very quiet and not make a sound, or we shall be discovered."

As soon as we reached the shelter of the trees she took a path which led back towards the sea, but through the scrub. Once she turned to me with eyes dancing with laughter, but her finger on her lips. I heard voices. We tip-toed past, stealthy as Indians, in single file, but through a screen of shrubs we saw Edward Shaw seated in the shade, with his arm round Edith Glasson's waist. When we were at a safe distance Amber Eyes burst into laughter.

"The humbug!" she cried; "won't I have some fun with him now! He pretends not to care a fig for Edith!"

Soon we reached the cliffs, and the path led to a great fissure, down which we clambered cautiously, a hundred feet or more. We stood at last upon the rocks of the sea level, and I saw before us a tiny cavern, hollowed out centuries ago by the action of the waves. It was marvellously secluded, a veritable hiding-place, with but a single approach, for on both sides of us huge cliff promontories extended far into the water. The cave was spangled with periwinkles right to the roof. Upon the floor was a great flat rock, which offered a tempting seat. Miss Denton brushed it clear of shells, then spread out a woollen wrap which she had brought.

"Well, what do you think of it?" she cried.

"I think you are a very daring girl," said I.

"Why?"

"To bring me — a man you know so very little of — here alone with you! You are beyond the reach of assistance. Your loudest scream could not be heard."

She looked at me curiously, but with no sign of fear.

"What could you do to me?" she asked.

"I might kill you!"

She laughed.

"I might kiss you!"

She drew herself up and eyed me very haughtily.

“You would regret the attempt, Mr. Rowe.”

“I beg your pardon, Miss Denton; I was jesting.”

“I hope so!”

I meditated the reproof for some time, gazing out to sea or watching the waters lapping on the stones. I felt completely crushed. But presently her laughter rippled out.

“How down you look!” she cried.

I glanced up and met her eyes; they were dancing with merriment.

“You are cruel!” I muttered.

“Nedder mind, the dear! Diddums hurt it, the naughty things — mudder will beat them!” she chuckled.

She was utterly beautiful, but she was laughing at me. I grew wrathful.

“It is a simple thing to make a fool of a man that way!” I cried. “I took you seriously.”

“I was serious!” She was grave on instant.

“Indeed; then why did you bring me here, if it was not to tempt me to kiss you or something?”

“Or something!” repeated Miss Denton, scornfully.

“What was it for, then?”

“Something — just you consider it, Mr. Rowe!”

“No!”

“Sit down beside me!”

I obeyed. We regarded each other, I defiantly, she in secret mirth.

“How slow you are!” she muttered.

“What do you expect me to do?”

“Something!”

A reckless demon possessed me. With a swift movement I slipped my arm round her waist.

“How dare you!” said Amber Eyes, indignantly; but she did not try to free herself.

“I don't know!” I replied. I was happy as a king. We kept silent for quite a time; but soon I felt the girl's frame quivering. Before I could think what it was she had her hands before her face. I thought she was sobbing, but the emotion was suppressed laughter.

“Is that the way you make love?” she gasped, between bursts of merriment.

It was too much, such treatment maddened me. Of a sudden, and more in rage than love, I caught her roughly in my arms and crushed her lips to my own. Not once but a hundred times I kissed her, manliness, memory, and all else lost in a perfect whirl of passion. She struggled to escape, but she was helpless, for I seemed possessed with the strength of a dozen men. My kisses were rude and cruel; they hurt her, they burned me. When I released her she was breathless and white as death. For me, I was

utterly undone. I trembled so violently that I feared to fall. We stared into each other's eyes for a few dreadful seconds, and then what needs must I do but burst outweeping? I could not help myself. I cursed myself for the weakness, but to stem it was impossible. I threw myself, face downwards, upon the stone and sobbed and cried as I have never done before or since, and in my heart was such a mixture of anguish and despair and strange exultant grief, as I imagine must sometimes torture the souls of outraged women. Something seemed torn from me whose loss was irremediable. I was no longer my own master. I hated the woman bitterly, but, ah! how I hated myself. I felt her hand upon my shoulder. It recovered me. Fiercely I wiped my face, more fiercely I shook off her touch, and disdaining to look at her I strode to the cavern's mouth. But there I paused. The sunlight was like a threatening hand clenched before my mouth. I thought of returning to the party with a shudder of terror. I could not do it. I felt that if anyone looked at me I should die of shame. I wanted to escape, but wanted courage to face the difficulties in my path. The girl must have watched me in amaze, but I did not consider her feelings, so wild and tortured were my own. I walked hither and thither through the cavern like a drunken man. Twice she called to me. Her voice was maddening. I could not bear it.

"Go," I cried. "Go!" and faced her desperately.

Her lips were tremulously parted. Her eyes were luminous with some deep feeling. They held me spell-bound.

"Must I go?" she asked, and her tones were full of sweet humility. I thought she mocked me, and was almost choked with rage.

"Yes," I cried. "Go to your friends, and laugh with them at me. Tell them what I have done. Tell them how I kissed you, and how I played the woman afterwards. I never wish to see you again. I hate you! I hate all women! You are all flirts and heartless creatures. I have disgraced myself; but it is all your fault. Yours, do you hear? I wish to God I had never seen you!"

The words poured from me in a torrent; wildly unreasonable as they were, I never realised their import. I was filled with a burning sense of injury and resentment. And yet it was she who had the best right to be indignant.

The girl's eyes filled with tears as I watched her. Even those I thought a mock. She whispered, "Yes, it was all my fault. I shall go. I was wrong. I shall never flirt again. I have hurt you. It was very wrong of me. But we have known each other so short a time. How could I know that you loved me like this?"

"Love you!" I cried. "I——" "Loathe you" was on my tongue; but something restrained the words — a strange meaning in her eyes, a sudden revelation in my own heart.

I sat down upon the stone, turned suddenly weak, all my anger gone

and all my passion. I watched the girl pass from the cavern, slowly, a drooping, repentant figure. I had no strength to stay her or recall her. I scarcely felt the wish. Hours seemed to pass; the cold crept up from the sea, and entered my blood. I was chilled through and through, yet I remained as I was, overcome with an enthralling lassitude of mind and body, neither miserable nor happy, neither dreaming, nor entirely free from dreams. She crept back to my side like a shadow at last, and her beautiful face was wet. I looked at her in vague surprise, not perfectly comprehending her return.

"I am so sorry," she whispered, her sweet lips quivering pathetically.

I shook my head. "Why should you? That is my part. I treated you brutally."

She gave a sob. "No, it was my fault; all my fault. I led you on. It was all my fault."

"Why are you crying?" I asked; "because I kissed you?"

"No."

"Why, then?"

"Because you are unhappy. What made you love me, Lucas?"

"I don't know."

"Does it hurt very much?"

"It did at first."

"Only at first?" Her eyes were utterly reproachful.

In spite of myself I smiled.

"Ah!" she cried, and panted a little. "Don't you love me?"

"No, I do not."

"Lucas!"

"Yes!"

She gazed at me intensely. "You are telling me a lie."

I got to my feet. "Let us go; it is getting late."

"It's not yet four!"

"May, May, what a heartless girl you are!"

"I am not."

"Do you love me, then?"

"No, no, no!"

"May I kiss you — one kiss? May I, May?"

"No."

"Just one — for the last time!" I pleaded.

"No." Her eyes were fixed on mine. "You hurt!" she muttered.

I put out my arms and seized her, my very heart on fire.

"Coquette!" I cried, and drew her to me — close — close. She resisted slightly — very slightly. With head thrown back, she waited for my kiss. Slowly I bent my face to hers, reading her eyes the while; they loved me if she did not. When I felt her breath upon my lips, I stopped. I drew back, and suddenly released her. She swayed, and fell apart from me in

wild amaze. But I was master of myself.

“It is a crime, a blasphemous mockery of something half divine, unless both love,” I muttered, and I felt like one inspired as I spoke the words.

She went crimson from brow to throat, then white as a lily. She hurried from the cave, and I followed her. Not once did she glance at me as we climbed the path. I thought I had offended her past pardon; but, strangely enough, I did not care. When we reached the cliffs, a great noise, a commotion of angry voices, hoarse, enraged outcries, and the hammering of steel on wood, met our ears. With every step we took it grew louder, and before we arrived at the edge of the scrub we could already distinguish words, oaths, and other horrible expressions. Miss Denton quickened her pace, and at last broke from the scrub ten yards in advance of me; but before I could make the spot she had returned. “Quick! Quick!” she cried.

I dashed forward at a run, and in a second stood beside her.

“What is it?”

She pointed outwards towards the beach. I parted the bushes and perceived in the middle of the turf our party collected in a knot at a short distance from the omnibus. A rabole of about twenty larrikins were breaking up our tables, smashing the crockery, and wildly disporting themselves, while fully forty more, drawn up in line of battle, armed with sticks and stones, were menacing our friends. A heated altercation was in progress. A heavy hand was at that moment laid upon my shoulder. I swung round and stood face to face with Rupert Percival. He was very pale. “Don't show yourself, you fool!” he muttered. “If they saw you it would be all up with us.”

“But our friends!” I cried.

“We can't help them, the larrikins are between us; remember we have to save these girls!”

“Girls!” I echoed, stupidly, then perceived that a woman in the last stage of terror stood beside Miss Denton, who was trying to soothe her.

“It's a push!” cried Percival. “I believe it's the Dogs' Push. If it is, Heaven help us all!”

I started violently. “How did the quarrel start?” I demanded.

“They came along about an hour ago, and camped over there, then one of them insulted Miss Feversham and George Gribben, as they passed to go to the omnibus. Gribben knocked him down, but before you could say Jack Robinson the whole Push set upon poor George, and gave him a terrible time. I believe they would have killed him, only Shaw and some others ran to help. They were kicking him——”

“How do you know all this?” I demanded, sharply.

“We watched from here.”

“You watched!” I cried.

He turned scarlet.

“It is not my fault. I could not leave Miss Somerset — she fainted!”

“What is that in your hand?”

“A revolver!”

He held it out. I snatched it from him and darted from the trees into the open. I was consumed with rage, and felt inclined to shoot down every one of my old companions. How dared they interfere with my new friends! I felt a match for them all. They should see.

Imagine my consternation when, at last, pausing within twenty feet of the ruffian mob, I discovered that they were all perfect strangers to me. In place of fury I was quickly turned into a block, icy with terror. But only for a moment. At all events, these were larrikins, and I remembered with a thrill of reviving courage that all larrikins are cowards. I pointed Percival's pistol at the mob and drew trigger. One man uttered a howl of agony and clapped his hand to his arm. All turned.

“You pack of cowardly scum!” I shouted, my voice reanimating my rage. “Is this what you call a fair game — forty of you against fifteen? Down to the beach with you, you dogs, or I'll damned soon make some of your wives widows!”

I advanced upon them with steady steps. Well was it for me then that larrikins *are* cowards! Before the revolver they fell back terrified. Forty to one it was; but they knew that did they rush me one man at least must die before they reached me, and no one wished to be that one. They swore, they uttered the most filthy curses, but they retreated. When they reached the tables, for a wild moment I thought that with such a reinforcement of their number they would gather pluck; but I did not falter in my advance. For a second they paused. There was only one thing for me to do: I commenced to run at them. That decided the matter; they wavered, broke, and fled, yelling like fiends, for the beach. I followed for fifty paces. They gathered in a knot by the water's edge. They were in a *cul-de-sac*. It was exactly what I wanted. Had I driven them to the scrub they would have assailed us from the cover, and I fear but few of us could have escaped unscathed from the volleys of stones with which they would have harassed us. I held my revolver in rest and watched them. Presently I heard footsteps behind me. Old Mr. Shaw came running up.

“By Heaven, Mr. Rowe!” he cried, “it is the finest thing I ever saw. You are a hero, sir!”

I did not look at him.

“Excuse me!” I replied, “I have to watch those brutes yonder. Get the horses put into the 'bus with all the speed you can, and drive off. Only, wait for me about half a mile up the road. I'll cover your retreat!”

“Leave you!” he cried, indignantly; “No, sir — not if I die for it!”

I glanced at him sideways. “Very good, you stay with me, but make the rest go! We shall be perfectly safe, for I am armed, and that scum hasn't

an ounce of courage in its composition!”

He gave a short, brisk laugh, patted me on the back, and hurried off. In about ten minutes, I heard a ringing cheer, the crack of a whip, and the sound of wheels ploughing through the turf. “Lucas Rowe,” I muttered, in apostrophe, “this is the best day's work that you have ever done for yourself. I'm commencing to believe that you are not such a coward after all!”

Next instant friendly hands were on my shoulder. I turned, and saw Mr. Shaw and Edward. They were both shaking with excitement. Edward caught my left hand and pressed it between both of his own. “What do you think of my new pal, father?” he cried.

“I'll tell you another time!” said the old gentleman.

“Is Mr. Gribben hurt badly?” I demanded.

“No; he is terribly bruised, but no bones are broken. Aren't they cursed cads!” and the old gentleman shook his fist at the larrikins.

The Push saw, and loudly groaned.

“Don't do that again!” I advised, “we are within stone's-throw.”

“I'd like to kill them all!” growled Edward.

“I guess,” said I, “it's time for us to go. You move forward in advance of me; go quite slowly; if we offered to run they'd be after us like a shot, and then — good-bye!”

In this manner we conducted our retreat. The Push followed us step by step, but every time I levelled the pistol at them they paused. We passed the lagoon, and gained the road in dead silence, but there the pursuit ceased. The larrikins, recognising that no hope of revenge remained to them, scattered over the turf immediately we had abandoned it, and set to work to build a camp-fire, using for fuel our broken tables. When I saw that, I overtook the others, and after a while carelessly examined the revolver. To my surprise it was uncharged. It had only contained the one cartridge which I had fired when I first attacked the mob. I handed it with a smile to Edward Shaw. He looked at it, saw, and turned to me, almost aghast.

“Did you know it was unloaded?” he cried.

I shook my head. “If I had,” I frankly confessed, “I don't know where we should all be now.”

“Don't libel yourself, my dear boy,” said Mr. Shaw, looking at me with warm eyes. “I believe you would have faced them in any case.”

I was silent; I did not agree with him, but I did not see why I should protest. When we had topped the first rise in the white sandy road, we saw the carriage awaiting us on the slope of a neighbouring declivity. Its occupants set up a ringing shout, which we heard echoed in loud groans from our rear. We laughed heartily all three! The whole thing appeared to me supremely ridiculous, now that the peril was past, and I comically wondered what the Dogs would say if they knew that I had put to shame

a brother push.

"What does it feel like, being a hero?" asked Edward Shaw.

I stopped and faced him. "Look here, old chap, none of that nonsense, you know. I won't stand chaff of that kind from you!"

"You'll have to from everyone else then; wait till the papers get hold of it!"

I gasped with terror, for I thought: "If the papers get hold of it, so will the Dogs." "Mr. Shaw!" I cried, suddenly, "will you do me a great favour?"

"Anything, my boy!" cried the old gentleman, heartily.

"Keep this out of the papers!"

"But why?"

"I don't want my steps to be dogged by a push. You know what push vengeance is. I heard about it even in England!"

He looked at me curiously, shook his head, and smiled.

"I don't think you are very much afraid of push vengeance, my boy; but never mind, I like you all the better for your modesty."

"Whatever it is — you promised," I urged.

"For myself, yes," he said. "But remember we have a press man amongst us — Rupert Percival."

I smiled. "I don't think he will be hard to persuade."

"What makes you think that?"

"This is his revolver!"

The old gentleman looked at me very thoughtfully, then nodded his head once or twice.

"I wondered what had become of him!" he muttered.

Edward laughed.

"He is a crack shot!" he explained. "He gave us an exhibition this afternoon!"

Next moment we reached the carriage. I had to shake hands all round. Mrs. Shaw and two old ladies insisted upon kissing me. Hero-worship has its drawbacks. I passed a very uncomfortable time indeed, until I found myself on the box seat beside Miss Denton. How I got there I have no idea; it was certainly not my fault, for I was so confused by my welcome that I was incapable of forming any plans. She subsequently protested that she had nothing to do with it, so I am obliged to consider that I must have unconsciously gravitated to her side. We spoke very little on the home journey. Amber Eyes appeared strangely reserved and shy, and I saw her from a new point of view. I think I liked the change. Often I caught her glancing at me in a sweet, furtive fashion. Each time I did so she blushed. She, of all the party, alone made no reference to what had passed, and I felt really grateful to her for her silence on the matter. When we did speak, it was upon some generality, and then very tersely. My brain was crowded with thoughts; perhaps hers was, too. When we

reached Park Street, the Shaws begged me to dine with them, but I excused myself upon the pretence of a prior engagement. Everyone thought it necessary to shake hands with me again, and cover me with fulsome praise and thanks — that is, everyone save Amber Eyes. She stood apart and watched the performance, smiling vaguely. It was I who had to go to her.

I muttered low, “Good-bye, May.”

“Good-night,” she corrected, softly.

“Is that all?” I asked, reproachfully.

“Lucas!” she whispered, and cast down her eyes; also she pressed my hand.

I left her gloriously happy.

XVI An Assignation

ONE of the first things I had done on entering the University was to procure from Farmer's a suit of evening dress clothes. They were the first I had ever seen except in the pages of illustrated magazines; but as yet I had had no opportunity to wear them. Quite early on Sunday afternoon I donned them, in anticipation of the dinner to which I was bidden, and in order to render myself accustomed to their use. I thought they suited me amazingly well, but the queer, cut-away tails of the coat were an abiding nuisance. It was Edward Shaw who taught me how to fix my tie. He waited for me at his garden gate, and took me at once to his bedroom. I had furnished myself with a common ready-made bow. This he tore off, and forced upon me one of his own, which, after much trouble, he made appear presentable. “It is in little touches like this,” he assured me, “that one can at once distinguish between cads and gentlemen!”

I owe a great deal to Edward Shaw; more than I can ever repay, except in gratitude, or rather now, alas! in grateful tributes to his memory! He was a most unselfish fellow, very kind and tender-hearted, but of rather a secretive nature. He loved little children, and necessitous folk, who appealed to his imagination. I do not mean that he was charitable to the poor, but that he had a natural inclination to help people of his own class whenever they were in a difficulty, provided that he liked them. He hated, however, to see the feelings of anyone hurt or derided, and always took the part of anyone who was laughed at. He once said to me, “I would much rather be ridiculed myself, than see another person made little of.” He was full of sympathy, and yet he appeared cold, sometimes even morose. He possessed a fine sense of humour, but such a sensitive heart that he seldom exercised it at the expense of another. His greatest fault was indolence. He was incurably lazy, and, rather than work in anything approaching a set fashion, would go to such trouble in avoiding it, that really had he applied the energy so wasted to his proper tasks he must have achieved a brilliant success, for he was clever, and marvellously quick of apprehension. I had conceived a fancy for him before I knew him. It is, therefore, hardly to be wondered at that I grew to simply love him as time proceeded, especially as, in spite of his indolence, he took unwearied pains over me, and seemed to always want to have me at his side. He had a great number of acquaintances, who liked him heartily, and whom he also liked in a fashion, but I was his

chum, and he made no secret that he cared for me incomparably better than the others. It is a great sadness for me to think that I did so little to deserve his affection. After he had fixed my tie, he showed me a poem he had written. I considered it as charitably as I could; but it was doggerel.

He watched my face intently. “I want you to tell me exactly what you think of it,” he said, with great earnestness. “It is my ambition, Lucas!”

“What, to write?”

“To become a poet!”

I felt he was hopelessly incapable of realising his desires, but I had not the heart to tell him so. You see, already I failed in friendship.

“I think it is splendid!” I said, after awhile.

His face lighted up. “I'm so glad!” he muttered, and showed me a drawer in his desk chocked with manuscript. “One day I'll let you read it,” he said, in the manner of a child promising another a great treat.

I felt as sorry as possible for him. “Thanks!” I said, as heartily as I could. “When did you commence to write?”

“Years ago; but no one knows except you. I couldn't tell anyone before. It's just my life, the best part of me; I love it.”

“Have you ever published any?”

He shook his head. “I could never bring myself to try. The thought of an editor coldly criticising what means so much to me, hurts too much. Never breathe a word of this to a soul, Lucas, will you?”

“No. I'd have my tongue cut out sooner!”

He wrung my hand. I could have cried for him. “I believe you could write if you tried,” he muttered; “you are sympathetic.”

“No,” said I; “it does not depend on sympathy. It is a gift. *Nascitur non fit*, Edward.”

His eyes gleamed. “I'll astonish people one day!” he said.

I sighed, for I pitied him profoundly. He appeared to me an extraordinarily pathetic figure; astute in all else, but in this subject devotedly blind.

“Who is your favourite poet?” he asked presently.

“Longfellow.”

He gave a cry of delight. “Is it possible? I just adore him, too.”

Now I did not adore Longfellow; but in very pity, I descended to the lowest depths of hypocrisy. “Do you know, Edward, those verses you just showed me somehow remind me of Longfellow.” Oh, how glad he seemed! I felt the lowest brute imaginable.

“I borrowed the metre from ‘Coplas de Manriqué,’ ” he cried, and then added, a little jealous of his own pride of authorship, perhaps, “but the thought is my own. You do not think me a plagiarist?”

“No, Edward, far from it; it was the melody that made me reminiscent, that was all.”

From that hour Edward Shaw accorded me his deep and whole-hearted

affection. It is my shame and not his that I won it so easily; but I cannot all regret the contemptible part I played, at least thereby I gave him some happiness, a happiness which elsewise he could never have enjoyed, for any other man would have laughed at his pretensions. I fear very much that a great deal of human satisfaction is founded, at bottom, upon insincerity; it is a sad thing to reflect upon, for it induces one to institute enquiries much best left undetermined.

The dinner passed as such functions do. I have long ago grown used to them, though I shall never forget the purgatory I suffered at the commencement of my social invasion. I carefully avoided solecisms, and talked as little as I could; you see, my chief curse is an itching tongue, and I recognised the desirability of curbing it. In spite of that, however, I was the centre figure of the conversation, for politics was the theme, and I had views. How paltry they all seem now!

The Attorney General was present, and he engaged me in an argument. At first he listened with amusement. No doubt he thought me an impertinent boy, to venture to discuss with him a point of economics. Later, however, he seemed to change his mind. I quoted established authorities in support of my contention with a glibness that confounded him, and foolishly refused to yield a jot of my opinions. It is true that I fought a losing battle, but I managed to leave the table in doubt as to whom the palm was due. I quickly realised the foolishness of my conduct, for I perceived that my opinionatedness had won the unfavourable consideration of a powerful man. It is a mistake for an unknown person to assail an established potentate, and I resolved not to commit the error again. When the ladies left the room, the Attorney General poured on my head a flood of ridicule, to which I submitted as a token of repentance. This restored his equanimity, and induced him to regard me with less hostile eyes, but by no means repaired my former error, for he afterwards described me to Mrs. Shaw as a bumptious young idiot, although she, dear lady, warmly defended me.

I was subsequently, in the drawing-room, much amused to observe the manner in which everyone who possessed an accomplishment was “trotted out,” and induced to perform for the benefit of the crowd. I can't avoid taking this opportunity to record my opinion how ridiculous men who sing appear, regarded by critical eyes. Their songs never suit them. Sentiment becomes bathos; passion ludicrous; grandeur, simply absurd; while comedy, even in the performance of a master, descends swiftly into farce. Several men, after much pressing “obliged” their hostess, and, although a few had good voices, they all made me feel pretty sick. Now with women it is different. Music suits them; they seem created for the purpose of melodious expression, and seldom appear to better advantage than when either singing or acting a congenial part. I may be wrong; but I think that women are set more utterly apart from men than most men

believe. Things which have no practical worth or meaning save in sense constitute their peculiar province, and when a man invades their territory he appears to me just as poor a creature as a woman rigged out in masculine apparel.

I was asked by turns to sing, to play, and to recite. Mrs. Shaw was *sure* I could do something. I assured her I could listen.

"And laugh!" she added.

"Madam," I whispered, "it is no laughing matter to watch a man play the fool."

Which speech was unhappily overheard by Rupert Percival, who had just recited "Clarence's Dream!" with the utmost fervour and tragic earnestness. He turned to Amber Eyes, and said impressively, "I have often noticed that people who can do nothing themselves are the readiest to decry the performances of others."

My wretched tongue tripped me up again. "Sir," I said, addressing him directly, "the men who abstain from folly for the sake of principle are rare enough to deserve even greater privilege."

"I spoke of artistic achievements," he answered, coldly.

"Pardon me," I replied; "I am not clever enough to perceive what does not exist!"

He turned a queer green colour, and his back on me. Edward Shaw, who sat upon my other side, whispered in my ear, "Bad, Lucas, very bad! You have been rude to a fellow guest; it is an insult to your hostess. Luckily, no one else seems to have heard you!"

"I am awfully sorry!" I muttered. I was covered with shame. "Shall I apologise to him?"

"Only make matters worse."

Miss Denton stood up. "Let us go out on the terrace," she said. Everyone agreed; she took Percival's arm, and looked at me. I met her eyes, and realised my punishment in their condemnatory glance. But a little later she came up to me alone, as I stood leaning on one of the low battlemented walls.

"What has Mr. Percival done to you?" she demanded.

I slowly turned to her. The light was dim, but we could see each other distinctly.

"He is one of my six enemies!" I said.

"No!" she cried, "you are wrong!"

"Never mind!" I muttered; "he wants to be the seventh. I can feel it."

She laughed, and presently observed, "You are staying at the Kentish Hotel, are you not?"

"Yes."

"To-morrow evening I shall be out your way. I am dining with some friends at Forest Lodge."

"Indeed. Now, I wish——"

“What?”
“That I were too.”
“Oh!” she cried. “I shall be leaving early.”
“But attended?”
“I don't think so.”
“Do you mean to say you ever go about after dark alone?”
“I often do.”
“Without a chaperone?”
“I detest chaperones, don't you?”
“I don't know. Where shall I meet you?”
“What do you mean?”
“Excuse me, Miss Denton, you want me to meet you, don't you?”
“Certainly not!”
“Then why did you tell me?”

She laughed contemptuously. “Just for something to talk about!” and flitted away, leaving me with an intimate conviction of the folly I had been guilty of in attempting to drive her into an admission.

When I bade her good-night that evening, her right hand contained a tiny note, which I managed to receive without an exclamation of surprise, although one was on the tip of my tongue.

It contained four words; “University Bridge. Ten o'clock!”

XVII A Protracted Idyll

SHE kept me waiting almost half an hour. The park was completely deserted. I stood upon the old plank bridge that traversed the pond, and occupied myself in counting the flat fronds of the lotus lilies by the reflections of the lamps and stars. It was very dark. I had counted already almost two thousand, when she glided like a spirit from the shadow of a big aloe at the corner of the bridge, and stood beside me.

"Where shall we go?" she asked.

"What time have you to be home?" I demanded.

"As late or as early as I please."

"How long will you stay with me?"

"As long as you amuse me."

"Shall we find a seat; the wind is cold?"

She put her right hand in my overcoat pocket as we strolled towards the University; she seemed to know her way very well. Indeed, it was she who led me to the door of the left wing, and pointed out a dark and sheltered corner in an angle of the building.

"You have been here before," I cried.

"Often."

I felt jealous. "With whom?"

"A very nice fellow indeed!"

"Where is he now?"

"At Oxford."

"How long ago?"

"Years!"

"What was his name?"

"I shan't tell you."

"Did he kiss you?"

"Yes."

I at once got up. "Then I won't stay here," and I strode off.

She laughed, but followed me. Presently I found a pretty dell, sheltered by a terraced wall. I took off my coat, and spread it on the grass. She sank down, and I beside her. I felt cold, and shivered. I smuggled up close to her for warmth. She did not offer to rebuff me, so I gathered courage, and wrapped my arms about her. She was clad in a lovely fur cloak, which it was a luxury to touch. I rubbed my face up and down her shoulder. She put her soft cheek against mine, and slipped one arm round

my neck. We did not speak for hours. Then I asked her if she loved me.

She said “No!” but I did not believe her.

“Why don't you kiss me?” she asked, at last.

“You want me to?”

She nodded her head.

“Any man would do?”

“No.”

“You are a little animal,” I said; “you love to be cuddled and petted and kissed. You will never be a woman, though!”

“Why?”

“Because you have no heart.”

“Kiss me!” she muttered.

I was burning to kiss her, but I managed to refuse. I felt myself growing angry with her.

“You have no soul!” I cried.

“Kiss me!”

“No comprehension of anything except a vague desire; you are a little animal.”

“Kiss me!”

Passion urged me on. “It is the spirit of evil; it will lead you there some day.”

“What do you mean?”

“You don't respect yourself.”

“Go on.”

“You make yourself cheap, too cheap; cheap as dirt.”

“Lucas!”

“Can't you see, fool that you are!” I cried, hotly, “that where favours are yielded easily they are never appreciated? You throw away what should be almost the greatest gift of all. Your kisses should only accompany your love. Then they would be valuable. I could buy what you offer in a score of places in the city for a few half-crowns. If you were for sale I could understand!”

She drew herself away, and sat to face me. “Is that what you think of me?”

“Yes.”

“You have almost called me a bad girl.”

“It was very rude of me.”

She fetched up a big sigh. “Is it wrong to want to be kissed?”

“Oh, you are very innocent!” I sneered.

“You will make me hate you!” she flashed.

“In a very little while I shan't care a pin what you do.”

“Oh, Lucas!”

“It's the truth! Do you think I want your kisses? Give them to the others; the six, or as many new ones as you can find. Give them to

Percival.”

“I thought you cared for me.”

“I am sincere!” I knew what I wanted to say, but I could not find the words. Presently I cried: “Don't think you are going to make a fool of me with your kisses. I love you; but what of that! I don't want you unless you love me. I don't want anything of you. You can go.”

“Now?”

“If you want to.”

“If I do, I shall never see you again — never!”

Her tones calmed me; they were passionately earnest. “I can't understand how you can bear a man to kiss you when you don't care,” I muttered.

She laughed suddenly, then threw herself upon me. “You are a silly boy!” she cried.

I caught and held her arms; I pushed her back. She panted like a little fury.

“Let me go!”

“No.”

“Oh, Lucas, you silly boy; why don't you understand?”

“What?”

“Why don't you make me love you? If you want me, make me; do you hear?”

There came a noise like the sound of rushing waters in my ears. For a second I was weak and utterly unnerved; but, in another instant, I had caught her in my arms. It was then she struggled; instinct warned her of my passion, and it terrified her. She fought to escape; crying out to me to let her go. She even bit at my wrists. I used her roughly, but I did not know it. I was doomed to master her. I forced her lithe, sweet form across my knees. I held her fast, and, finally subdued, I showered kisses, swift, burning kisses on her lips and cheeks and eyes. It seemed to me that I poured out my very soul upon her. There was an intoxicating fragrance in the air, a species of silken soft incense that weighed upon my senses like a charm. Thin, unearthly melodies rang in my ears — intangible, haunting, and wildly sweet, as the music that one hears in dreams. It commenced to rain — a fine thin mist that ran along the grass with a low and lulling sound without an echo. I raised my head at last, and gazed up into the gloomy skies. She lay in my arms still as death. She had swooned. When I knew it I wished that she might be really dead, for I had no hope of winning her love. I raised her body on my knees, and brought her to with kisses. She sighed and moaned, and set herself to weep. I always kissed her. The tower clock chimed midnight. Slowly she freed herself, and started to her feet, trembling like an aspen. I put on my coat, and deliberately approached her. With me was the calm after a storm. I was absolutely emotionless — cold and passive; my hands were

steady, my heart was still. She came into my arms of her own accord, and hid her face in my breast.

"Oh, I am so miserable!" she sobbed.

I stroked her hair; I had nothing to say.

"I am the most miserable girl on earth," she moaned.

"Why?" I muttered.

"I feel just terrible," she sighed.

"Do you hate me, dear?" I asked.

"N-no!"

"Do you love me?"

"No."

"Let us go."

I led her to the gates, and put her into a cab. During the drive she said no word, though often she shuddered violently. I stopped it at a distance from her house, and helped her down. She leaned upon me heavily until we reached the gate. There I raised her chin, and kissed her softly on the lips. "I am so sorry, dear!" I said.

She clung to me. "Tell me — tell me something!" she gasped. "Something to make me happy! I am very miserable."

"Ah, what can I say to make you happy? you do not care for me."

"Tell me that you love me."

"I do."

"But tell me how much!"

"Everything in the world, dear!"

"But outside the world?"

"The whole universe."

"How long?"

"For ever and ever!"

She sighed and smiled and raised her face. It looked bonny in the dim lamplight, even though thin rain-drops splashed upon it.

"Be true to me!" she whispered.

A wave of warm longing enveloped me. "Love me, May!" I pleaded.

Her eyes flashed. "Be here to-morrow night at ten!"

The gate clicked and she was gone. I stood for moments listening to the flying patter of her feet, then with the silence I went off, in a sort of ecstasy, a delirium of curiosity, of love and hope.

I dreamed through the hours between. I cut lectures, I pretended to be ill, I never left my bedroom, and ordered my landlady to tell any chance comer I was out. At nine o'clock I commenced to live. At ten I slipped like a spy down the Yarrannabbe Road, and hid myself in the shadow of the fence. I peered through the railings. The garden was deserted. The lower portion of the house was already wrapped in gloom. Edward Shaw was pacing one of the balconies, cigar in mouth, probably meditating a poem. I watched him angrily, for I guessed that May would not appear

until he had withdrawn. He kept us almost an hour; but five minutes after he had disappeared the gate softly opened and she came forth, gowned in sable like the night. We gave each other no greeting, but she led me swiftly through the shadows to the sea, by a little rocky byepath. At last we stood within a narrow cleft of rocks, the way behind us hidden by great masses of larn tarner, and before our feet the tide. The water surged into the passage with a hollow note of lamentation, its white foam spangled with a thousand phosphorescent glows; it receded with a breathless mutter. The place was ghostly and full of echoes; the rocks frowned above us black and grim; straight overhead hovered the sky of stars, at which we seemed to look as from the bottom of a well.

We held each other's hands, and tried to look into each other's eyes each time the tide swept in. I was feverishly happy. We stayed thus until after one o'clock. We spoke very little. Once she said to me —

“Have you been true to me?”

“Yes.”

“So have I.”

Again she said: “Do you love me more and more?”

“No.”

“Neither do I.”

But we seemed to be conversing all the time. My hands tingled from her touch. I could feel her thoughts. The night was cold, but I was filled with a delicious warmth.

“Do you believe in God?” I asked once.

“How did you know?” she cried. The same wonder had disturbed her.

I told her that I was happy. She raised my hand and touched it with her lips. I knew then that I could win her. I bent and kissed her feet, one after the other. Then I led her from the place and we parted without speech. Her eyes were dark with dreams.

I saw her almost every night thereafter. Sometimes we spoke calmly and dispassionately, on trivial topics, of our acquaintances and friends, of current events, and books. We would grow suddenly shy of one another and be obliged to converse, in order to hide deeper feelings. Speech was our mask, but it always grew transparent in its course. We each loved the same books. Jean Jacques Rousseau, Hugo, Voltaire, and Meredith were our idols. Our discussions ever ended in books. Their intimate theme is love; we slipped into talk of love unconsciously, and then started to perceive each other through the masks we had been wearing. Her ideas were conventional, but beautiful. She thought true love the great and only perfect guarantee of permanent fidelity between human hearts. She regarded marriage as a sacrament, a divine consecration of devoted lives, too often degraded by the approach of thoughtless aspirants, ill-equipped for its duties, improperly acquainted with its deeper meaning. Sometimes she was a grave philosopher, and her discourse was enchanting.

Sometimes her mood was personal and confident. She pictured the life she wished to lead, the wife of the man whom she would one day love. I listened in a dream. She promised me her husband would be a human man, neither a hero, nor an insignificant, but that he would be the sovereign of her mind and actions, the throned monarch of her heart. Her wifehood was a sweet idyll. She purposed to become her husband's friend; she would love him; he must adore her, but in season. The constant mood should be companionship. He must be ever at her disposal as she at his, but he must be her master. She would always be the second, he the first; he would never be permitted to dethrone himself; but, of course, he must unbend to his friend; his majesty must be provided with a friend as well as subject. Her moods would supply his kingdom. She would never be to him the same person for hours together. She would know how to prevent that. She would marshal minister, his subject; if occasion required, his enemy, but not for long. He should not be permitted to grow cold. She would know how to prevent that. She would marshal against indifference, jealousy. He should never be allowed to feel entirely sure of her, or know her utterly. She would teach him to guard his conduct by hidden forces, which he should perceive in her but never fathom. Love, to be a power, she thought, must hold a threat from the woman to the man; man was *au fond* inconstant. Her husband would be true, because in winning her he would wed a hundred women. Man's heart is republican in worship, woman's monarchical. She would fill her husband's heart with diverse faces of herself. She seemed to have acquired instinctively all the wisdom of the ages. She was variable as the wind. Her heart was asleep, but I thought it was slowly awakening. In public we met and spoke, and parted, each set on our separate ways, so that not even Edward guessed that there was aught between us. But in private and on our clandestine meetings we drew together swiftly, impelled by a mutual and irresistible attraction. She would not admit that she loved me; but I was satisfied to wait. We used to stand close together, holding hands; sometimes we would touch each other's faces, softly, questioningly. We were each filled with a shy, vague curiosity. She would often murmur, “I wonder — ” and pause. She often besought me for my thoughts. Every night I asked her, “Has it come?” She would shake her head and sigh. We only kissed each other's hands. She had great power over me. I would have gone to Hell for her with a smile; or, had it been possible, and need arisen, have killed hundreds without remorse, just to reach her side, to kiss her hand, or even look at her afar off.

One night she said to me, “Next Thursday evening I am to be presented at the Government House Ball; it is my début.”

I was instantly sad, for I thought, “I shall not see you on Thursday night.”

“I want you to come,” she said.

“How can I?” I sighed.

“Captain Graham, the aide-de-camp, has promised me a card. You will find it waiting at your rooms to-night.”

“Darling!” I muttered.

“I could not like it if you did not dance with me.”

“May, you love me!” I cried. “Why don't you admit it?”

“No,” she replied, “I do not love you, Lucas!” and then she softly kissed my hand.

“Your heart is sleeping,” I said.

“No, it is dreaming.”

“You will love me soon?”

She shook her head. “When you go home, write me a love letter, Lucas. Go now, so that you may catch the post. I want to read it when I wake.”

I sent her these words: “I love you.” When next we met she placed my hand on her bosom, and I felt beneath the lace a twisted sheaf of paper.

“It is now!” I cried, enraptured. But still she answered “No.” I almost gave myself up to despair.

She said, “Next month aunty and I are going to England. We sail in the *Oruba*.”

I wonder that I did not swoon; I felt like death.

“Why? Why?” I cried.

“By the terms of my father's will I must spend two years in England before I am twenty. I cannot help myself.”

“Are you glad?”

She shook her head, and smiled. But so deep was my grief that I could not stay with her. I swung on my heel and strode off. She did not move to hinder me.

I said to myself, “She is playing with me. I shall never see her again! Her heart is not sleeping; she has no heart at all, at least for me.”

Next evening I remained at home. In order to do so, I locked my door, and threw the key out of the window. In the morning they had to break the lock for my release. I did not sleep, for through the hours I saw her waiting for me in the cleft by the sea, and the vision was full of restforbidding pain.

A letter came from her. “I waited” — that was all; but I cursed myself for a thousand, thousand fools when I received it.

Dark found me at the trysting-place. I waited two hours, and at last she came.

“The reason?” was her demand.

“A woman!” I replied.

The moon shone so brightly that I could distinctly see her face. She looked at me in a startled fashion.

“Who?”

“You!”

She smiled happily. It was curious how thoroughly we always understood each other. She knew why I had stayed away, and I knew that she knew.

“Poor boy!” she murmured; “was it hard?”

But I resented her pity. I said to her, “Miss Denton, have you ever reflected that some day you will probably marry?”

“Often!” she smiled.

“If your husband who is to come happens also to be the man whom you will love, don't you think you will repent these hours with me?”

“Why should I?”

“They would seem wrong — at least, I think they should.”

“But if the man were you?”

“You have never thought of me in that way.”

“Have you?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me your thoughts.”

“I have pictured our lives spent together, not here, but in some far country of the old world, amid the beauties of Italy, perhaps, or in some bright city of France. It was a pretty fancy; but it is impossible of being realised.”

“Because?”

“For one reason, you do not love me!”

“And next?”

“Because I am really poor. I shall be penniless when my degree is taken. I have only sufficient to keep myself till then.”

“I am quite rich,” said Amber Eyes, reflectively.

“You!” I cried, surprised.

“Did you not know?”

“I never dreamed.”

“I have almost a thousand pounds a year. I come of age when I am twenty, or when I marry, if before that time.”

“What a lucky girl you are!” I cried, and a moment afterwards, “and how far away from me!”

“You mean that my money puts a barrier between us?”

“Scarcely that. I mean you are going abroad. You will probably meet and marry some man in England — a nobleman, perhaps.”

“I am not rich enough to tempt a nobleman.”

“You are beautiful enough to tempt a king!”

She placed both her hands upon my breast. “The man I love will be a king to me!” she murmured, gazing dreamily into my face; “yes, even if he had not a penny in the world.”

“Romantic girl!”

“You are very handsome, Lucas Rowe!”

My cheeks burned. “Your methods are very cruel, May Denton. Do you never think how miserable I shall be when you desert me?”

“I want you to be miserable. You will miss me?”

“Ah! The very thought of it hurts! hurts!”

“You must be true to me.”

“To what end?”

“I want you to be true to me.”

“And you?”

“I do not know. Make me a promise.”

“What is it?”

“Swear to me, on your honour as a man, that you will be true to me in thought, word, and deed until I return.”

I put my hands on hers. “And in return, May?”

“Swear!” she cried.

“I swear.”

“I,” she murmured, “swear to you, on my faith and honour as a woman, that I shall never flirt with any man again.”

“Is that all?” I muttered sadly.

“No. I promise you that the man I kiss next or allow to kiss me will be the man I love.”

“Kiss me, May!”

“No.”

“Let me kiss you?”

“No.”

“Ah!” I sighed, “it will never come!”

XVIII The Ball

EDWARD SHAW was my cicerone to the ball. At a little after nine o'clock we entered the court-grounds. Two armed sentries, formidable looking men, were posted at the gates, but we passed without a challenge; they were merely ornaments. The drive from the gates to the house was strung with Chinese lanterns; it was like a road in fairyland. We alighted from the cab beneath a big square portico, and boldly advanced into a wide and brightly-illumined hall. We left our overcoats and hats in a man-crowded cloakroom, and proceeded through a twisting corridor to a great, richly-curtained door beside the stairs. Shaw handed our cards to a gorgeous person in livery, and the curtains slipping aside, we were ushered into a room. Our names were recited behind us, and a sweet-looking woman standing just within extended to us her hand. Shaw bowed deeply as he reverently touched it with his fingers. I followed suit. Next moment we had traversed the room, and entered a second apartment, whose splendid mural decorations and wide, smooth floor proclaimed the ballroom. It was tenanted with splendidly apparelled women and black-coated men. I had never witnessed a scene half so brilliant or magnificent. Here and there flitted officers in scarlet coats and bright dangling swords, which clattered as they strode. I envied them profoundly; they looked so insolent and beautiful. I was fearfully shy and diffident; my heart had fallen to my very shoes. Shaw looked round him carelessly, bowing right and left to his acquaintances. He was very handsome, and seemed entirely at his ease. Presently he smiled and nodded, then, turning, caught my arm. “Mrs. Clare has signalled me to take you to her, Lucas; you must ask her for a dance! She is interested in you. I told her about your adventure with the Push.”

I felt embarrassed. I knew Mrs. Clare by repute; she was a middle-aged woman, supposed to be beautiful and smart, and a leader of society. Her husband was almost a millionaire.

She was standing amid a group of younger women, some of whom were pretty, but she was like a queen compared with them. She was tall and generously fashioned, exquisitely gowned. Her thick masses of hair were of a dark auburn colour, shot with both black and gold. I caught a glimpse of a pair of brilliant dark eyes, a small straight nose, gleaming teeth, and soft oval cheeks; then I bowed before her.

“Mrs. Clare — allow me — my friend Mr. Lucas Rowe,” said Edward

Shaw.

I looked up, and our eyes met. She smiled entrancingly, and gave me her hand. She was fearfully *décolletée*. I simply dared look no lower than her eyes; but she was very beautiful. She said softly, “I have been wishing to meet you, Mr. Rowe.”

“I am overwhelmed to hear it!” I replied. To my deep astonishment, she moved a little round, and put her hand within my arm. “Do take me to a window,” she murmured, “it is dreadfully hot here.”

We left the others and crossed the ballroom, but she was the guide. All whom we encountered stared at me. We reached a French glass door, the handle of which I turned; she smiled as we passed out upon a stone verandah. The harbour lay beneath us glittering like a jewel, for the moon was just rising over the heights opposite. The music of a band struck up suddenly within the ballroom. I felt horribly stupid, for I could think of nothing to say to the beautiful creature at my side.

“May I beg the honour of a dance?” I said, desperately, after a moment of simple torture.

She handed me her programme card; it seemed already full. “There is not one left,” I stammered.

She laughed. “I have kept two for you. Mr. Shaw told me you were coming; give me your card.”

I handed it to her, lost in amaze. “How sweet of you!” I muttered.

“Was it? for my own sake, then!”

I said to myself, “All women are flirts. I must pay this one a compliment.” Then aloud and very seriously, “If I thought you meant that, I should be the happiest man in the world.”

“Why should I not mean it? let me tell you, Mr. Rowe, that everyone is talking about you; you are quite the lion of the evening.”

“But how can that be?”

She smiled archly. “Ah, Mr. Rowe, are you so used to deeds of valour that you have already forgotten your exploit with the larrikins — a month past?”

I felt my face burn. “It was nothing!” I stammered.

“Nothing!” she echoed.

“I am wrong,” I cried, quickly. “It was much, for it has given me the happiness of knowing you!”

She shook her finger at me. “That is a compliment — already, Mr. Rowe.”

I looked at her ardently. “Yes, but it is true.”

She smiled. “Another!”

The door behind us opened, and an officer stepped out who wore a coloured sash across his uniform.

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Clare — but, his Excellency——”

“I had forgotten,” she replied; then, smiling to me, she murmured “*à*

bientot," took the officer's arm, and moved away. A moment afterwards I saw her dancing with the Governor. As the whirling crowd swept past, I perceived Amber Eyes, with the officer who had taken Mrs. Clare from me. Her face was brilliantly animated. She was dressed in white satin; a red rose in her hair. Her shoulders, neck and bosom were a revelation. I was consumed with rage to think that all who cared to look might see. It seemed a damnable sacrilege! I slipped into the ballroom, and cautiously made my way around the wall, until I reached an open door opposite. It led to a long conservatory of palms and ferns; luxurious seats and lounges interspersed the plants, but all were shaded and half-concealed, as though arranged for *tête-à-têtes*, and the place was only lit with coloured glow-lamps. I sank into a chair, and listened to the music of the band in a fever of wild, unreasoning jealousy. When the music ceased, I rose and hurried down the room, anxious to hide or to escape. I passed through a curtained alcove, into another room, then out into a corridor. Suddenly I came face to face with a lackey. "Where is the smoking-room?" I demanded. He led me to a room. I was completely lost by this. Edward Shaw was there smoking a cigarette; also a lot of other men.

"Why are you not dancing?" I enquired.

"Not a dancing man!" he responded, lazily.

In ten minutes I had smoked three cigarettes.

"What's the matter with you — you look wild about something?" demanded Edward.

"I'm nervous, that's all."

"Buck up, old chap! How many dances has Mrs. Clare given you?"

"Two."

"Which are they?"

I glanced at my card. "Third and eighth — lancers and the supper waltz!"

He whistled. "May is keeping the supper waltz for you!"

I brightened up. "That is good of her. I shall excuse myself to Mrs. Clare."

"And make an enemy for life?"

"You don't mean to say?" I cried.

"Of course I do! But come and have a drop of whiskey."

It was the first glass of spirit I had ever tasted. Its effects were magical. I lost all diffidence; I forgot my jealousy; I felt happy, elated, triumphant. Shaw took me back to the ball-room and procured partners for me. I danced every dance, but I do not remember one of my partners, except Mrs. Clare. Amber Eyes I did not see at all, although I looked for her; but I did not know where to look. Mrs. Clare was very kind; she said I waltzed perfectly, and she ate a tremendous supper. So did everyone but myself. They ate as ravenously as if they had been starving for weeks, and they drank champagne as though it were water. I watched couple

after couple return again and again to the tables, and for the rest of the evening the supper-room wore the appearance of a crowded bar, all the waiters being kept furiously busy between dances in attempting to satisfy the apparently inexhaustible appetites of Sydney's hungry élite. It was really a disgusting spectacle.

"One need not go to the Zoo to see animals feed!" observed Mrs. Clare, disdainfully.

It was true, but it was also true that she disposed of as substantial a meal as anyone else. I heard one old lady whisper to her daughter: "Really, Dora, you should not eat so much! Remember you are a guest!"

The girl replied: "Nonsense, mother! Whose money pays for it, I should like to know? It's really all ours. I enjoy a tuck-in here, 'cause it's like getting back some of the taxes poor pa has to pay!"

Perhaps the same spirit animated the others; certainly, they seemed to make it a point of honour to cram themselves to repletion, only they did not ever appear able to arrive at quite that point. I pitied the Governor profoundly for being obliged to entertain such gluttons. I came upon Amber Eyes at last in the conservatory; she was eating an ice, and talking to an officer; but she signed to me. I had just left Mrs. Clare. I went up to her. The officer courteously departed, in obedience to Miss Denton's nod of dismissal. I sank into the chair he had vacated. Miss Denton's eyes were very angry.

"How dare you neglect me like this!" she muttered.

"Have you kept me a waltz, May?"

"No."

"That was unkind!"

"You never once came near me."

"I could not find you. I looked everywhere."

"You danced twice with Mrs. Clare!"

"True!"

"If you go near her again to-night, I shall never speak to you again!"

"I won't, then."

"I have kept you one waltz," she presently admitted.

"Which?"

"The next."

The band struck up the first bars of the "Blue Danube." I arose and offered her my arm. We entered the room, and I put my arm around her waist. She was like a fairy, light as air, lissome as a sprite. All through the waltz she gazed into my eyes. I was in a dream. When the music ceased I led her to the door, and we passed into the garden.

"You should have taken me to aunty!" she murmured.

"Hang your aunt!" I muttered, beneath my breath.

We found a seat in the midst of a bamboo clump.

"She is very pretty," said Miss Denton.

“Very!” I agreed.
“But very fast.”
“Is she?”
“She is old enough to be your mother, Lucas!”
“Do her justice, May!”
“She is — you know she is!” Her tones were hard and cold.
“You are not jealous?” I muttered.
“But I am.”
“Absurd!”
“Lucas, do you love me?”
“You know I do.”
“Then do something to prove it.”
“Well?”
“Go home — go now, at once! that is, when I leave you.”
“I can't do that, May!”
“I knew you did not love me!” she cried, angrily, and moved quickly away from me.
“May! May! What a strange girl you are! Why do you want me to go?”
To my despair, she commenced to weep, and between her sobs she muttered out —
“I knew how it would be. I was a fool to make you come. I wanted my first ball to be so happy, and — and now you won't let me. I am just miserable.”
“But why?”
“Because you'll go to that woman again, and she will have you, and I won't enjoy myself a bit.”
“Selfish child that you are — will you be happy if I go?”
She swept up to me on instant. “Lucas, will you really?” and pressed her tear-wet face against my cheek.
“On one condition!”
“Yes, yes!”
“That you kiss me.”
She uttered a little cry and next instant was sitting on my knees, her white arms wound around my neck, her dewy lips on mine. It was the most perfect moment of my life. I cannot write of it, except to say that in that lingering sweet kiss it was love and not passion that inspired my delight. Afterwards I put her from me and passion came. In a sort of fever I knelt beside her and covered her with kisses, from her dainty slippered feet up to her dark crowned hair. I kissed her shoes, her dress, her arms, her neck, her shoulders, her eyes, and lips. I was mad! She rested still, but she panted like a thing in deadly fear, and I could hear her heart-beats. When at last I stood before her, trembling and dizzy with rapture, she hid her face in her hands, even though I could not see it for the dark, and she seemed to sob.

“You are mine!” I said, triumphantly; “mine by your promise, by your oath! You have kissed me, you have let me kiss you! I am the man you love!”

She sprang to her feet and stood for a moment swaying like a reed.

“Oh!” she cried; “I did not think. What have I done, what have I done?”

Next instant she was gone. She glided from me like a shadow and vanished flying on the lawn.

I sank upon the bench half swooning. Voices roused me, the voices of women. One said: “He is good-looking, certainly, but a stick, slow as a funeral!”

“Well, you ought to know!” replied the other.

“I should think so!” said the first speaker. “I had him for half an hour in the conservatory and he never even put his arm round my waist.”

The second woman's voice was tinged with satire.

“That, my dear, proves it; the man must be a stick!”

I got up and stealthily escaped from my retreat. An hour later I was in bed.

XIX The End of a Dream

I MET Shaw next afternoon in the common room; he had cut all the morning lectures. I had just had a row with Voyce, the captain of my football team, who wanted me to join in a match on the following day, and was annoyed at my steady refusal to play again. He had said, “Since you took up with that fellow Shaw you are no longer any good to us.” I had replied coldly that I was at liberty to act as I chose, and that “that fellow Shaw” was my friend and a gentleman. Voyce interpreted this remark as a personal reflection, and I was obliged to spend a quarter hour in convincing him that I had intended no insult. Voyce was a big fellow, and excessively pugnacious. The argument had left me heated and undignified. Shaw led me into the quadrangle, where some girls were playing tennis; he seemed distressed about something. I asked him what was the matter. He said, “There has been a row at home!”

I pressed him for details. He said, “It's all over May Denton,” and looked at me very sharply.

“Whatever about?” I cried.

“She has been meeting some man night after night clandestinely after dark, indeed, after everyone else went to bed, slipping out and meeting him, and coming back at all hours of the night and morning.”

I suppose I must have turned pale, for he asked angrily, “This means nothing to you, Lucas?”

I did not understand him, and shook my head. He cried, “I can see it does. You don't mean to tell me that after the warning I gave you you have fallen in love with the heartless little wretch!”

I muttered something incoherent. Edward shook his fist, and swore in a savage undertone. “It's too bad, too bad altogether, the way she led you on! She ought to be whipped! Mother is awfully cut up about it, and so is father, too, on your account chiefly. Mother has said all along that you cared for her, but I simply would not believe it. I told her that I had warned you; but she just laughed at me. She said warnings were never any good in cases of this sort. It seems she is right!”

“How was it found out?” I muttered.

“A servant!”

“Do you know who it was — the man?” I gasped desperately.

“No, she wouldn't say; but we all think it is that fellow Percival. He has been after her for months; the beggar wants her money. She took the high

hand, and said she was responsible to no one for her actions, that she was her own mistress, and rot of that sort. There was an awful scene. Mother had hysterics, and father almost boxed her ears. She stood up and faced him like a little fury, and dared him to touch her. Then, in the middle of it, Percival called and off she went with him to lunch up the river. I promised the mater to follow and bring her home, for the poor old lady is frightened of an elopement. I only called here to get you; I want you to come with me. Will you?"

"Very well."

I slipped into the common room, and, throwing off cap and gown, donned my hat. We then jumped into a cab. "Lime Street Wharf!" cried Shaw, "and quick about it; we want to catch the two-thirty Hunter's Hill steamer!"

"Right oh!" answered the cabby, and we were off like the wind.

"The mater is packing," said Edward presently; "she is going to take her off to Melbourne to-morrow night, and catch the *Himalaya* for London, so as to nip this matter in the bud, and put a stop to my lady's capers for good and all!"

At this I was almost in despair. The thought of losing May so quickly was torture unspeakable. I longed to confide in Edward, and let him know that I was the man May had been secretly meeting; but I dared not without her consent. Edward, no doubt with the idea of doing me a service, and curing my passion for his cousin, occupied the whole of our journey in giving me accounts of her misdoings. According to him, she had already broken more hearts than any other girl in Sydney, had won for herself the reputation of being fast and reckless, and was in her home life a little termagant, self-willed, hot-tempered, and without a spark of reverence in her composition.

The more I took her part the more bitter he became, until at length he allowed her to possess no virtues save pluck and purity, and the last admission he qualified by declaring that she frequently put herself into such dangerous positions that it was more by good luck than anything else she had managed to retain it.

"Consider her latest escapade," he cried. "Could you blame any man for anything he might do, when a girl so tempts him as to put herself in his power at all hours of the night, as she did? For my part, I think the fellow a fool to have let her go unscathed, whoever he was!"

"But are you sure?" I muttered, anxious to hear all his mind.

"Why, as to that," he replied, "I know her too well to doubt! Whatever else she may be, she respects herself; and I believe she would kill herself or the man, if anyone dared to take a liberty with her. You see, with her it is not a matter of love. If it were, the Lord only knows! She'd probably prove as weak as any other girl. But she is incapable of love. She doesn't care a snap of the fingers for Percival. She has just been meeting him

because she thought it a romantic thing to do, and because she knew it would be sternly forbidden were it known. If she marries him, it will be in revenge for the rating she got to-day. But I want to save her from that if I can. Percival is all right, as fellows go, but he's a mean hound at heart; frets if he loses a copper. You ought to see him play whist for shilling points; it would be a revelation to you in the man's nature."

"I thought you liked him?"

"Bosh! I can't stand him; never could. I put up with him, because the mater used to like him, and he once did the pater a good turn in the press, when the labour members were trying to oust him from his position in the Civil Service because he is over fifty-six years of age."

"Edward," said I, "have you ever been in love?"

"I am and have been for years."

"Have I ever met her?"

"No, she lives in Melbourne. I only see her twice a year myself. she — (he stammered a little) — she's a work girl. She's a retoucher in Falks', the photographers. Her name is Mabel Lord."

"Do you intend to marry her?"

"It is why I am going through the Uni., Lucas. Nothing else could have induced me, for my whole ambition is to write. When I get my degree the governor will obtain for me a billet in the service, and then I shall. This is private, Lucas. They know nothing about Mabel at home; if they did they would go off their heads; they expect me to marry money!"

"Are you engaged?"

"Yes, these seven years."

"I am glad you are in love, Edward; you can understand my feelings for your cousin."

"You'll have to get over that, Lucas!"

"I don't want to, Ned; never, while I live. I worship her."

Shaw groaned. "The little wretch; I could strangle her. Do you know I thought at first she might have fallen in love with you — you are so different from the other fellows she has fooled with?"

"How do you mean?"

"You are more serious, more clever, and there seems more in you. Besides, you are better-looking."

"Do you think me good-looking, Ned?"

"Scarcely that, but you have character in your face, and a lot of strength; you look a thorough aristocrat, and of a good stamp, too!"

I coloured high with pleasure. "It may sound womanish, Ned, but I'm glad to hear you say that, for I know you mean it. I could never see anything in my face more than eyes, but sometimes I feel sure there's something in me. I'm always dreaming of doing big things in the future!"

Shaw laughed. "I wish you'd put that girl out of your head."

"No, I'll win her, Ned; you mark my words, one of these days May

Denton will be my wife."

"I'd like to think so, Lucas; but I can't. If you could make her care for you you'd get as good a wife as they make, mind that, for all her faults are on the surface; she's sound inside. And she has money, too, a fact not to be despised."

"I don't care two straws for her money!"

"I believe you, Lucas. I simply could not imagine you as a fortune hunter; you have too much heart for that — a fool could see it."

"Ned!" I cried, suddenly, "there they are!" We had landed long before from the steamer, at Cassilis Wharf, and were strolling across country in the direction of Rupert's Cave, where Edward believed that May and Percival were lunching *tête-à-tête*. We saw in a neighbouring field the runaway pair walking at a little distance from each other, their backs to us.

"Ned," said I, "I feel a fool; what excuse can there be for my presence? What will Percival think?"

"Leave that to me," he replied. We got through a fence and hurried to overtake them. They meanwhile entered another field, in which were a lot of fat sheep. We heard a man shouting loudly from the enclosure opposite. In a few minutes we had almost reached them, but their attention was distracted by the shouting yokel, who was advancing to meet them armed with a pitchfork. "You are trespassing!" he yelled, excitedly. "Get out at once, or I'll summon you, you pack of fools; can't you see you're disturbing my ewes!"

It was true; the great fat sheep which had a moment before been contentedly browsing on the herbage were now in a great fluster, and floundered about in a state of frantic excitement, probably frightened by Miss Denton's gorgeous sunshade. Miss Denton stopped dead, but Percival moved forward a few paces, as though to protect her from the enraged farmer. This was a middle-aged and excessively wrathful person. Unmindful of a lady's presence, he swore at us all like a drunken drover, and threatened Percival with his fork — a most ugly-looking weapon. Percival, protesting and apologising, backed and backed until he reached us, then, seeing his reinforcement, I think he was not sorry, at all events at once, that his *tête-à-tête* with Amber Eyes was broken up for the day. Shaw spoke to the farmer coolly and sensibly, and reminded him that none of us had trespassed out of malice. "Dang yer," cried the fellow, "what do I care? malice or no malice, those ewes are nigh to lambin', an' if they takes hurt, I'll have the law o' ye."

"Very good!" replied my friend, and, imperturbable as glass, handed the man his card, together with half-a-crown. "If they take any harm," he added, "you will know where to find me, and you'll have no difficulty in getting your due."

This somewhat mollified the yokel, and presently he retreated whence

he came, but first insisted that we should at once depart from his land. We made no demur, and proceeded towards that part of the fence which he indicated as our proper point of exit; naturally, it was the point farthest away from the sheep, and by chance it was also a point most distant from the yokel's house.

We did not any of us speak until we were without the field. Percival was the last to climb the fence, which was one of those rickety contrivances known as a dog's leg. He seemed boiling with suppressed fury.

“Now is our chance for revenge!” he cried. “The insolent dog! I'll teach him that he can't insult a lady with impunity!”

With that he seized a log, which happened to be loose, and proceeded to smash up the fence. I could hardly believe my eyes. The fellow had been full of apologies while the yokel was present, but now that he had gone, he was venting his spite like a woman. I darted up, and seizing his arm, swung him away with more force than politeness.

“You coward!” I cried, hotly. “How dare you do such a thing! you are worse than a woman!”

His eyes blazed. “Dare!” he growled, and swinging the log he still carried aloft, brought it down with murderous force in my direction. I had just time to spring aside to avoid it, when Percival staggered, threw up his hands, and fell senseless to the ground. Edward Shaw had struck him on the jaw with all the strength of his body. The three of us stood round and gazed at him and at each other. May Denton was white to the lips. Edward Shaw was panting with rage. I, too, felt boiling.

“This,” gasped Edward, contemptuously touching the prostrate man with his foot, “this is the thing for whom you have just missed disgracing yourself. Perhaps this will open your eyes!”

“Edward,” cried the girl, “how dare you speak to me like that — before Mr. Rowe!”

“He knows!” cried Shaw; “I told him everything!”

“How dared you!”

Her bosom heaved and her eyes flashed.

“He is my friend. In any case, I am not accountable for my actions to you!” replied Shaw, but more coolly.

“Mr. Rowe,” muttered Miss Denton, “I am sorry that you have been informed of my delinquencies. Why Edward saw fit to try and disgrace me in your eyes I cannot imagine, but I ask you to believe this: I never, never in my life met or saw Mr. Rupert Percival clandestinely!”

I bowed low. “Certainly, I believe you, Miss Denton!”

“Bah!” said Shaw.

She looked me in the eyes. “You see, he does not believe me!”

“Shall I try to convince him?”

She gave me a meaning look. “Thank you, sir; no! I am not

accountable for my actions to Edward — nor to anyone!" she answered, proudly. "Edward can believe what he likes. I shall not be bullied!"

"That is right!" he cried, with scorn. "Behave as you please; disgrace yourself and your relations, then act the tragedy queen if anyone presumes to question you. Never mind, my lady, you won't have the chance for long. Tomorrow, at mid-day, you and your aunt take the mail train to catch the *Himalaya* at Melbourne!"

"I am glad to hear it!" she exclaimed; "and now, with your permission, unless you have some more kind things to say to me, I shall take my leave."

"You had better wait for us; we can't leave this fellow here; he is unconscious!"

"You may not; I can. I have no wish to be escorted by him after what he did and tried to do. 'A coward — worse than a woman.' " (Her eyes flashed defiance at me.) "And as for you, Edward, I wish to have nothing further to do with you. You have insulted me in a most ungentlemanly and brutal way, and I simply decline to remain in your company!"

She swept me a mocking courtesy, gave Edward a cold nod, and next moment was yards away, walking with her pretty head high in air, as Shaw had said — like a tragedy queen.

I turned to Edward. "I can't allow her to go off like that, Ned!" I muttered.

He laughed shortly. "Follow her, then!"

"But I don't like to leave you with this cad."

"Oh!" he sneered, "I can manage him; he'll be like a whipped cur when he comes round!"

I was painfully embarrassed what to do; but Miss Denton drew me like a magnet. I felt that Shaw was angry with me for wishing to desert him, but I could not help myself. I hurried after the girl. I found her shaking in a paroxysm of silent laughter.

"Didn't I manage that cleverly?" she asked.

"May!" I cried, "you have got yourself into a frightful row, and all over me!"

"I did it on purpose."

"What?" I gasped.

"I gave the housemaid a sovereign to tell aunty about me!"

"May! May!" I cried, almost sick with surprise. "Why did you do this? But you are fooling me. You never did it?"

"I did, Lucas."

"But why?"

"Because I knew what would follow. I knew that their first thought would be to hurry me away to England, in order to stop the scandal! They have done exactly what I expected and wished."

I was cut to the heart. "You want to leave me!" I muttered. "You want

to leave me!”

“Yes!” she cried, and turned to me a face I could not read, it was so doubtful, so troubled, and yet so full of love and challengeful witcheries inexpressible of speech. “I want to leave you, Lucas. If I could get away this moment — if I could put a thousand miles between us by telegraph — I would!”

“You do not love me, after all!” I said, miserably.

“I do not know.”

No, she did not know. I read it in her eyes. She knew neither her heart nor her mind. After that, I had nothing to say to her. She, too, had nothing to say to me. I was so unhappy that her silence was something of a comfort. We sat at the stem of the ferry boat, and silently stared into the glassy, sunlit waters, which the knife-like bows cut with a ceaseless, lulling swish, like the rustling of rich drapery on a satin polished floor.

When we had landed she broke the silence, while we stood waiting for a cable tram at the foot of King Street. “Would you like one more night?” she asked very softly.

I looked at her, and saw that she made the suggestion from compassion.

“How could we?” I muttered.

“We could dine together, then afterwards stroll out to the Chair.”

But her eyes asked me to refuse.

I sadly shook my head. “No, May. I am afraid that such nights are over for both of us.”

“Then bid me good-bye now.”

“Good-bye?”

“Yes.”

“Won't you let me see you before you go?”

“No, I hate farewells. Let us say good-bye now.”

“We may never meet again!”

“In two years.”

“It is a long time, May!”

“It will pass, Lucas.”

I held out my hand. My eyes were blurred so that I could not see her perfectly. “Good-bye, May!” I said, huskily.

Our hands clasped and parted. I swung on my heel and strode off, blind with pain. “Lucas!” whispered a voice in my ear.

I stopped, arrested by a hope that hurt more keenly than the pain.

“Do you hate me?” she whispered; she was pale as death.

“You are mine, May!” I cried; “mine by that kiss!”

She shuddered. “Ah!” she cried; “you remind me of that?”

I fell back a step, and gazed at her, thrilled with an emotion that was new to me, so much was there in it nobler and less selfish than mere passion; but I was angry too. “Very good!” I said quietly; “I release you

from your vow. You may leave me free — free as air!”

“Free?” she questioned. “And yourself, Lucas?”

I laughed unsteadily. I do not know what at. “Why, as for me!” I said, “you need not worry your head about me. I shall do very well, thank you.” And, with a bow, I walked away, leaving her standing there seemingly lost in thought. A cable tram caught and passed me presently. She was seated on the dummy car, and was paying her fare to the conductor. She did not glance in my direction, nor once look back. I watched her till she was out of sight. At York Street, where for a moment the tram paused, she purchased a paper from a news-boy, and immediately commenced to read. Apparently she had already forgotten me; her face was perfectly composed, her attitude graceful, careless, and indifferent, the ghost of a smile played on her lips, as though her mind was engaged with an amusing thought.

“Edward is right,” I muttered; “she is entirely heartless!” I thought each instant that my own heart must break or burst.

XX The Cottage

AT the corner of King and George Streets I came face to face with my uncle, Daniel Rowe. The old king was quite respectably dressed; he looked like a better-class mechanic in Sunday attire, and not at all like a larrikin; he was carrying a black patent-leather handbag. When he caught sight of me his face became transfigured with purest joy; his eyes glistened and beamed, his whole personality diffused satisfaction. He dropped his bag and held out both his hands.

"My dear Mr. Rowe," he cried, "how glad I am to see you!"

This ceremonious greeting was intended for the benefit of the bystanders. In spite of my distressed preoccupation, I was touched by his gladness.

"Dear old uncle!" I muttered, and pressed his hands.

"Come this way!" he said, and led me back down King Street, towards the wharves, to a tavern called "The Angel." There we obtained a private room, and, after being served with drinks, my uncle shut the door.

"Lukey, my boy, this is a lucky meeting. I would have gone out to see you to-night!"

"Why, uncle, is anything wrong?"

"Haven't you read the evening papers?"

"Not yet; why?"

He drew from his breast pocket a folded journal, which he spread on the table before him. I saw it was the *Evening News*.

"Listen!" he said. "*Larrikin Outrage*. — A little after daylight this morning, the body of a young man was discovered by the water police lying half-concealed amongst some lumber upon one of the old jetties on the Darling Harbour side of Miller's Point. It was at once conveyed to the Morgue, where an examination of the remains was made by the Government medical officer. Dr. Milford, upon whom our reporter waited during the forenoon, is of opinion that the dead man, whose identity has not yet been determined, came to his death by foul means, and is probably the victim of a larrikin 'push.' The body is covered with bruises, apparently the effects of blows administered by some blunt instrument (no doubt the boots of the larrikins could account for this feature), but no bones are broken. Marks upon the neck suggest the employment of a strangulating rope, and the surgeon has certified that death accrued from asphyxia, within a period of thirty-six hours previous

to the discovery of the body. This gruesome find irresistibly recalls the cowardly and brutal murder of senior constable Tobin, which occurred in the same district not many months ago, and which is still fresh in the minds of the public. Many circumstances point to the conclusion that the authors of both crimes are identical. It is well known that Miller's Point has long been the habitat and retreat of a dangerous gang of ruffians; but so far the police have seemingly been unable to successfully cope with their inhuman adversaries. We do not wish to cast any aspersions upon the policy, whom we believe to be, on the whole, a fearless and capable body of men, but we desire to strongly urge upon them the absolute necessity of instituting and prosecuting forthwith a relentless campaign against a band of criminals whose depredations are now become a serious menace to society. They should not rest until the murderers have been caught and convicted, and the whole larrikin element of Miller's Point utterly stamped out. In the public interest we shall watch their proceedings with the closest possible attention. An inquest on the body will be held at the Morgue to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

"*Later*. — The body of the victim has been identified as that of Alphonso Daly, an iron-worker, recently employed in the foundry of Mr. John Robin, a boiler-maker, of Miller's Point and Balmain. The brother of the murdered man, Mr. Patrick Daly, is a designer, also in Mr. Robin's employ. He states that deceased left home on Thursday evening about nine o'clock, intending to spend the night with some friends at Redfern, and then catch the morning's train for Newcastle, where he had some business to transact for his employer. Since then nothing has been heard of him by his family, who are all respectable, hard-working people. Mr. Patrick Daly merely visited the Morgue from feelings of curiosity, for he believed his brother to be safe and well in Newcastle. His grief on recognising the body was painful to witness. So far, no clue has been discovered of the murderers."

During this recital my feelings had undergone a succession of changes. At first I was struck with horror; then rage and indignation, that the Push had broken its promise to me almost choked me; but when my uncle had concluded I was cast in doubt. I knew not what to think. It seemed impossible that the Push should deliberately murder Pat Daly's brother, and Pat Daly not only a member of the Push, but one of the king's councillors.

My uncle glanced at me enquiringly. "Well?" he said.

"Whose work is it?" I muttered.

He shrugged his shoulders, leaned forward, and whispered in my

"He was a traitor, boy; we have not broken our promise to you; remember, we made an exception for traitors."

My very spine turned cold. I fancied I could see blood on my uncle's hands, his clothes, his face — the room swam with blood. I had a sort of

vertigo. My uncle quickly pushed his glass before me. It was rum, a liquor the smell of which makes me ill; but I seized the glass with shaking hands and drained it to the dregs.

"What did he do?" I gasped.

"We caught him in the passage — looking for the Book."

"What did he want with it?"

"To sell us to the police!"

"How do you know?"

"He confessed!"

My teeth commenced to chatter in my head.

"We are in danger; he must have had some dealings with the police. They will know!"

My uncle smiled grimly. "He had no chance. Pat has suspected him for some time. His idea was to steal the book and bolt, then sell it afterwards!"

"Did Pat consent to his death?"

"Pat strangled him with his own hands!"

I shuddered violently. I could see the whole thing. "How is it you didn't bury the body at sea?" I gasped presently.

"We had no time. The boys were getting it ready; but a watchman was posted outside the wharf. The boys had to take to the water and swim in order to get off unseen as it was. One of them was nearly taken by a shark while going through the piles of Job's wharf."

I laid my head on the table, and simply groaned. "It's too horrible, uncle. I can't stand it!"

He frowned. "Lucas, boy, I'm afraid you're a bit white-livered. It's time you were a man; you're over twenty-one!"

"I can't help it, uncle." In a few moments I was horribly ill.

My uncle tended me with the kindness of a woman. I loathed his very presence; his touch sent thrills of horror coursing through my frame; but I bit my lips hard, and managed to prevent him seeing quite how cruelly he affected me. But he must have noticed something, for he often shook his head, and sighed. When I was better he said:

"This will alter all our plans, Lucas. You mustn't come near the shop for six months at least, until it all blows by. But I'll have to see you now and then, so will the councillors, and we oughtn't to go near the pub. you're stoppin' at. What you'll have to do is this. Take a little cottage on lease as near the Uni. as you like, and furnish it. You can get a woman in to look after you. You can get just the very sort you want in Derwent Street, and cheap, too. I had a look round the other night."

I liked this idea. It would be more private for me, and also it would enable me to entertain Edward Shaw and any other friends I might make. I thought it wise, however, not to appear too pleased.

"It will take a lot of money to furnish it, uncle!" I objected.

“Can't be helped, boy!” He shrugged his shoulders. “What could you do it on?”

“I'd have to furnish it properly, uncle, if I take it at all. You know I am in a good set now — swells. I couldn't bring them to a poor place!”

“That, of course!” he replied proudly. “I wouldn't ask you to live in rags. What you've got to do is to play the gentleman, and live right up to the others. The Push is that glad you've got in with the Shaws I couldn't tell you!”

“I'm glad of that, uncle.”

“Could you do it with a hundred?”

“I'm afraid not — unless second-hand; furniture costs an awful lot, you know.”

“But it won't be a big place; three rooms would do.”

“I must have a spare bedroom, uncle. Edward Shaw will often want to spend the night with me.”

The old man's eyes flashed with delight. “Will he, now?” he cried. “Well, name your figure, boy, and you'll have it, if it breaks me. Remember I'm doing this, not the Push.”

“Two hundred, uncle!”

He looked curiously relieved. “Well, well, it might be managed. I can't say.”

“When shall I know?”

He put up his forefinger to his nose, with a very knowing look. “You'll have the ready to-morrow, boy, or Monday at latest. Your old uncle's no blooming pauper, though he's not a rich man — miles off a rich man, Lucas. But let me tell you this: you go on straight and good, as you're doing — I've no fault to find with you, boy — you go on straight, and one of these days, when I peg out, you'll find yerself — not badly off, not too——badly off, Lucas.” And he got to his feet.

“When shall I see you again, uncle?”

“You write when you're fixed, and I'll drop you a line and let you know, so that nobody else need be by. I'll always write you when anyone's comin', so as to give you time to have the coast clear.”

“I'll get in some good rum for you!” I said.

“Now that's kindly of you, Lucas. I appreciate a little attention like that; it shows you don't forget your old uncle's tastes. I like you for that, Lucas.” He positively beamed at me.

The old man's affection was so manifestly deep and earnest that I felt a shame that I could so meagrely reciprocate it. I hastily changed the subject.

“How is Judith?” I asked.

“Well and bonny!”

“Has she another boy yet?”

“Two. Sam Pagney and Bill Jones are cuttin' neck and neck to get her.

She has 'em both under her thumb like slaves. But she reckons she keeps true to you. One of these days you'll have to wed her, Lucas!”

I shook my head. “I'll never marry her, uncle. If Judith hopes that, she is making a great mistake!”

He frowned. “Don't you go makin' a fool of yourself over that girl Denton, Lucas. I tell you straight, for your own sake, 'cause the Push will never let you marry outside of the Push. Judith has heard of her, and is jealous as a cat already!”

I felt myself turning pale. “If I wanted to marry I wouldn't ask the Push for their permission!” I cried, hotly. “This is a matter which entirely concerns myself.”

My uncle looked at me steadily. His face had marvellously changed. A moment before soft and affectionate, it now frowned grim as death. His thick brows met over his small, cruel grey eyes, and his heavy jaws locked together with a snap. His yellow lips were lifted over his teeth in a dog-like snarl as he grated out:

“She has money, I'm told?”

I did not pretend to misunderstand him. “She has!” I replied.

“A thousand a year, they tell me?”

“You are correctly informed!” I was quite reckless, but curiously cold. I intended to thresh the matter out, and I was not a bit afraid of the issue.

“Don't you go for to cross me, boy!” growled my uncle.

“Apply that advice to yourself!” I insolently returned. “What right have you to cross me in an affair of this sort?”

“I'm king of the Push!” His restrained rage was terrible to watch. “And this much I'll have you know. In your position, how you stand, you've got to depend upon the Push, and owe every bean you get to the Push. Do you think we're goin' to stand by an' see you marry a rich woman — a lady, not belonging to us? Why, first thing that'd happen, she'd get to the bottom of things, and if she didn't put us all away, she'd persuade you to clear out; and then where'd we be? You tell me that!”

It may seem strange, indeed improbably wildly strange, but nevertheless the fact is, that until that moment I had never really considered the matter of my marriage with Miss Denton, and the issues such an event must involve with regard to the Push. I had existed for almost two months in a sort of dreamland, a realm of romance and love-like imaginings. I had given neither thought nor care to the future, nor to the practical side of life. But now I was recalled to actualities, and with a sharpness of vigour which almost stunned my faculties, I perceived at once that from my uncle's point of view he was entirely right and just in his demand. The Push, if they wished to retain me as their instrument, as reasonable beings, simply could not afford to allow me to marry a rich woman. The guarantees of my allegiance to the Push must always consist of two things: my fear of their vengeance, and my enforced dependence

upon them for the means of life. Were I possessed of independent fortune it would be always possible for me to quit Australia, and defy their revenge at the world's end. In that case it is true that they possessed a weapon in the confession I had signed, but it was not a weapon that they would ever dare to use except in self-defence, say if I betrayed them; at least, I thought so then. I was obliged to admit, in spite of myself, that I had no hope of solving the problem to my own advantage. I realised for the first time my true position; I was so far from being a free agent, that I believe no slave who ever lived was so closely shackled and bound as I. After an intense silence, during which all these ideas were successively reviewed, I looked up at my uncle. His regard was not in the least relaxed; on the contrary, he appeared more angry and doggedly resolute than before. A great wave of bitterness surged into my heart; the last little shred of affection which I still felt for him died, smothered in that flood.

"Do you mean to tell me?" I asked, slowly, and pausing on each word, "that if I ever wish to marry I shall be compelled to choose a wife from the Push?"

"Nothing less," he snarled; "and something more to boot, if you want to live with a woman either, she's got to be a push girl."

"We won't discuss that question!" I said, coldly.

"It's well to understand each other!"

"You may rest assured that I shall never marry, uncle!"

His eyes became bitterly suspicious. "No use you're tryin' to put me off," he growled; "I can see with half an eye that you're gone on that damned girl!"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Make your mind easy, there is nothing between us. To-morrow she leaves Sydney!"

"Where for?"

"England."

"How long will she be gone?"

"Two years!"

His face relaxed, he broke into a smile. "Come, come!" he cried, "we've been fighting over a shadow; but you are gone on her, Lucas — own up to it like a man!"

"She is not on me, at all events. She doesn't care a rush!"

The strange man before me frowned blackly. "The slut!" he cried; "did she treat you badly, boy?"

I shuddered; the word hurt me like a knife thrust. I bit my lips, and muttered, "No, she was within her right."

"Say the word, boy, and I'll——"

I stopped him with a gesture of rage. "For God's sake let her name alone. I don't want to speak of her."

He strode across the room and threw wide the door, then returned to

me, and grasped my hand. “Good-bye, boy!” he said, and, stooping, kissed my fingers.

When he had disappeared I furiously wiped the place his lips had touched — that hand had been caressed a hundred times by Amber Eyes.

XXI Explanations

THE inquest held by the city coroner on the body of the unfortunate Alphonso Daly brought to the light of public criticism very little that had not been already published. I watched the reported proceedings with the most painful interest; but as adjournment succeeded adjournment, and the police, in the spite of all their efforts, could discover no clue to go upon, I gradually grew pacified. The Push had arranged matters with such consummate skill, that no vestige of suspicion came to rest on any member of the gang; I believe that they attended the funeral in force, and conducted themselves with such propriety that the police finally conceived the idea that some rival push, who entertained a grudge against the deceased, must have visited the district, under cover of the dark, committed the murder, and escaped without a remark. The jury brought in a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown, and the whole affair was presently from being a nine days' matter of wonder and horror, consigned to oblivion. It is strange how short and unstable the public memory usually is. Even the journals which had been most vehement in their pronouncements (and some of them had threatened never to let the matter drop until the murderers were discovered and brought to justice), soon quietly ceased to refer to the crime, and filled their columns instead with details of football matches and Parliamentary humours.

For a period after Miss Denton's departure from Sydney, I was, I think, almost heart-broken; so much so, indeed, that I welcomed the excitement of the inquest, and the consequent danger in which I stood, as something of a relief from the torment of hopeless longing. There came to me one day, however, a little registered package, postmarked Albany, which contained a gold ring, inscribed with the word “Mizpah!” Only May Denton could have sent it. The comfort and hope this token gave me was greater than can be described. It made me content to wait for her return; it inspired me with belated faith in her affection, and I construed the meaning of the word literally as a message sent direct from her heart to mine. How many thousand times I have kissed that ring, I cannot even guess! I wore it on a ribband next my heart. I worshipped it as a talisman of happiness; even now it is one of my dearest treasures. I was a very romantic person then; I think, perhaps, I am so still. But it is scarcely strange I set such value on the token. It was the only communication I

received from the woman I loved for two long years, and my mind constantly dwelt upon it, so that I came to attach to it before the end an incalculable importance, and to regard it with a species of superstitious adoration, as an emblem of my hopes and dreams, and a promise of their ultimate fruition. I was never a philosopher. I have always been constrained to live either in despair or hope. The ring was a little thing, but it brought me the gift of hope, and for the rest I cultivated patience as best I could. My success was poor, perhaps, but then I was very much in love.

Time glided by for the most part peacefully. I leased a little cottage in Derwent Street — Forest Lodge — which, thanks to my uncle's money and Edward Shaw's taste, was transformed into a little bower of elegance and comfort. It contained only five rooms and a kitchen. Two of these I fitted up as bedrooms, one as a library, one as a reception, and the last as an eating room. I hired a woman to look after the place and cook my meals; she arrived at eight o'clock each morning, and left at nine in the evening; I paid her £1 a week for her services. The rent of the cottage came to another pound; but my uncle supplemented my salary, and allowed me a sufficient sum to live in comparative affluence. I am bound to confess that as far as money was concerned he invariably treated me with the utmost generosity. I had only to ask in order to receive. My cottage possessed a small garden-plot in front, and quite a beautiful fernery at the rear. I grew to love it very soon, and before long it became a rendezvous for my friends and even my acquaintances. I sedulously set myself to the task of making friends. It was quite an easy thing to do, situated as I was. I discovered that men are not excessively exacting; a number of those I met casually sought me out of themselves, and when they knew that they could always depend upon finding at my place a good glass of wine or whiskey, and excellent cigars and cigarettes gratis, their visits were repeated. Even those whom I chose myself for cultivation were not hard to win round; men of position I refer to. When they perceived that I had apparently no ulterior motive in seeking their friendship, they accorded it to me quite cheerfully, and many responded by receiving me into their circle of home intimates. In this manner I gradually acquired an assured status in Sydney society. I attended all the Government House functions — balls, fêtes, and garden-parties, and, having struck up an acquaintance with the Governor's son and the aides-de-camp, I was occasionally invited to dine at Government House. I visited at the houses of most of the society matrons, received cards to all their “at homes,” dances, etc., and before the first year was out, had I chosen, could have dined at a different place each night in the week. Mrs. Clare was especially kind to me personally, but she afforded no help to my advancement. I could not go to her house often enough to please her; I frequently escorted her to the races, out driving, to receptions, and “at

homes," but I soon perceived that she wished to keep me to herself, and would have liked to have had me always dangling in her train, a *cavalier servente*. Not that she was in love with me, or even cared for me particularly as a friend, but the fact is, Sydney society is split up into a hundred different little cliques, and the leader of each clique simply exists for the purpose of outshining her rivals. The cliques call themselves "sets," and they are distinguished by the names of their various leaders; thus there is the "Clare" set, the "Smith" set, the "Carr" set, the "Cholmondeley" set, and scores of others. Men are in great demand amongst these sets; that is, unmarried men; and it is the fixed ambition of every woman belonging to the separate coteries to attach to her brigade, by unbreakable chains, every bachelor of her acquaintance. For this purpose the women go to any lengths, and will unhesitatingly embroil their male friends with the opposing factions if they can accomplish it; should fair means fail, there is always scandal to fall back upon. I narrowly escaped several little traps, laid cunningly for my unwary feet, by Mrs. Clare and others, through the good offices of Edward Shaw. He was at first very jealous of my social aims, but when I explained how necessary it was for the accomplishment of my political ambitions to secure as many friends as possible, and, moreover, when he perceived that I honestly regarded him with unaltered affection in spite of my little successes, he put aside his jealousy, and often consented to accompany me where I went in the capacity of mentor and sarcastic commentator on my progress. Some of the social methods of the dames in securing unrivalled dominion over a male satellite are contemptible in the extreme. Should a man appear to waver in his allegiance between the claims of adverse sets, a favourite plan is as follows: — but no, everything considered, I shall give the facts of one instance exactly as they occurred. Mrs. Clare's most dangerous rival for supremacy amongst all the subsidiary sets was a lady named Mrs. Palmer-Glynne. Mrs. Palmer-Glynne had several times entertained me at her house, and one evening while there Mrs. Clare came into the room, and gave me an unfriendly glance. Edward Shaw caught this, and subsequently warned me that Mrs. Clare would probably endeavour to induce me to slander Mrs. Palmer-Glynne. What he had prophesied came to pass. While dining with Mrs. Clare about a week later, the whole table, as though on a preconcerted signal, commenced to discuss Mrs. Palmer-Glynne, and in a somewhat sneering fashion. Had I not been forewarned, I must have fallen a victim to the snare, for I was constantly appealed to, and there is nothing so easy in the world as to play the game of follow-my-leader in a frankly slanderous conversation, when such is conducted, as this was, under the cloak of a good-humoured sort of compassion for the person spoken of. Had I made a single remark derogatory to Mrs. Palmer-Glynne, Mrs. Clare would have had news of it quietly conveyed to her

rival, with the names of witnesses, and I should have been thenceforth tabooed by the lady in question. After this experience I watched myself most carefully, and such was my success that I managed to keep in touch with quite a score of separate “sets,” and to render myself equally desirable to them all. I was never a great favourite, however, although a welcome guest and visitor. The most popular men in society were the gossips and scandal-mongers. Of course, they were disliked by the sets they scandalled, but, being persons of position, were, in spite of that, universally received, and in some sets positively adored. Shaw and I detested those fellows; they were greater liars than any of the women, and perfectly unprincipled. They numbered about twenty, and all appeared to be inveterate bachelors; about half were in the civil service, and the remainder either solicitors, doctors, or clergymen. I avoided them like the plague, but took extreme care not to offend their susceptibilities. The advantage which a male possesses over a female gossip is incalculable. A woman is expected to be a gossip, and her assurances are discounted by sensible folk, especially men, for that very reason. It is supposed, however, to be impossible for a man to be a scandal-monger. On that account his tales are accepted as gospel by ladies; and his fellow-men, reluctant to class him as an old woman, credit him very often, in spite of their private inclinations. I have observed many a lady's reputation quietly fractured in the smoking-room, after dinner, in many a splendid Sydney mansion, to the accompaniment of cigar smoke, jingling glasses, and vaguely credulous brow lifts and shoulder shrugs. Probably in nine out of ten such cases the maid or matron slandered was, in reality, as pure as snow. The motive actuating these dangerous brutes was in each case vanity; they were extremely jealous to shine as centres of attention, and like certain old-fashioned actors, wished to permanently occupy the centre of the stage. With the same object in view, each had possessed himself of an apparently unlimited repertoire of realistic stories and unrepeatable anecdotes, any of which might have brought a blush of shame to the cheek of the creator of Pantagruel. I loathed them, but I listened to them, and applauded them, because the other men did so, and it was not in my book to quarrel with anyone, or excite undue remark. It is charitable and I believe proper to conclude that a great number of other men did as I did for similar prudential reasons. But enough of Sydney society; it is a subject which saddens me every time I think of it, for I am then inevitably compelled to reflect what a cruel thing it is that one of the most beautiful and otherwise perfect cities in the world is rendered a social Bedlam by a score or two of unscrupulous persons, men and women, utterly unworthy of the name, who contrive (for no other purpose than the gratification of their vainglory and petty spite) to disturb and distract the lives of hundreds of vastly more worthy people, and cast discredit upon a community which it should be their

dearest ambition to maintain in harmony, and make an example for the honour and imitation of the country's lesser capitals.

Throughout all my social engagements I did not neglect my studies, and I also took care that Edward Shaw should do likewise. We set apart certain days out of each week to the subduing of our authors, and it is a pleasure to me to reflect that my friend owed his success at the yearly examinations to the unremitting care with which I watched and combated his native indolence. In this matter he rendered me full justice in his father's consideration, and when we together passed our second year, Mr. Shaw made me a present of a handsome grand piano. He was a very sweet old gentleman, and one of the most grateful creatures I have ever met.

Once a week, usually on Thursday evenings, between ten o'clock and midnight, my uncle visited me, sometimes accompanied by members of his council, and not infrequently by Judith Kelly. Five times during those two years I attended secret meetings of the Push, which were held in my honour, in John Robin's workshop, at dead of night. On those occasions I addressed to the assembled larrikins an account of my progress at the University, and my social successes, and wound up with a short political lecture, devised for the purpose of keeping before their minds a definite political ambition. They regarded me as a sort of demi-god, but one essentially their own property. I was a toy for them, a subject of constant wonder, question, and excited speculation. I was, in fact, their experiment, the most important experiment they had ever undertaken. They listened to my words with silent reverence, accepted my dicta on all subjects as oracles, and whenever my addresses were concluded they gathered round to shake my hands, examine my clothes, or furtively touch me somewhere with their finger tips. They were so proud of me, and so jealous of the distinction which they believed I was subsequently destined to give them over all other Australian pushes, that they passed a law inflicting the punishment of the “sock” upon any member who might be led to boast of my connection with them to a member of another push. It was their fear that their example might be imitated. I always proceeded to these meetings, rowed in a boat, from Balmain by one of the councillors, and there was generally a quarrel among the rest for the honourable privilege of rowing me back to my starting point. All these precautions were taken so that not a whisper might reach the ears of the police that Lucas Rowe, the University undergraduate, continued to take the slightest interest in the fortunes of his old associates at Miller's Point. I think they troubled themselves needlessly, because the police could have had no motive in suspecting or interfering with me, and I very much doubt if they had not long ago forgotten my existence, if even they had ever been more than vaguely aware of it, for my life in the district had always been extremely unobtrusive. But the air of mystery thus cast over

the proceedings charmed the larrikins, and endowed me with a sense of enhanced importance in their eyes. They felt that they were pioneers, exploring seas of interest and excitement, whose existence was undreamed of by their rivals. They regarded me as the central figure of a great conspiracy. How childish they were, how insensate and profoundly ignorant, may be gathered from the fact that one and all professed to believe that a sort of political millennium must come to pass very soon after I became a member of Parliament — their member! Their faith sometimes frightened me; it seemed so deep and perfect. The first measure of reform I was expected to accomplish was the abolition of capital punishment! Next I was to procure the Government to resume all alienated lands, so that every foot of real estate within the colony should be the property of the community. What they expected to effect by this drastic measure was a redistribution of riches, in which they should personally benefit, for their policy extended to the idea that landholders should thenceforth become tenants of the people at reasonable rents, and that all native born colonials should be equally eligible as tenants, and the claims of rival tenders to lease the same property should be decided in every case by ballot!

I must confess that my own enthusiastic utterances of the past had implanted these wild aspirations in their dense minds. But the ideas had taken root, and grown into flourishing and firmly-established dream forests, which they considered were quite capable of being transplanted into realities. I had been a silly, stupid, visionary boy when I first talked to them in that fashion, and I think I must have believed what I said, and believed also in my own ability to work the miracles I prophesied, else I could scarcely have so successfully convinced them. It did not, however, take me long, once I mixed with the outside world, to perceive how utterly impossible it would be for me, or, indeed, the greatest genius ever born into the world, to accomplish the smallest jot or tittle of the Push's vain imaginings. I had possessed, as a boy, only the vaguest conception of people, of society, and of politics, ideas gathered from history and books of fiction. I had steeped my mind in the half-fanciful and marvellously facile successes of dead and gone heroes, orators and reformers, in the dramatic achievements of the fictitious characters of romance and poesy. I had thought of men as masses of puppets, invented for the purpose of furnishing a plastic material for the recording of impressions by a master's hand. I had thought of women as half-hysterical worshippers and helpers of the discovered great. I had fatuously dreamed to enter the world in some vague, splendid fashion, and my greatness proclaimed in a piece of astounding oratory, or other absurd and impossible fashion, to ascend a permanent throne, and thereafter, in an undisputed sovereignty of intellect, magnetically bend and sway the multitude of my subjects to my wishes. Of course, I should

have governed wisely, kindly, and well. My kingdom would have been an ideal state, its every inhabitant happy, prosperous, and good, and crime within its confines a word of no significance.

Other lads have dreamed the same dreams as I. Other men have, in similar wise, awakened to their sad absurdity, and recognised, as I, not only that they had dreamed foolish dreams of the world, but also of themselves. That is the saddest part of the awakening, to realise that as the world of other men assumes its true proportions in one's understanding, so one does oneself, but in the opposite direction. I discovered that, instead of the wonderful creature I had believed myself to be, I was a very ordinary man indeed. I was able to achieve no marked success at the University examinations, no marked success in society. I had not a special aptitude for any particular subject, and scores of other men eclipsed me in everything, even in ambition. I was obliged to admit that I was a failure, and, as regards the Push, a humbug and a hypocrite. It was the feeling of keen shame which I experienced in addressing the Push at the third of the secret meetings I have mentioned, that first made me realise that I was treating them unfairly. They were paying for my education on a false assumption, and most generously; I was repaying their generosity with deceit. In other words, I was wasting their time and money, entirely conscious the while that it would be impossible for me ever to give them the recompense which I then believed was the stipulation fixed between us.

It is right that I should not spare myself. I have now to paint the most contemptible portion of my character. I knew that I was cheating the Push, yet I deliberately continued to cheat them. Two reasons moved me to this shameful course. I think the principal one was my affection for Miss Denton. I felt that even the very slender chance I possessed of winning her absolutely depended upon my maintaining my position as a gentleman, and without the help of the Push I did not know how to do this. A second reason was even more despicable. I was ashamed to admit to the Push that I had been mistaken in myself, and they in my abilities; I was ashamed to confess to them that as an orator I was, compared with educated speakers, a mere tyro. I did not even shine in the University debating society, which I regularly attended; how, then, could I hope, or they hope for me, to make any mark among the professional debaters in the Legislative Assembly? Again, all this while, my allowance from the Push was constantly supplemented from my uncle's private purse. Now I knew that my uncle had not made his money by legitimate means. I knew, from his own admission, that he was a “fence.” I was, therefore, living in luxury upon the proceeds of crime!

It is but just, that having confessed my infamy, I should now propose excuses. There is an excuse for everything. A great writer has said, “To know all is to forgive all.” Never were truer words uttered. My chief

excuse is this: throughout my childhood, indeed throughout all my youthful life, I was not instructed in the tenets of morality. I was brought up among a class of people peculiarly irresponsible and unprincipled. They constantly committed mean little sins and crimes. Their code of morals was contained in the maxim, “To be found out is the only sin.” Men and women, boys and girls, were daily haled off to prison for all sorts of misdemeanours. Their sentences served, they returned to their homes unrepentant and unashamed, and their friends and acquaintances never thought the less of them because of their incarceration. No disgrace attached to them, among the Push families at all events, and as I was never allowed to mix with respectable people, I had had no opportunity of discovering their ideas. I myself joined in none of these practices, because my uncle looked after me very sharply, and also because my disposition as a child was timid, retiring, and studious, and I hated and feared violence. But never did I once hear my uncle or aunt make a remark derogatory to the vicious people about us, that is to say, from a moral standpoint. My uncle would occasionally disgustedly observe, “That——idiot — So-and-so — is copped again; he sneaked a purse from a lady in a tramcar. He'll get six months this time, without the option, and deserve it for being such a messer. Fancy, he snatched the purse in broad daylight, and a copper about five yards off watchin' him!”

Is it to be wondered at, therefore, that brought up within such an environment my ideas of right and wrong were somewhat indefinite? Remember also, I knew nothing about God, Heaven, Hell, or the Hereafter except what I had read in books. I had never been inside a church, and although I had received Biblical instruction in the public school in common with the other scholars, it was there only a matter of learning and reciting verses by heart in chorus with the class, chiefly from the Old Testament, verses which were not explained to us, and which we unanimously regarded as boring and ridiculous, because they were meaningless, being couched in language only half intelligible to our unenlightened minds. I read the Bible for the first time when I had been already a year at the University. It may be objected that my conscience should have taught me at all times my duty. I must admit, it did. But in what a vague and uninsistent fashion, people who have been bred from infancy according to orthodox principles can hardly conceive. Its lessons were only perfectly intelligible where broad principles were involved. I felt it was wrong to murder, to steal, to swindle, to calumniate, in fact, to do anything to injure my neighbour. This, because reason helped conviction, and also egotism. It was only natural for me to conclude to treat my neighbours in the manner in which I wished them to treat me. But in the finer issues between right and wrong, my conscience, dulled by utter lack of cultivation, only gradually commenced to help me. For instance, it seemed wrong, I vaguely felt it was wrong, to lie, to depart in

anywise from the truth. But it was quite easy to persuade myself that a lie which harmed no one was not a sin or dereliction. To tell the truth always, for the mere sake of truth, when a harmless lie might prove of service, appeared to me absurd.

So, too, in scores of other things. When first I realised that I was deceiving the Push, acting to them the part of humbug and hypocrite, I was overwhelmed with shame. But that feeling soon faded. I could not recognise that I was injuring them in any way. I persuaded myself that I was doing my best to keep my part of the bargain, and even though foredoomed to fail in my mission, at any rate I should always do my best to succeed. I fed myself on such sophistries, and became blinded to the true issue. But not always could my blindness continue. I dwelt in daily, almost hourly, intercourse with a man who was the very soul of honour, a man who, however much he lacked the power of poetical expression, nevertheless possessed a true poetic sense of the finer duties of existence. Dear old Edward Shaw, how good he was to me, in spite of my shortcomings; how invariably kind and charitable to my failings; how unwearying in his efforts to make of me a proper gentleman! It is a sad thing to remember that his affection was founded upon my pretended appreciation of his execrable poetry. I feel more ashamed now of having played the hypocrite to him, than of having continued to deceive the Push. Inspired by his example and his gentle doctrines, I gradually awoke to a completer understanding of the word “honour,” and by insensible degrees formed a code for my own guidance. I was assisted in this by my love of novel-reading. In all the books which I voraciously consumed, there was a hero; and each hero possessed some particularised attribute which appeared to me good, and worthy of acquisition. Once I had been content to be pleased with my heroes, and presently forget them. But this light attention became impossible when my mind was more urgently directed to the fact of lacks in my own composition which might be remedied. Those admirable characters who had fought for principles and died for ideas, if only in the pages of romance, must surely have been proper men, I told myself, for their contemplation produced delight and inspired emulation even in me; while the world regarded them as criterions of conduct. I analysed my heroes, then, those I loved best, and the discoveries I made reduced me to despair. I found it would be impossible for me ever to resemble them; they were all so splendidly strong, so steadfast, so virtuous, and strict; I, in comparison, so weak, unstable, and covetous of peace. But at last my blindness was dispersed. I could see! My mind was clear, and the choice of ways stood straight before me. Either I had to go to the Push and confess myself a cheat, or continue deceiving them, and rest an outcast of honour! Other ideas and other questions then propounded themselves for my consideration. I had once fatuously resolved to devote my life to the regeneration of the Push.

Already I had accomplished something; I had won their promise to refrain from the crime of homicide except in the case of punishing a traitor to the order. But, alas! since that time I had realised the petty limit of my abilities. How could I hope to reform others, weak and unregenerate myself! From the task of perfecting my own character I shrank; I recognised the task of elevating the morals of the Push to a reputable standard as superhuman. Two years' absence from their ranks had obliged me to consider them in their true colours, to despise and detest them. I hated their vulgar habits, their gross manners, brutal instincts, and bestial conversation. It was a misery to mix among them. I had lost all desire to attempt their reformation. Nevertheless, I owed them a duty, and however much I disliked them, I could not but loathe myself the more for my hypocrisy and my cowardice.

Miss Denton's return to Sydney put a term to my indecision. When Edward asked me to accompany him to meet her, I suddenly realised that it would be a crime to go before her until discharged of my obligation, purged of the shame which had beset me for so long. I made an excuse to my friend, and sent a letter to my uncle requesting his attendance with his councillors the following evening at my cottage. The resolution once taken, I felt happier than I had done for months. I determined to confess everything, and, whatever the result, I would at least be secure in my own esteem, and able to look the woman I loved in the eyes without shame. I thought that I was going to ruin, for I believed that the Push, on hearing my confession, would at once cut off my supplies and withdraw me from the University. The ultimate future I dared not consider. I felt that I was doing right; the consciousness of that sustained me. I passed the day in a mood of curious elation; through the night I paced the streets, dreaming of Miss Denton as I walked. I was hungering to see her; but, to save my life, could not have approached her with an unshrived conscience.

Next morning, during Greek class, Edward said to me:

“She was disappointed, Lucas; she expected you at the boat.”

My heart throbbed. “How do you know?” I muttered.

“She made no secret, boy. You must come and dine with us to-night. The mater has invited you.”

I shook my head; I could not speak.

“But May expects you,” said Edward. “I told her that you would be sure to come.”

“I have an engagement I can't break, Ned,” I whispered. “But tell me of her; how does she look — has she improved?”

He smiled. “I think I see your game, Lucas. Well, perhaps it's not a bad line. Yes, she is much changed; you will scarcely know her, she has grown so sedate, quiet, and lady-like, and her accent — good Lord! She talks like an English Johnny!”

“But in looks — is she as beautiful as ever?”

“I think her improved. She has filled out, you know, and is more of a woman. Her dresses are simply too gorgeous. Of course, she has her own money now, and can do as she likes with it, but I guess she has invested a year's income on gowns.”

“Is she engaged?”

“I don't know, but a rich Englishman has followed her out from London; he is mad on her, mother says!”

This piece of information made me so miserable that immediately class dispersed I slipped away from my friend. I simply could not bear to talk with him any more, and returned as quickly as I could to my cottage, where I spent some wretched solitary hours.

My uncle, attended by his councillors, arrived a little before midnight. They were full of wonder. I was terribly nervous. After shaking hands, I drew them into the dining-room, where they each silently swallowed the rum I had prepared for them. Then they looked at me. I pointed to chairs. I was shaking so much that I too sat down.

“Well, boy,” said my uncle, “what have you brought us here for?”

“Sir!” I exclaimed, addressing him by his proper Push title, “this is a formal meeting!”

“Yes, boy, as formal as you like.”

I stood up, white and desperate. “I have sent for you, sir and councillors, to tell you that for almost two years I have deceived you, first unwittingly, but of late consciously!”

“What?” growled my uncle; his small eyes commenced to blaze, and his face rapidly assumed the hue of fear. Perhaps he thought that I had disgraced him. The councillors sat up in their chairs and glared at me. But now that the announcement was made, I was calm and cool.

“Yes,” I continued, “I have deceived the whole Push!” and paused.

“How?” asked Dave Gardner.

I shrugged my shoulders. “The Push believes that immediately I become their member I shall do a lot of wonderful things — abolish capital punishment, make the Government resume all landed property to the state, and so forth. Well, I have to tell you now, as the representatives of the Push, that such things are absurd impossibilities. If I were the greatest orator who ever breathed, and possessed of the energy and power of forty Ciceros, they would still be impossible. I have to tell you that if you continue to keep me at the University, and later contrive to send me to Parliament, you must expect me to accomplish very little, if anything, for years and years to come!”

With that I sat down again and drank a glass of wine. I expected a storm, and waited for it. There was a long silence, during which I stared at the table-cloth, trying to nerve myself for what must come.

“Is that all?” demanded my uncle at last. His voice was tremulous.

“Yes,” I said, and looked at him defiantly.

He commenced to laugh, and the councillors followed his example. They laughed and laughed; they rocked themselves in their chairs, in perfect paroxysms of mirth, while I gazed at them, at first amazed, but very soon indignant. I waited, hot and enraged, until they were quiet, then demanded an explanation. My uncle partially composed himself, and looked at me as though I were a sort of comical conundrum, which amused but puzzled him.

“What did you tell us all this for, Lucas?” he asked, with a gasp.

“Because I thought it right you should know; but if I had guessed how you would have received my confidence, I——”

“Bosh!” he interrupted. “Never mind what you'd have done. I like you all the better for this!”

He turned suddenly to the councillors.

“Well, boys, what do you think of my son — straight enough for you, is he?”

His voice was sonorous and full of challenge.

To my astonishment, the councillors sprang to their feet, and crowded round me with the heartiest expressions of approval and goodwill; but the king presently ordered them to be seated, and addressed himself to me.

“It's this way, Lucas,” he explained, “we all know what we want, and we all have hopes of getting it in the end. But we don't expect blind impossibilities, leastwise, we 'uns here don't, and what the others think ain't of much consequence; it's about what we want them to, I guess. When you're elected all the Push 'll expect you to do is to make as many speeches as you can, and bring up what you've spoke to them about — abolition of hangin', and the rest, no matter whether it does any good or not.”

“Do you mean to say,” I gasped, “that they expect no more than that? Uncle, don't tell me that I have been such a fool. I am sure that they want more, and expect more. I am certain that they believe that once I am elected I shall do all I have been stupid and wicked enough to promise them.”

My uncle stopped me with a deliberate, derisive wink.

“I guess I know more of the Push than you do!” he replied. “Of course, they have great faith in you, and all that, but Lord bless you, boy, when it comes to a question of what they expect, you go too far; they ain't quite such fools as you make out. They like you to speak big to them; it's the sort of talk that hits 'em on the spot, and the more you promises, the better they like it. But rot it all, boy, they have a bit of sense. They know you can't do everything at once. The great thing is that they'll have a member of their own, and the other pushes 'll jolly soon know it when the murder's out. That'll be our nuts; if you never did anything else for a

year after it wouldn't much matter."

"But what good can I do them? They are paying for me; I don't suppose they want me as an ornament."

"That's another pig, Lucas, another pig altogether; it's my business, mine entirely, leastwise the councillors', too. Don't you fret, boy; you'll come in mighty handy, I promise you.

"But how?"

"Well, for one thing, you are going in for the law; you'll be able to defend our coves who are unlucky enough to get run in, on the cheap. Then there's the matter of billets; you'll be able to get anyone as wants it work on the trams and railways, and roads and things. That's worth paying out a few hundreds for alone. Then, when a cove's lagged, you'll be able to look after him, and his friends can get to see him without parting through the neck for it like we have to now. Then look at the way the coppers treats any of our boys when they arrests 'em, and gets 'em in the cells. Only last week Bill Evans was copped for stoushing a chow in Upper George Street. He followed the copman as quiet as a lamb, but when the bloke got him to the lock-up, he put Bill in a cell, and gave him a frightful time; near beat him to death, and next mornin' charged him with assaultin' a constable in the execution of his duty. The poor beggar got three months. I took the thing to Truth, but Norton wasn't interested, because it was just Bill's word against the cop's. Well, you'll have to show those sorts of things up, and put a stopper to them, Lucas. Then there's Jack Robin's wharf. Jack Robin's lease is almost up, and a big company is after it already. You'll have to put the kibosh on their game, and get Jack a fresh term at the same rent he's paying now."

"But, uncle," I objected, "your present member could do all these things."

"Indeed," he snarled; "who's been telling you? I guess we are all just about sick of ——, he is just the same as the others before him, and we put 'em all in, the ungrateful dogs! They promises as much as you like before the election, and afterwards we can go to blazes for all they cares."

"Then," I cried, "am I to understand that I have been mistaken, and that the whole Push will be perfectly satisfied, although I fail, as fail I must, in redeeming the promises I have made them."

"So long as you do what we tell you, whatever you fail in, boy, the Push 'll be perfectly pleased with you, depend upon that."

"Very good; I am content. We understand each other better now. To tell you the truth I have been very unhappy for a long time in believing that I was deceiving you all. I perceive that I have been only deceiving myself."

"So you have, boy; so you have!"

Thus ended the interview and my attempt to put myself straight with

my tyrants and patrons, the Push. My uncle and his councillors quitted the cottage, believing me a perfect model of all the virtues on account of my confession. As for me I felt relieved of a great load, and looked forward very happily to meeting Amber Eyes as soon as possible. The thought of the rich Englishman who had followed her from London was the only bitter drop in my cup, and even that I was content to quaff — for I reflected, “If she cared for him there must have ere this transpired an engagement of which Edward would surely have been informed.”

Before I went to bed I wrote a letter to my uncle, in which I informed him that I no longer intended to be a drain upon his private purse, as I found I could manage to live perfectly well on my allowance from the Push. I had not cared to tell him this before the councillors, because I was not sure if they knew that he was supplementing my income. When I had posted the letter I was more satisfied with myself than I had been for years. I thought that I had climbed two great steps in the right direction. I felt clean in mind, and worthy to meet the woman I loved. I was no longer a hypocrite, and I had rid myself of the odious charge of living on ill-earned gold. It will be perceived that even so my regeneration was only as yet an amateurishly conceived and dreadfully unfinished article. It did not enter my dreams that there existed any reason why I should not always continue to dwell in the dear little cottage which my uncle's tainted gold had purchased; not a single qualm of conscience came to disturb my placid pride of possession. You see I was only gradually becoming a proper man, and very slowly acquiring the instincts of honour. I fondly believed that the past did not matter, because it could not be mended, and only concerned myself with the future. The present I did not consider at all, and as my cottage was a thing of the present, and also allied with the past, inasmuch as it was an accomplished fact, bought and paid for, I continued to live in it without a tittle of remorse, unconscious, indeed, of the existence of occasion for remorse. One curious little fact concerning my moral reformation is worthy of recording. Then, and for years thereafter, whenever I became or was made aware of a new and desirable delicacy of feeling, a hitherto unrecognised perception of proper relative values in separate spheres of action, or some finer distinction between right and wrong than I had been accustomed to consider in the past, such discoveries would strike me with the force of long preconceived convictions. I would realise their justice almost instantly, and with the sharpness and ever-increasing vitality of long sleeping but suddenly awakened memories. I think myself that they were really memories, inherited from my father, who was a gentleman. The idea is fanciful, perhaps; but if we inherit from our parents traits and tendencies, then why not memories?

XXII The Betrothal

“MAY is offended with you, Lucas,” said Edward to me next morning. “She believes that you have some motive in avoiding her. I knew what your motive was, but I did not put you away.”

“And what do you think my motive was, Ned?”

“To pique her by affecting indifference, eh, boy?”

I smiled. “No, Ned, you are wrong; I really had an engagement last night, otherwise I should have loved to dine with you! How is your mother?”

“Splendid; the tour has done her worlds of good. But she, too, is huffy with you. She says that if you don't call very soon she will know just what you think of her. An awful consequence, eh?”

“Will she be at home to-night, Ned?”

“Yes, you'd better come to dinner. The Englishman will be there.”

“What is his name? Is he nice?”

“Your rival's name is Walter Ballack; he is a Captain of Hussars, and seems a very nice fellow. He's infernally handsome, and rather dudish; but his manners are pleasant. He came out last evening after dinner, and May flirted with him desperately. I should class him as dangerous — in your regard.”

It took me quite two hours to dress that evening. I tore off collar after collar, spoiled tie after tie, before I could be satisfied that I looked my best. After all it was a very poor best. I was pallid with apprehension, and my counterfeit presentment in the mirror seemed nothing but a spirit framed in black 'and white; a wan-faced spirit, with two big, glaring eyes. I entered Mrs. Shaw's drawing-room obsessed with my old familiar demon sense of nervous unreality, feeling that I myself was far away, and imagining the experience of another man. Mrs. Shaw seized both my hands, and assured me that I was very wicked not to have called on her before. I told her that I had already suffered terribly from a remissness which had not been my fault at all. She smiled, and led me forward. Miss Denton was seated upon a settee conversing with a well-built and very handsome man, about thirty-five years of age. He had beautiful pink cheeks, and a pair of sweeping chestnut moustaches. His head was covered with real golden curls. His nose was good, his eyes magnificent — big and blue as the sea, his mouth was hidden, but his chin was rather weak. I looked at him first, and coveted his good looks

with a pang of insupportable jealousy; he was beautiful to see. Then I looked at the girl. She seemed his match in every respect, so perfectly did she contrast with him; she was as dark as he was fair, as bewitching as he was handsome! With a sort of despairing conviction I muttered to myself, “These are counterparts, it would be only right for them to mate!”

She had improved; my swift, jealous glance noted every change. She was stouter than of old, and more assured in her demeanour. Her figure had rounded, and taken to itself a fine free dignity. She rose to meet me, and looked a girl stepped from the frame of one of Gibson's drawings — tall, queenly, mistress of herself, carelessly gracious. I felt chilled to the bone.

Our eyes met, she extended her hand. “How do you do?” she enquired.

I gazed at her steadily, her eyes were cold. “Quite well, I thank you!” I muttered; then, half stupidly, “Welcome home, Miss Denton!”

“Thank you” — icily.

“Mr. Rowe, Captain Ballack,” cut in Mrs. Shaw.

The Captain got slowly to his feet, looked me up and down, and nodded.

“Glad to meet you!” he condescended, and sat down again.

“Please excuse me for a moment,” said Mrs. Shaw, and left the room. I opened the door for her, then found a seat.

Miss Denton rather ostentatiously put her left hand palm downwards on her knee, looking at me the while. The third finger was ornamented with a plain gold ring, which exactly resembled the one which she had sent me from Albany, and which at that moment rested above my heart. I was curiously thrilled to mark it.

“You are very much changed, Mr. Rowe!” she said, presently.

“Two years is a long time!” I replied. “You, too, are changed.”

“A great deal may happen in two years!” observed Captain Ballack.

“Or in ten minutes,” said the girl, quickly, glancing at him.

The Captain looked a trifle disconcerted, and I felt sure that he had asked her for a private ten minutes of her time. Perhaps he wished to propose to her. I hated him.

“Are you glad or sorry to be home again?” I asked.

“My feelings are mixed. I am quite unsettled yet. I scarcely know.”

“Did you like England?”

“Not so much as Italy; we spent most of our time on the Continent and travelling. I simply adore travelling.”

“You will find Sydney rather humdrum for a time.”

“I am afraid so.”

And then we all three fell silent. Miss Denton was preoccupied. The Captain looked sulky. I was sad and moody, cruelly disappointed. In none of my dreams had I pictured a meeting so formal, cold, and

unsatisfactory. I felt *de trop*, and was filled with a sense of burning injustice that it should be so. I endured the silence for a few moments, then stood up.

"If you will excuse me, I'll run up and see Ned," I said.

Miss Denton flushed suddenly, and gave me a glance full of indignation and reproach. "Certainly, if you wish," she said.

"Thanks!" I marched out of the room, and in the passage ground my teeth. I vowed that at any rate she should not have the satisfaction of knowing that I still loved her. I thought she had treated me abominably.

Ned was in the balcony smoking one of his eternal cigarettes. He turned and looked hard at me. "Well, boy?" he muttered.

I shook my head, breathing hard. "It's all up, Ned. I resign!"

He wrung my hand. "Poor old chap, poor old chap," he said.

"I'll get over it, Ned, but I wish I could get away to-night."

"A sudden illness?" he suggested.

"No, I have my pride, Ned. I'll not let her know, ever!"

"Good man! but there's the gong; we'll have to go down. Will you take a drop of whiskey first?"

"No, thanks!"

He took my arm, and together we entered the dining-room; the Shaws kept up but little ceremony in their establishment. I was placed between Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, and immediately opposite Miss Denton. I scarcely glanced at her once during the meal. My spirits were feverishly excited. I drank a good deal of wine, and talked incessantly to Mrs. Shaw, amusing her by recounting my impressions, gathered during her absence, of Sydney society. I relaxed my ordinary caution, and fearlessly criticised numbers of her acquaintances and friends. Often the whole table listened and laughed; for with a recklessness foreign to my nature, I painted characters known to all, with the merciless language of a tongue dipped in gall. I was quite miserable, and only bent on concealing my misery; I think I succeeded in my object.

After dinner Captain Ballack sang "Let me like a soldier fall!" He did it very well, and Miss Denton played his accompaniment. We were allowed to smoke in the drawing-room. In order to conceal my bitter rage and burning jealousy, I forced myself to pay court to the Captain. I gave him a cigarette, and held a match for him to light it, then devoted myself to him with a hypocritical assiduity I could never have dreamed myself capable of. I persuaded him to talk, and listened to his conversation with an attention he must have found quite captivating, for he responded very frankly, and seemed to take a fancy to me. The fact was Captain Ballack was rather dull of intellect. Any man must be who cannot immediately perceive that he is disliked, no matter how skilfully the feeling be concealed. He saw nothing except that I apparently admired him, and my admiration touched him. When I had thoroughly effected my desire I

abandoned him to Miss Denton, and as about a dozen other people had dropped in, I flitted about like a butterfly for the rest of the evening, until Edward challenged me to a game of billiards. We played a hundred up, and by that time the visitors had gone. I bade good-night to my hostess, but Miss Denton had disappeared. “She has gone to the gate with Captain Ballack,” said Mrs. Shaw.

“Then I shall see her as I pass out,” I said, smiling. I felt capable of murder by that. Edward wished to see me off, but I begged him to let me go alone. Miss Denton was not on the path, she was not by the gate; the road was deserted, save for a cab trailing off into the distance.

I said to myself, “This false girl has taken Captain Ballack to our old trysting-place!”

Carried away by a wild, unreasoning impulse, I sharply banged the gate, and ran swiftly down the sea-path towards the larn tarner hedge and the cleft in the rocks, where in the past I had so often spent rapturous hours with Amber Eyes. The moon was at its full, and shone with a cold, golden brilliance. What I wished or thought to do I do not know, unless it were to catch the lovers together, and wildly upbraid Miss Denton for her treachery to memories which I felt she should have held sacred, even though she had never loved me. The path was broken now and overgrown with weeds. The prickly larn tarner plucked at me with every step I took, and held out angry arms to stay my progress. I dashed through like a mad thing, burning with hate and love; my face and hands cruelly scratched with thorns. I sprang down the broken causeway by the sea, and turned the corner of the rock, all in a whirl of passion. She was standing at the entrance of the cave cleft, bathed in the splendid moonlight; the tide was low, and a bitter salty smell rose from the narrow streak of glittering sands before her feet, against which the waters lapped and frothed and spumed continuously.

She was alone, and she gazed dreamily out across the bay towards the dark-clad coverts of the far shore. She held in her hand a golden ring, which she seemed to weigh upon her palm.

She did not turn or look at me; but she murmured softly, “I knew that you would come!”

Anger, passion, jealousy, all vanished from me, charmed by the word. I looked, and worshipped her. She seemed an angel of beauty in her soft, white gown. She was framed in a shimmering haze, a halo of golden light. I bent my knee before her.

I said, “I love you, May. I have been true to you in word and deed and thought.”

She bent her head and answered, “I have been miserable away from you, Lucas. I should have returned sooner if I had not been bound!”

“You love me?” I cried.

She smiled divinely.

I sprang to my feet, dizzy with rapture. “Tell me!” I implored.

She pointed to the ring on her palm. “Where is yours?”

“Here!” I cried, and touched my breast. “It is always here. It was your message — yours!”

“Ah!” she cried. “I looked for it!”

“You should have known.”

She shook her head. “Show it me!”

In a moment it was before her.

“We shall change them!” she murmured, and offered me her left hand. I kissed it reverently, and slipped on the third finger the ring I had treasured for so long. She held out the other to me. “Can you read?” The moon was kind. I read these words: “I love you!” She took it from me, pressed it to her lips, then placed it on my finger. “Wear this openly!” she said, “and wear it always. When you came to me to-night, and I did not see the other on your hand, I thought a thousand things.”

“Was that the reason you——?”

She put swift fingers on my lips. “Yes——”

“I thought you loved the Englishman!” I cried.

“He is persistent,” said Miss Denton. “To-night for the third time I told him ‘No.’ It will be your duty next.”

“May!” I cried out, trembling with my happiness; “you really mean——”

She looked me full and honestly in the eyes. “Do you love me?”

“Yes — yes — yes!”

“I love you!”

“Ah, at last!”

“This is our betrothal,” she murmured, softly.

We stood facing each other, separated by a yard of charmed space. I longed to clasp her in my arms, but dared not touch her.

“I have prayed for this moment,” I said, dreamily.

She swayed a little towards me, her eyes glowed with an entrancing light, her face wore an expression of melting tenderness, of happy self-surrender.

“Not yet!” I cried, and held out a warning hand. She clasped it, and placed it on her heart. I could feel the beats. “It is yours!” she said.

“Dear,” I muttered, and as I spoke a deadly fear possessed me that I was about to lose her. “There is something you should know before you bind yourself to me; something you should have known before.”

“Tell it me quickly, then!”

“It — dear, look away!” I stammered. “It is a shameful thing!”

She drew in her breath sharply. “Lucas — you — you are free.”

“Yes.”

“What is it, then?”

I blurted out. “It's myself, May. I have no right to use my father's

name — do you understand?" I tore my hand away, fearing lest she would throw it from her when she realised the thing I meant. She uttered a low sob, and her bosom heaved. She gazed shyly at the ground. "Was Rowe your father's name?" she whispered, presently.

"No, my mother's."

"Is — is she dead?"

"They are both dead."

A deep silence fell between us. It lasted so long that I grew desperate at last.

"I deserve for you never to look at me again," I muttered. "I have treated you like the worst of cads. I should never have tried to win your love, remembering the thing I am. I have no name to offer you — none."

"Hush!" she said. "Hush!"

"My life is a lie!" I cried, gloomily; "except that I loved you, I might have lived it always. No one knows of this but you and Edward Shaw."

"Hush!" she whispered; she was deep in thought. I watched her as a lost soul might gaze at the door of Paradise. Soon she turned to me, but I could not read her face; her eyes were dark and inscrutable.

"What do you expect of me?" she asked.

"Nothing!" I muttered; "nothing, dear. Tell me to go, and I shall never reproach you!"

"I am rich," she murmured, musingly.

"I am poor," said I; "you might call me an adventurer."

"But I never shall," she cried, her sweet face breaking into a radiant smile.

"It is your charity," I said.

"No," she whispered, "it is my love!" and she held forth her arms.

I caught her to me with a hungry cry, but before I kissed her I looked deep into her eyes. "You forgive me, sweet?" I asked.

She shook her head and smiled. "What is there to forgive? I have loved you since I knew you. I have longed for you these two dreary years. What should part us now? Do you think I care for a name?"

Our lips met at the last word, and from her kiss I gained the dear conviction that nothing could part us, only lack of love, or death. Next moment, on a mutual impulse, we left the cavern hand in hand. "I shall be missed," said she. "You will be missed," said I, and we laughed, because we had said the same thing in a breath. A few yards up the path she freed herself. "Wait!" she cried, and ran back. In a moment she had returned. "Wait!" said I, and slipping back to the cavern I kneeled down and kissed the imprint of her feet upon the sand. She asked me shyly what I had gone to do. I replied that the same thought had called us both. "It was a sweet 'thought,' " she said.

"It was a lover's thought," said I.

We were very shy and humble each to the other, because we were

confessed, and it was a new life upon which we had entered, but we were very light-hearted and happy. When we reached the gate she became for a moment grave and serious. “One day,” she said, “you must tell me all your story; it is sad, I know. When first we met I knew you had a history.”

I shivered a little. “It is a mean tale, May; a sordid tale. You will hate to hear it.”

“Only if you hate to tell it, Lucas.”

“One day you will know all, dear!” I assured her.

“I shall tell aunt at once of our engagement,” she whispered, presently.

“I shall write to your uncle to-night!”

“I am my own mistress,” said she. “It is only a courtesy to tell them; you need ask for no consent.”

“Ah, dear,” I cried, “if there were need I would make a pilgrimage barefoot across half the world to win it.”

Like two children, after we had said good-night, and the gate was closed, we ran back and kissed hands through the bars.

It was the best hour of my life.

XXIII The Tale of Suicide

MY engagement with my sweetheart was not countenanced by her uncle and aunt without opposition. Mr. Shaw inflicted upon me a bad quarter-hour, which I shall never forget, to such a rigorous cross-examination did he submit me. If I had not been previously thoroughly persuaded that he regarded me with much sincere affection, I must have considered him as the sternest of business men, and the hardest parent imaginable. I told him that I possessed only enough money to enable me to take my degree as LL.B., and that thereafter I should be obliged to depend upon the profession of law, combined with politics, as a means of livelihood. He there-upon very frankly informed me that I had no right to approach his niece while my prospects remained so poor; he said it would, in all probability, take me many years to earn more than bread and cheese at the bar, and even if I entered Parliament, as was my ambition, the salary I should receive of £300 per annum as a member was of too precarious a tenure to be seriously considered. This interview took place at his office, and I left him feeling much abashed, and half convinced that he looked upon me as a fortune-hunter. Mrs. Shaw was more charitable; she admitted that it was not my fault I was not a rich man, but declared that she did not think it right that Miss Denton and I should become engaged until I had taken my degree, and had been called to the bar. This would necessitate our waiting for nearly tow years, for although I was then in my third year at the University, the law degree was not conferable within a year of attaining the B.A.

My sweetheart, however, promptly took the matter into her own hands. She sent for me one evening, and leading me before Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, introduced me to them as her fiancé, with these words: “It is no use you dear people protesting, for the matter of my engagement concerns me, and me only. All that you have a right to demand is that I shall marry a presentable man. Well, I don't think you can deny that Lucas is presentable. I tell you frankly that I love him, and I shall marry him whenever he wishes me to.” With that she put her hand within my arm and looked at them with smiling defiance.

Mr. Shaw shrugged his shoulders. “Of course it is your own business, May,” he said; “you are your own mistress now, and I have no longer any right to control your actions. I thought it, however, my duty to protest, and I still hope that you will wait until Lucas can make himself

independent before you marry. You know how glad people always are at a chance to talk. Everyone will say that he has married you for your money. It is always an odious thing for a husband to be dependent on his wife."

"Do you think I care a pin what people say?" she cried, scornfully. "So long as I am satisfied, how dare they talk! Lucas does not trouble about my money, I can tell you."

Mrs. Shaw threw up her hands. "Don't tell me that you think of getting married soon?" she gasped.

"It rests with Lucas!" replied my sweetheart, proudly. "I am his, when he wants me, and everything I possess. I only wish I were ten times richer for his sake!"

I squeezed her hand, so grateful and proud, that I felt my eyes burn. I turned to our elders, and said as sweetly as I could,

"Dear sir and madam, please try and think a little more kindly of me. I shall not marry your niece until after I have taken my degree in Arts, and that cannot be for six months hence, but I do not see why we should wait longer for our happiness. May's money would elsewise be a curse to us both, rather than a blessing. Believe me, I shall not always be dependent on her; I shall work all the harder because of her sweet generosity, and before we marry every penny she possesses shall be settled upon her as firmly as you, Mr. Shaw, may desire!"

It was then that they made a virtue of necessity. Mr. Shaw observed, with rather a husky voice, that I should know he liked me, and did not think me a fortune-hunter; and Mrs. Shaw, after a moment's hesitation, gave me a motherly kiss, whereupon she and May fell into each other's arms and had a quiet weep together. To my delight no one thought to question me as to my antecedents; they knew certainly that I was an orphan, so I suppose they took it for granted that I had no relatives on my part whose wishes I should consult. Edward quizzed me unmercifully when he heard of my success, but I think he was sincerely glad of it. I told him I had confided to May the secret of my birth, and how she had received the information.

He nodded, and said, kindly, "That was rightly done, Lucas. Well, old boy, soon we shall be cousins, and let me tell you I have no blood relative outside the mater and the governor whom I like half as well."

A week swiftly passed by, each hour of which was a period stolen from Paradise. I lived in a perfect dreamland, into which not a single disturbing thought dared seek an entrance. In the mornings I dreamed through my studies; the afternoons and evenings I spent with my sweetheart, wrapped in a trance of love; and I returned each night to my rooms like one in a gentle delirium of joy. For the time I forgot the world, the Push, everything, except the beautiful girl who loved me; I have no excuse to offer for my folly, save that I loved, and that my love

was strong enough to overwhelm both reason and memory.

I think my uncle must have been aware of what I had done, almost from the first, for he had always enveloped me with spies; but for a week he made no sign. While I dreamed, he cogitated, schemed, and planned. On the tenth evening after May's return to Sydney, I walked home to my cottage a little before midnight, my fancy, as usual, steeped in splendid visions. I was destined to have a rude awakening. Entering my bedroom, I found seated there, like six silent ghosts, my uncle and his five councillors. They had climbed in from the fernery through the open window. My uncle had a copy of that week's *Bulletin* open in his hand.

I started violently. I read an omen in the faces of all. I felt in my heart what was to come. They offered me no greeting; all sat like mutes, staring at me accusingly.

My uncle broke the silence. “Sit down!” he commanded.

I obeyed. He raised the journal to his eyes, and read aloud:

“An engagement has been arranged between Miss May Denton, one of Sydney's heiresses and prettiest girls, who has just returned from a long sojourn in the old country and Mr. Lucas Rowe, a young Englishman of good family, who is a student at the Sydney University. The marriage will take place as soon as this fortunate young man takes his degree in Arts, which, barring accidents, means about six months hence.”

My uncle silently handed the paper to me. I had not seen the paragraph. The *Bulletin* was a smart society paper which I seldom looked at. In order to collect my wits I put it before my face and scanned the column. At first the print played strange gambols, but presently another paragraph met my eyes. I read it word by word without comprehension, but it so fascinated and compelled my attention that gradually its meaning dawned upon me. “Miller's Point enjoys the grim distinction of holding the record among all Sydney suburbs for felo-de-se, and a curious feature observable about those of its inhabitants who vicariously seek such a refuge from the ills of life, is that a great proportion have preferred the death by water to all others. During the last two years, without apparent rhyme or reason, no less than six respectable and well-to-do tradesmen have cast themselves into the sea. The body of the latest of these unfortunates, one John McSwiney, was picked up on Wednesday last, where it had been washed on to the rocks at Bondi. In one of his pockets was found a half-obliterated letter addressed to his wife, the contents of which go to prove that the poor wretch must have been deranged in mind before he committed the rash act, for they contained an unintelligible request to conceal the manner of his death from his son, William McSwiney, a child of six, who died a month ago of scarlet fever. When he left his home to proceed upon the fatal expedition Mr. McSwiney carried quite a large sum of money with him in his pocket-book. This has vanished, probably wrested from him by the waves, but his watch still

reposed in his vest-pocket when he was discovered."

In my turn I put down the paper. A revelation had come to me. I discerned the hand of the Push in the reputed suicide of John McSwiney. The obliterated letter, the foolish reference to his month-dead child, the large sum of money that had vanished; above all, the fact that McSwiney had been a resident of Miller's Point. The Push, then, had broken their vow to me, probably many times. It was possible that the six tradesmen mentioned by the *Bulletin* as having drowned themselves within the two past years had all been murdered by the Push. It was possible that there were even other victims. The horror of my thoughts paralysed my faculties, but only for a moment. In another I was stirred with a dull cold anger. I turned to my uncle; my face was stiff, almost rigid. I had to force my jaws open, in order to speak, with a real physical effort.

"I am waiting," I said.

"Is it true?" he demanded.

I returned to him the paper. I pointed out the paragraph I had read.

"Is that true?" I asked, and my voice grated horribly.

He read it slowly; he then passed it to Jack Robin. The whole council read it; meanwhile my uncle stared at the floor, biting his lips. Dave Gardner was the last to read, he let the *Bulletin* fall when he had finished. The rustle made such a loud noise in the dead stillness of the room that they all started; guiltily, I thought.

"Boys!" cried my uncle, who appeared curiously upset. "You tell him he is wrong. He accuses us of murder!"

I held up my hand. "Sir!" I said, hoarsely, "the French have a proverb — 'qui s'excuse, s'accuse,' which means 'he who excuses himself, accuses himself.' I did not accuse you. I asked you was that true — that tale of suicide. Your thoughts flew at once to murder!"

"Damn you!" he cried, in an instant furious; "don't you dare hector me, boy. If you think that we put those coves away, you're a blasted fool; we didn't. The crowner brought 'em all in suicides, and they all left letters behind 'em. So put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"Did they write those letters, uncle?"

He sprang to his feet; his face was livid with rage. In two seconds he stood before me; in another I was lying on the floor half-stunned from a brutal blow, and he was kneeling on my chest, his fingers clutching at my throat. He would have killed me then and there, I make no doubt, but that the councillors roughly dragged him from me. Even so he fought against them like a wild beast; for the moment a veritable madman, and the five had as much as they could do to hold him. I got up and resumed my chair, with dazed head and swimming senses. I watched the struggle curiously, every detail of it. I marked my uncle's strength gradually wane, and with its decadence the return of his reason. He ceased fighting, and of a sudden collapsed. They led him panting to a chair. He was

chalk-white, and sobbed like a hysterical woman, but without tears, his head thrown back in wild abandon. After a time he partially recovered, and glared at me. I returned his glance without fear. I was stone cold, my hands felt like ice.

"You'll give up that girl!" he said, choking between each word.

"I'll not!"

"Within a week, or——" he gasped, and clawed at the air; he looked like one of Doré's devils.

"Or what?" I questioned, icily.

He rose unsteadily to his feet, and swayed from side to side, trying to speak. I thought he was about to fall in a fit, but I hated him too much to pity him.

"Or what?" I repeated, with a sneer.

"Death!" he roared out, of a sudden.

I sneered in his face. "Kill me now, murderer!" I cried.

He staggered towards his councillors, who immediately gathered round him. He clutched Robin's shoulder, and, so supported, turned to me. "Not you; not you, boy. I never meant to touch you — you angered me past bearin'."

"Whom then?" I demanded.

"Her!" he almost screamed the word.

"Uncle!" I cried, aghast, and I, too, started to my feet. "You are mad; it is only a threat!"

But he turned from me. "Take me away; take me away!" he muttered, "I'm sick, I'm sick. As for you, boy, I'll send one to you. You do my bidding or you'll suffer. Oh, I'm sick!"

I watched the councillors give him some spirit, then bear him off between them. I, too, was sick, sick with fear and horror. But even then I was not permitted to rest alone. One man returned — Pat Daly. He patted me roughly on the shoulder, and muttered, "You oughtn't to cross your uncle, Lucas, it'll never do no good."

I looked up at him, of a sudden longing for a little sympathy. I tried to read his soul. "Pat!" I said, "they killed your brother!" but then I started from him, for I remembered what my uncle had told me. "Ah!" I cried, with a violent shudder. "Don't touch me; don't come near me, you strangled him with your own hands."

"It's a lie!" he cried; "I never did!"

"What! think what you say. My uncle told me he was caught playing traitor, and *you — you* strangled him!"

"He lied then," said Daly, with a sullen frown. "He was put away for drunkenness behind my back. They was frightened he'd split on us some day drunk, and so they did him up. I knew naught about it till afterwards. Poor old Alf was no traitor; never a Daly would turn on his pals."

"Oh!" I gasped. "Oh! what would you do, Pat, if you loved a girl, and

they threatened to kill her rather than you should have her?”

He frowned and shook his head. “You mustn't cross your uncle, Lucas; it's no good; it'll only lead to harm. You'll have to give up that girl. To-morrow night Judith Kelly's coming out to you.”

“What for?” I cried.

“To live with you!”

I writhed in my chair. “This!” I gasped. “This is their plan. I may not have the girl I want, but I must have Judith Kelly.”

“And be true to her!” said Daly, sternly. “It's no good kicking, Lucas; you've got to take your gruel, and there's lots in the Push who'd rush your chance with Judy Kelly. She's the finest girl in the Point.”

“And if I refuse?”

“That's what I come back for to give you a word of friendly warning over. If you kick, it's all up with the other one. It's all fixed, Lucas, the whole Push is in it; lots drawn, and everything passed but the decree! Only two voted the other way, and they're both mad on Judy.”

My brain reeled. “If you attempt to harm her — so much as attempt it,” I cried, “I tell you, and you can tell the Push, I shall go straight to the police and acquaint them with everything!”

He smiled pityingly at me. “You're a bit dotty just now, boy,” he said, kindly, “you'll think different and sensible of all this to-morrow.”

“Tell my uncle I refuse. Tell him I defy him, defy the lot of you!” I cried, wildly. “Judith Kelly shall never enter my doors. I swear it by heaven!”

Pat Daly shook his head, and without another word departed from the cottage. I spent the night feverishly pacing the floor. I made a thousand desperate resolutions, all of which were wild and impotent for good. The future lay black before me. My dream of bliss was broken, and its fragments dispersed. I could not bring myself to give up my sweetheart, and yet I felt that my love for her had now become a sword above her head, that threatened her sweet life in no uncertain fashion.

XXIV The Push Decide

“MAY,” said I to my sweetheart as we sat together late next evening on the lower terrace of Mr. Shaw's garden, “what would you think if suddenly I were to change towards you; if of a sudden I were to completely leave you to yourself, never come and see you, never write to you, never answer your letters if you wrote to me?”

“What a cruel fancy!” she answered. It was dark, but I think she smiled.

“Tell me, sweetheart!” I persisted.

“I would think you had ceased to love me,” she replied.

“But surely not if I were to change at once. You do not think that I have ceased to love you now?”

“Oh, no.”

“Nor will to-morrow?”

“No.”

“Well, suppose that when to-morrow comes there happens what I have described?”

She rubbed her soft cheek against my face. “I would think that you were ill, dear.”

“And what would you do?”

“I would wait till you were better.”

“How long?”

“A day, a week — perhaps a week.” Her voice was doubtful.

“And then?”

“Oh, if you were not better then, I would go to you.”

“You would be sure I had not ceased to love you.”

“Make me sure!” she whispered. “Make me sure that you will never cease to love me.”

I held her tightly to me. “Listen, dear. I have a presentiment that an evil thing is about to part us, something that cannot be fought against and cannot be gainsaid. It may be for little, it may be for long; but, sweetheart, if it happens, if we part, and for ever, I swear to you, by all that there is sacred in earth and heaven, that I shall never love you less than I do now, and, too, that I shall be true to you as I have always been until I die!”

She rested silent for some time in my arms, I think a little troubled by my deep earnestness. “You have a presentiment,” she whispered, at last;

“do you believe in dreams, Lucas?”

“I do not know, dear; why?”

“Last night I dreamed that Edward was dead — killed; it was horrible!”

“What, dear old Ned!” I cried.

“Yes!” she shuddered. “I cannot tell you how I suffered; it has made me ill all day. I could not banish the horrid memory of it, try how I would. His blood was on my hands. I have been looking at my hands every few minutes to reassure myself.”

“My poor darling, what a frightful dream it must have been; but it was after all a dream.”

“And yours is a presentiment. Let us each forget, Lucas dear.”

“Ah,” said I, “but I can't. I feel certain my presentiment must come true. Such happiness as mine has been of late cannot last. I feel it in my heart.”

“Lucas, you frighten me.”

“May, my own fear is inexpressible. It came to me when I left you last evening. Since then I have not closed my eyes. It would not let me sleep!”

“But that is foolish, dear; what could part us while we love each other?”

“Death, May!”

She trembled in my arms. “If you were to die, so would I,” she muttered.

“You love me so much, sweetheart?”

“So much that I could not live without you!”

“And else?”

“What do you mean?”

“If shame came to me?”

“I would love you still.”

“If — crime?”

She pressed my hand to her heart. “Lucas, if you committed the worst of crimes I would still love you. I have given my love to you; it was a gift, not a loan.”

“May, if you were to find out that I had deceived you——”

“Ah!” she pushed me away from her. “Not in love?” she cried.

“No, not in love.”

She kissed me softly on the lips. “Nothing else matters, dear,” and with a contented sigh she nestled in my arms again.

When I was leaving her I whispered, “It may be for ever, May!”

She shook her head, smiled, and sighed. “You do not know me yet,” she said.

I had before leaving home that afternoon locked up my cottage with the most extraordinary caution; but, on entering the hall door, I heard voices. I had reckoned without my host, or rather my uncle. I should have

remembered that a “fence” must know the rudiments of cracksmen's ways. Daniel Rowe and Judith Kelly were seated in my library. Stretched out on the sofa was a drunken man fast asleep, habited in the garb of a clergyman. He was snoring intermittently; his face was horribly blotched and bloated, he seemed very drunk; he was an absolute stranger to me. My uncle appeared to be in quite a genial mood; Judith Kelly was loudly dressed: she wore a great hat decked with a triple tier of huge ostrich plumes, and a white dress trimmed with glass beads; a row of big imitation pearls encircled her throat, and her bare fingers were covered with flash rings. In spite of the vulgarity of her attire, however, she was a beautiful woman. Her figure was superb, and though her face was bold and unmaidenly, her features were almost perfectly regular, and strikingly expressive. She looked an ideal barmaid.

“Well, boy,” growled my uncle, “I must say you're a tardy groom. Here have we — your bride, your uncle, and the sky pilot, all been waiting for ye this hour past ready to tie the knot; we'd commenced to think ye'd never come. The sky-pilot has gone to bye, but I'll soon alter that.”

“Stop!” I commanded, as he started to cross the room.

“What's the matter?” he demanded.

“I won't pretend to misunderstand you,” I said, coldly. “You have brought Judy here to marry me, and that man is the parson hired for the work, I suppose. Am I right?”

“As a trivet.”

I turned to Judith. “My dear girl,” I said, “I am deeply grateful for the honour you have paid me, even though I cannot guess how it comes about that you are willing to throw yourself away on me, considering the fact that we have scarcely exchanged a dozen words during more than two years.”

“That's all right!” cut in my uncle. “Judy's always been fond of you, and she's glad of the chance to get spliced. Everything's fixed but the knot, and that'll soon be over, and you un's can do your billin' and cooin' together. I brought Judy's box along, it's in the fernery outside.”

“Excuse me,” I objected, with rising anger. “It seems to me you have done everything with one exception. You have neglected to obtain my consent to these proceedings.”

My uncle gave a grim laugh. “Don't fool, boy,” he said.

“I'm not fooling, uncle.”

He looked me in the eyes. “Come into the dining-room for a bit, I want to talk to you!”

I followed (Unclear:) locked the door, then faced me with (Unclear:) clend know that You'll marry her to-night!” he said.

“I shall never marry her!” I replied, coldly.

“Let us understand each other. You are silly on that high-flown lady of yours; do you want her to check up, suddenly?”

I shuddered, but forced a sneer. “Bah, you can't frighten me, uncle. You are no longer dealing with a boy; the sooner you realise that, the better for us both. I give you fair warning that if so much as a hair of her head is injured, I shall betray you and your Push to the police without compunction, and do my best to hang you all, if I have to swing for it myself.”

My uncle turned deadly pale, and fell back to the window which I perceived stood open. He gave a low whistle. To my amazement, within a moment the room was filled with silent figures, twenty of them; the five councillors, and fifteen ordinary members of the Push.

“You heard, boys?” asked my uncle.

“Ay, sir,” they muttered.

“It's got to be, though it breaks my heart to say it,” muttered the king. “Boys, do your duty.”

In an instant I was surrounded by men whose eyes were lurid with sudden hate; these were the men who had but lately worshipped me as a god. I was seized, strapped, and gagged with the speed of thought, stripped nude, and held face downwards across my own table, helpless as a week-old child.

“Lay on hearty, boys,” said my uncle; “he's been gettin' out o' hand this long while, mind and take *all* the starch out of him.”

I have described the “sock” before. There is little need to speak of it again, save to state that I experienced the fullest measure of its torture. I fainted three separate times, and each time was recalled to life and recollection by intolerable physical agony. Had my mouth been free I would have screamed loud enough to wake the dead. As it was, I was gagged by practised hands, and could not move a muscle of my body. When they had (Unclear:)satisfied their brutal appetites the inhuman fiends rubbed (Unclear:) naked wounds, then plastered me with some (Unclear:) which was smeared over a sheet of oilcloth. They rudely dressed me, and, last of all, partially removed my gag. It was a blessed relief to moan; I had not strength enough left to cry out or even groan. I said to myself, “Ah, fool that I was to have ever dreamed that pleasure is anything but absence of pain.” If a knife had been near me I should have slain myself.

My uncle addressed me in a low but harsh voice; tears were running down his cheeks. He was evidently sorry for me, but I loathed him for his emotion.

“Don't cross me any more, Lucas,” he said. “See what's come of it already! Will you marry Judy now?”

“For God's sake kill me!” I moaned.

Dave Gardner held a glass to my lips. “Drink this!” he commanded.

I was parched with thirst. The liquor was salt to taste, but I thought it nectar. Almost immediately I felt very drowsy, and did not mind the pain

so much. My uncle led me back to the library, and forced me to stand side by side with Judith. She looked at me very curiously, but said nothing. I moaned continually. I scarcely knew why, for I was growing numbed. My uncle kicked the drunken clergyman into a semblance of life. The beast staggered to his feet, shook himself, and uttered a hideous cracked laugh.

“The happy pair,” he chuckled, and leered at us.

“Go on!” commanded my uncle. “Marry 'em quick; can't you see the man's sick?”

The clergyman rubbed his eyes, yawned, and swore that he must first have some whiskey. My uncle gave him half a glass of raw spirit, which he gulped as though it had been water. Meanwhile, unable longer to stand, I tottered to a chair. I had no will power left. The clergyman was more drunk than ever. Swaying backwards and forwards with a rotary movement, like a stray pendulum, he searched his pockets for something which he could not find. His gyrations made me so giddy that I closed my eyes. I heard as in a dream a mumble of words, and presently a heavy fall. But I did not open my eyes. “It (Unclear:)!” said Judith's voice.

“Lucas won't (Unclear:) though,” said my uncle. “I'll make out your lines myself after we get him to bed.” I was lifted quite gently from the chair, and carried to my bedroom. Someone took off my boots, and I was placed tenderly upon the bed, and propped so that I lay sideways, and half face downwards.

I remember no more until I woke, late upon the following day. I ached in every limb, and the pain of my lacerated back commenced to sting and torture me immediately I opened my eyes. I bit my lips almost through, but I could not repress a groan. At the noise the door opened, and Judith entered the room. She was dressed like a hospital nurse, in a grey uniform, with white apron, cap, and veil complete. She carried a tray with a bowl of broth. I realised that I had been undressed, and put into pyjamas while I slept.

Judith placed the tray upon a table and stood beside me.

“What time is it?” I asked.

“Almost noon.”

“Why are you dressed like that?”

“I am going to nurse you. Your uncle made me put on this gown, so that if anyone comes, it will look alright my being here! I am to tell people you are ill with a fever, and can't be seen. You are to see no one until you are quite better. Did it hurt much, Lucas?”

I groaned. “Horribly; you knew, Judith. You knew what they were doing to me.”

She turned pale. “I couldn't help you, Lucas. It wasn't my fault.”

“Ah, what a heart you must have!” I sneered.

She flushed crimson. “Come to talk of that!” she cried, “what about

yourself? It's not every fellow has to be socked into marryin' a girl! 'Tisn't as if I was an ugly beast. I've seen the piece you're gone on; I'm as good as her any day."

"Silence!" I cried, angrily.

"I won't silence!" she retorted. "I've as much right as you to speak. I'm not goin' to be put upon, I can tell you, by you nor no one. I'm your lawful wedded wife!"

"Liar!"

"Liar yourself. We was married last night fast and tight."

I sneered in her face. "You poor fool!" I groaned.

"Am I; am I?" She was furious. "I have my marriage lines here!" and she pointed to her bosom.

I laughed mockingly. "Written by my uncle, after the clergyman (who was probably a mock) had fallen down dead drunk. I only appeared to sleep, Judith; I heard everything!"

She stared at me for a while, white to the lips, her bosom heaving wildly; then, without a word, flung out of the room.

I immediately drank the broth which she had prepared for me, for I wanted my strength. I wanted to recover as quickly as possible. Afterwards I forced myself out of bed. Movement did not hurt me so much as I had anticipated, for my body was swathed in bandages. I looked for my clothes, but they had disappeared; my cupboards and wardrobe were stripped bare. Underneath my bed was, however, a trunk which had escaped my tyrants' notice. I locked the door, and with many a groan of anguish slowly dressed myself. Only boots were wanting to complete my attire. I found a pair of slippers, and, donning these, made my way to the library without meeting Judith, whose voice I heard, however; she was talking to my servant in the kitchen. I locked myself in the library, and scrawled this note to my sweetheart: "Darling, my presentiment is realised. I have fallen ill with a sort of aching fever. You must not worry about me, though, for I shall soon be better, and I am well looked after. I shall go to you the first moment that I can. Do not write to me, for your sweet letters would only delay my recovery by increasing my impatience, which is already intolerable. With all my heart and soul I worship you. — Your devoted lover,

"LUCAS ROWE."

I addressed and stamped this letter, then opening the door, passed out into the hall. Judith was still conversing with the servant. As quietly as I could I took a hat from the rack, and slipped from the house. A pillar-box stood within fifty yards of my street door. I almost fainted before I reached it; but I reached it, posted my letter, and managed to return without mishap. It was, all considered, the greatest undertaking of my life. Judith met me in the hall. She was mad with rage. "Where have you been?" she almost shrieked the words.

I looked her full in the eyes. “I have written and posted a letter to the woman whom I love, and whom one day I shall marry,” I said, very quietly, and entering the library I poured out and drank a glass of whiskey. I needed it.

Judith followed me. “I — I am your wife!” she protested.

“You sicken me of the word,” I said.

“You hate me!” she cried.

“As much as I love another, I detest and despise you. If I had the strength I would turn you out of my house this instant. You poison the air I breathe; you stifle and sicken me!” I said, slowly, and with deadly earnestness.

She threw herself into a chair, and burst into a wild storm of tears. I watched her without an echo of sympathy, without the least emotion. When she had worn herself out, she looked up at me.

“You are hard as steel!” she muttered.

I smiled.

“It isn't my fault. Daddie made me do it; and oh, Lucas, I've always loved you! she moaned.

“You are not a woman, Judith,” I replied, “you are a harpy.”

“I am a woman!”

“In form, not in heart. But please be silent; I don't want to hear your voice.”

She got up and meekly left the room, but soon she returned, and implored me to go back to my bed. I followed this advice, for I was burning to recover, but I did not undress. I was fearful that she might remove and hide my clothes.

The day passed wearily; no visitors came, not even Edward. I only saw Judith when she brought me my meals, and at those times she maintained a sullen silence, for which I was grateful.

About ten o'clock in the evening my uncle came. He said very little, for he assumed that my spirit was completely broken. He, however, dressed my back, and assured me that already it had commenced to heal. I never opened my lips to him. Before he went he said that my suffering had hurt him more than it had myself, but that he could not regret it, as I needed the lesson I had received to teach me that I must not get “cocky,” and must always do as I was told. He held a long conversation with Judith in another room after he left me, I heard the mutter of their voices, and occasionally an angry exclamation. I undressed myself, but took good care to hide my clothes under the mattress. I could not lock the door, for the key had been abstracted. About half an hour after my uncle had gone, Judith came into the bedroom, holding a lighted candle in her hand. She looked very pretty, but I loathed the sight of her. As she crossed the floor I sprang up, heedless of the pain, and hurried into my library, the door of which I was able to lock. In a very few minutes a rap sounded on the

door, but I made no answer. She called out to me several times, but finding herself unheeded, at last took herself off. At midnight I softly slipped into my spare bedroom, wherein I barricaded myself, and slept peacefully until the morning. I was aroused by a loud pealing of the street bell. By the bright light of the early sun I saw that all my clothes which had been abstracted from my wardrobe were bundled up in a corner. The bell continued to peal; so hurriedly dressing, I proceeded to see who was my visitor. It was my servant, the charwoman. Judith had disappeared, but she had left a letter pinned to the library door, addressed to me. It was scrawled in pencil, and ran: “Look out for yourself, Lucas Rowe. Don't think I'm going to stand your insults. I'm not that sort!”

I was so pleased to be rid of her, that I felt much stronger already, and ate a hearty breakfast. During the morning I wrote and posted a passionate love-letter to my sweetheart; Edward Shaw came to see me before lunch, and stayed almost all the afternoon. He thought I looked very ill, but I told him the doctor said I was much better, and no longer needed the services of a nurse. Altogether I passed a pleasant day, but as evening approached I grew excited; I felt that I was resting on the crater of a sleeping volcano, which had already given signs of approaching activity. I went to bed quite early, and fell into a troubled sleep. About midnight I awoke and became aware that a man was climbing through the window. I looked at him, trying to suppress my fear. It was my uncle; he lighted the gas, and looked at me.

“You're awake!” he growled.

“Yes.”

“So you've drove Judith off already.”

“She was kind enough to leave me of her own accord.”

“You insulted her.”

“Indeed, how?”

“You know — she's your wife; you have no right to.”

I sat up in the bed. “I wish you'd dress my back, first; we can talk afterwards.”

To do him justice, no woman could have performed the office with greater tenderness. He shuddered each time I groaned. I lay back at last, panting but peaceful.

“She is not my wife!” I said. “I had all that out with Judith; she knows herself that she is not. The clergyman was drunk, and you forged the certificate. If you tried to make use of it you would get five years' hard labour at least.”

“Never mind that,” he growled. “She's your girl at all events now, according to push law; 'cause she spent a night with you alone. That's enough to fix that.”

“Even though I was insensible.”

“Even anything; so now, my boy, if you play up with her you know

what to expect?”

“Another application of the sock, you mean?”

“No, my boy, not that.”

“What, then?”

He clenched his fist and banged it on the bed. “If you don't break off with that lady of yours within the week, there's goin' to be a death in the family, Lucas.”

“Whose?” I muttered; “mine?”

“We'll see, we'll see. Anyway, whatever happens it'll be your fault, for I've given you fair warning, and I never go back on my word. I'm tellin' you as king o' the Dogs — to-night.”

Silence fell between us for awhile; a deep silence, which I devoted to thought. In the midst of it I became inspired with an idea, a plan which seemed so brilliant that it almost took away my breath.

“Uncle,” said I, “do you know what I did this morning?”

“No.”

“I wrote out a full statement of all I know about you and the Push. I gave every name I could remember, and explained every one of your secrets down to its last detail. When I had completed this document, what do you think I did with it?”

His face had turned a horrid pasty colour. “What?” he gasped.

“I sealed it up, and gave it to a lawyer friend of mine; I told him to put it in his safe, and keep it for me. I, however, instructed him to open and read it should he hear that Miss May Denton has been murdered, or died suddenly, or committed suicide within the next twelve months.”

“Ah!” gasped my uncle. “Ah!”

“So you see,” I pursued, “if you lay a hand upon the woman I love it will be all up with the Push. Every man of you will be hanged, for I have given in my statement enough clues to help the police find plenty of evidence. I may hang myself, but I don't care a fig for that!”

My uncle commenced to pace the floor; he was dreadfully agitated, but strangely, curiously quiet. He paused at last and said, “If the Push knew this you wouldn't have a day to live.”

I laughed scornfully. “I would have plenty to follow me to the grave, uncle. There are five hundred in the Push, are there not?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, naturally, if I died, my friend would open the document that I gave into his keeping; don't you think so?”

He gasped. “Ah! Ah! Ah!” and stared at me, stupid as an owl, his eyes strained wide open.

“Who was your friend?” he demanded, presently.

I laughed derisively. “You must find that out for yourself.”

“A student at the Uni.?”

“No, a lawyer in good practice. I wired for him this morning, and out

he came; he charged me 13s. 4d.”

My uncle sat down; he had gone quite limp.

I suddenly reflected that in order to perfectly succeed in the lies I had uttered, I should force my uncle to believe them by every means in my power.

Shrugging my shoulders I said, “On thinking it over, my dear uncle, I see no reason why you should not know the lawyer's name. You might like to call upon him and chat the matter over. I am sure he would be delighted to make your acquaintance. He is a great swell, a Government House man, and so forth. His name is Rupert Finlayson.” I had named the most respectable and one of the most influential solicitors in the city.

My uncle gave a sort of inarticulate exclamation, and his jaw fell. All the fight was taken out of him. Determined to strike while the iron was hot, and press home my advantage, I said, quickly, “You will do wisely to allow me to follow my own desires in the choice of a wife, uncle. You must persuade the Push to the same course. I am perfectly resolved to have my own way, and if you fight me it will mean universal ruin. I shall never give in. As for Judith Kelly, I loathe the very sight of her, and if she dares to come out here again, or you try to force her on me, I shall simply sever my connection with the lot of you at once, and defy you! You know now what that will mean.”

He got to his feet. “An' — an' supposin',” he stammered, “supposin' we let you marry this gal of yours; what'll you do then?”

“I shall be as true as steel.”

“You'll get back that document?”

I shook my head. “No, uncle, I am not such a fool. That document must stay where it is as a guarantee for the safety of my wife and myself.”

He retreated to the window slowly, climbed out, and then looked back at me. “I've nourished a viper!” he muttered. “Boy, I never thought this of you.”

“You thought I was a soft fool, and would always remain a soft fool,” I retorted. “You are now finding out your mistake.”

An indescribable expression of hate and baffled fury flashed into his eyes. He ground his teeth, and shook the window frame with the strength of a maniac; for a second he struggled to speak, but not a word came. He disappeared in the same tempestuous silence, and presently I heard the gate click.

I said to myself, “I have beaten him, but only for a time. Men such as he is, and the other members of the Push, are capable of fear, but not of calculation. For a while, a month, perhaps, or even two, they will remain beaten and panic-stricken, then their fury will break out, and their longing for revenge will force them to dare their own annihilation in order to hurt me. My uncle will then be my bitterest enemy. I have destroyed his ambition, and broken the dream of his life, for he now

knows that he can never in the future find me the facile instrument to his desires that he thought. He can never again trust me, and he knows that if I marry Miss Denton I shall be financially independent of the Push, and able to quit Australia when I please. He will, therefore, do one of two things: he will either place my confession of Tobin's murder in the hands of the police, or he will decree my death regardless of the consequences which he believes must follow. I must be up and doing during my time of grace. I must arrange to escape from Sydney and quit Australia with my sweetheart as my wife; but before I go, I must seize and destroy the Push Book, for only then can I be safe from the Push!”

I sprang from my bed on to the floor. My back hurt me like the devil, but I laughed with contempt at the pain. I was a man, a man at last, every inch of me. I threw up my hands, and with the gesture, I threw off every shackle that bound me to the Push. I was free; my own master for the first time in my life. I feared nothing; I knew that I should never be a slave again, and I felt within me a power to force my way over every obstacle, to fight the dastard Push single-handed, and subdue them, and to win and hold the woman I loved from the very grip of death itself.

XXV Murder

BY the following evening I was so much recovered that I was able to drive out with Edward Shaw in a cab to see my sweetheart. I had so far decided on no definite plan of action. I only knew what I wanted. How I should induce May to marry me immediately, and then abruptly quit Australia, and how also I should manage to steal the Push Book beforehand, were questions whose solution I had scarcely attempted. I sometimes thought that I ought to confide all my troubles to my sweetheart, but I shrank from the task. I did not think that my terrible confession could alter her affection for me, but I fancied that she might find it hard to credit my assertions, or realise the danger in which she as well as I stood. So very little is known about push organisation, and the terrible strength and power of criminality possessed by these secret societies, even by the police of Australia, that I felt that my story must be regarded by May, who knew nothing at all, as an emanation from a fevered brain. Unfortunately I possessed no evidence to put before her other than my unsupported speech. The thought never entered my head that I was playing an unmanly part in expecting her to be the means of my salvation, nor did I experience the least compunction in considering that after our escape I must live for a great while entirely dependent upon my wife's bounty. Love was responsible for this. I loved, and wanted her so much, and I knew, too, that she so loved me, that the question of unchivalrous indebtedness never occurred to me. For the same reason I never dreamed of solving my troubles by attempting to escape alone. That course would have freed her from personal danger and risk, for the Push only regarded her as its enemy in my regard. I knew this, but I would rather have died myself than have abandoned her in such a fashion, and I think I would rather she had died too. I fear that my love was very selfish, but it was utterly sincere, and riches, honour, life itself, appeared to me only contemptible details when weighed in the balance. Beyond that I did not myself properly realise the danger in which we stood: she on my account, I on hers. I hugged to myself the comforting delusion of a time of grace, and made myself believe that though the peril menaced it was still remote. I had yet to discover how desperately wicked, ignorant, and brutal, larrikins may be when driven into a corner. I had yet to learn that a woman scorned is an enemy more dangerous and cruel than the most evil man may be. I had despised Judith Kelly's

threats, and almost forgotten her. My foolishness was to cost me eternal sorrow and abiding remorse. During our drive dear old Ned talked to me constantly about his sweetheart; the little girl in Melbourne whom he loved. His time of waiting was almost over; he was working very hard, and within six months would win his degree. A good billet was waiting for him in the civil service, and he looked joyfully forward to the day when he should be able to reward his sweetheart's years of faithful patience by making her his wife. He asked me to tell May all about his romantic attachment, so that her interest might be enlisted in his cause; and he said that he depended upon May and me to stand as his friends and partisans to win round his parents when the time came, so that they should consent to his marriage. He built fine castles in the air for us both, poor Ned, of long and happy useful lives spent in close companionship; ourselves friends, our wives friends. I was filled with sorrow to listen to him, for in my heart I thought that when the time for his marriage arrived, I should be far away, an eternal exile from the land of my birth. And yet I could not tell him; I dared not confide in him.

May was waiting for us at the gate. Her love for me may be gauged when I record the sweet fact that before Ned, and careless of the smiling cabbie, she rushed into my arms and kissed me on the lips.

Ned chided her as we went within for her impulsiveness. She replied, “I care for Lucas more than the whole world, Edward, and I don't care a bit if the whole world knows it. Besides (and she smiled divinely), we have not seen each other for three long days; have we, Lucas?”

Is it matter for wonder that for hours I forgot everything except so sweet a mistress? I only remembered the grim shadows which threatened us when, after dinner, we descended hand in hand to our favourite seat on the lower terrace. It was a cold and gloomy night, the sky was thickly overhung with clouds, and the harbour lay like a black shade before us. The twinkling lights of a certain foreshore brought me a vague foreboding. I wondered what schemes were being plotted there for my dismay, by the dark brains of my old associates. If only I had known! A curious silence fell between us; we were each warmly clad, but the cold penetrated to my wounded back, and gave me a constant ache. I said at last, “May, (Unclear:)exactly what is your fortune; will you tell me?”

“Our fortune,” she corrected, and I kissed her hand.

“We are not very rich, Lucas. The bulk of the money is invested in Government securities, and it brings in a little over nine hundred a year. Then there is about six thousand pounds in cash in my bank now, which represents the accumulations of my minority. The trustees had no power to invest that, but uncle wants me to let him invest it now on mortgage. But I say no, because it will be so nice for us to buy a house with, and furnish it after we are married.”

“Darling,” I muttered, “I want you to do me a favour.”

“What is it, dear?”

“Lend me a thousand pounds.”

“Yes, dear.”

“I want it to pay a debt that I owe to a man. I would rather be in your debt than his.”

“I should think you would,” she cried; “but, Lucas, there can never be any question of debt between you and me. I shall write out a cheque for you before you go to-night!”

“May,” I muttered, “how utterly you trust me!”

She uttered a little laugh. “You silly boy; if I did not trust you fully, I could not love you fully!”

“Let me tell you all about this debt, dear; may I?”

She shivered. “You are cold,” I cried.

“N-no. I have a queer feeling! I feel as if something is going to happen.”

But she was trembling violently. “You *are* cold!” I said. “Wait one moment, dear, and I shall fetch you another wrap.” She made an effort to stay me, but I kissed her hands and ran up the steps. I found a fur cloak in the hall, and, turning round, came face to face with Edward. “Cold?” he asked.

“May is,” said I.

Suddenly he laughed. “Lucas,” he cried, “I've thought of such a joke; give me the cloak, and you wait here a bit. I'll run down to May, and pretend to be you. She will be so beautifully indignant when she finds out her mistake!”

“Well, don't you dare say I consented to the joke.”

“Honour bright!” he cried, and ran off laughing. My back was giving me such pain that I was glad of the opportunity to obtain a glass of whiskey. But I did not dream of waiting as Ned had requested. I searched for and found another cloak — Mrs. Shaw's it was, I think — but I did not stay to find out, as the old people were very early in their habits, and had already retired. I then descended to the lower terrace whistling, to give Ned notice of my coming. In all, I had not been absent from May's side more than five minutes, and during my return I heard no sound, save my own whistle. And yet a fearful tragedy had happened. Neither May nor Ned was seated on the bench, but before it lay a dark twisted mass. With a horrible foreboding of ill I cried out, but no one answered me. I struck a match. May was lying on the grass across Ned's body. My poor friend was dead; his head had been battered in by some terrible blunt instrument, and, in ghastly mixture, his brains and blood spattered the footpath. At first I thought May too was dead, but a second's examination told me that her heart was beating. I did not swoon, though I felt like death. But with a sudden extraordinary strength I caught up my unconscious sweetheart and staggered with her up the steps. I carried her

into the library, where five minutes before Ned must have been reading, for an open, marginal scored Persius lay upon the table. I placed her gently on the couch, then, overcome with the horror of it all, I lost control of my senses, and screamed; yes, wildly screamed for help. In a few moments, which I filled with my disordered outcries, servants rushed into the room, and at the door appeared old Mr. Shaw — clad in dressing-gown and slippers, looking white and startled. The sight of his grey head and anxious face slightly calmed me, but I was unable to restrain myself. I poured out the dreadful story of my discovery just as I have related it here. Poor Mr. Shaw called wildly for lanthorns, and presently a white-faced, trembling company issued from the house, and was guided by me to the scene of the tragedy. Mr. Shaw stooped over his son's body, but only for a moment. He presently raised himself, and in a hoarse whisper directed the remains to be carried up to the house. I fled before — my heart a globe of fire and anguish; I felt I was a murderer. I knew that Edward had suffered in my place; that the blow which had robbed him of life had been aimed at me. But another fear had come; a new horror. Perhaps my sweetheart was dying, if not already dead. No one had looked to her. I found her lying where I had left her, but not alone. Mrs. Shaw was with her. Never shall I forget the terrible eyes she turned to me. “My son is dead!” she said.

I fell on my knees before her. “But not May, too; May is not dead!” I cried.

Mrs. Shaw turned from me with a terrible gesture of aversion, or so it seemed to me. I did not feel it the less because I deserved it. I had brought this sorrow on the friends I loved.

“She has only swooned!” she said, and her voice appeared to regret the fact that any soul remained alive after her son was dead. The night passed in a horrible phantasmagoric dream. It was filled with shrieks and cries; with groans, and sudden intervals of ominous peace. Doctors came, and numbers of police; all of whom asked me questions, which I answered in a sort of stupor. My sweetheart was taken from me still unconscious, and put to bed; nothing could be learned from her. The police formed a cordon round the scene of the murder, and carefully guarded it until the morning, lest any clue the murderers might have left should be trampled into the grass by careless feet and lost.

A sergeant spent the night with me in the library. He drank a good deal of spirit, and smoked a number of poor Ned's cigars. I could do nothing but sit and stare into the fire. I did not listen to or heed his maunderings. My poor friend's body rested in the next room — his father's study — stretched out upon a table. Mr. Shaw had broken down completely, and was very ill; Mrs. Shaw had been given a strong sleeping draught, and put to bed; the servants were all huddled up in the kitchen, too terrified to separate. It was a dreadful night.

In the dimmest dawn, my sweetheart stood upon the threshold of the room in which I sat. She made no sound, but I knew that she was there. I stood up, and she came to my arms, her eyes streaming with tears. The sergeant was not in a condition to question her; indeed, he had fallen asleep, and sat nodding in his chair. We said no word to each other, but sitting on the sofa, waited in a breathless suspense of horror for the day. She always wept, and every few minutes I dried her tears; so that at last my handkerchief was sopping. Gradually the gaslights paled, and grey streaks, like furtive fingers, crept in through the shutters. Ever since I have hated and feared the coming of morning in a blind-clad room.

With the sun, May spoke her first words. “My dream!” she said. “My dream! Do you remember!” Her eyes were unutterably sad.

I shuddered, and buried my face in my hands. She kissed me gently on the forehead, and then, I think, we wept in each other's arms; but no tears came from my eyes. There was a fire in my brain which burned up all moisture.

The sergeant woke at last, and appeared very annoyed that he had slept. He questioned May in a harsh, gruff voice. I listened to him from without the room, for he commanded my absence; but I could not hear my sweetheart's answers. Afterwards she came out to me, and I would have asked her questions, too, but that she begged me not; and in her eyes I saw such pain that I refrained. We were always together. I scarcely left her for a moment, and no one interfered with us. We neither ate nor drank; we attended the inquest dressed as we were. Fortunately we had not far to go. I dared not leave May. I had a horrible presentiment that I was with her for the last time; that when next I left her, it would be for ever. Reason told me that at the inquest, it must come out that the murderers intended to strike at me, and had killed Edward by mistake. Then I would be put into the box. I would be rigorously examined. A motive would be infallibly sought for, for the crime. My past would be investigated, and my connection with the Push discovered. Then — the deluge! In my burning fancy I saw stretching before me a terrible a bottomless abyss of despair and misery; the end of all things. While May was putting on her cloak, I glanced feverishly at a paper for something to distract my thoughts. Almost the first thing that my eyes encountered was a flaming headline, “*Murder!*” I turned the sheet over — with a shudder — and saw in great block letters “*Burglary!*” Something forced me to read on. The paragraph stated that the chambers of Mr. Rupert Finlayson, the eminent solicitor, had on the previous night been entered by skilled burglars, who had broken open and rifled two large safes, and had attempted to deal with the strong room in a similar manner, but that the strength of the solid steel door had resisted their efforts. There had apparently also been an attempt made to fire the building; but, fortunately, without success! The robbers had got clear off,

with a good deal of booty — money, papers, jewellery, and deeds!

The key to this burglary was in my hands. As well as though I had been present, I knew that my uncle had instigated the crime, hoping in the same night to recover the paper which he believed I had given into Mr. Finlayson's keeping, and to remove me from the world! He would thus have accomplished the revenge of the Push and their salvation. At that moment I realised how fatuously foolish I had been to expect a time of grace from such inhuman and desperate ruffians as the Push contained, and from such a leader as their "king."

The inquest, in deference to Mr. Shaw's high position in the colony, was held in a hotel in the Yarrannabbe Road, quite close at hand, so that his convenience might be considered, and in order to spare his feelings the pain of submitting to a more formal and public ceremony. The body of poor Ned was not removed from its sad resting-place; but the jury having been sworn, visited and inspected it, then filed back to the impromptu court house.

Crowds of gaping people lined the road, but the police were there in strength, and cleared a passage for our party through the rabble. Mr. Shaw, looking dreadfully aged and ill, was taken in a closed carriage to the hotel. May (heavily veiled) walked there with me, leaning on my arm. The crowd maintained a deep, sympathetic silence as we passed. I thought I was going to meet my fate; perhaps to death.

Several policemen gave evidence before anyone else was called. They deposed to their examination of the body, and their search for clues of the murderers. They all told the same story, and the only startling fact they revealed was that the murderers had come from the sea. A boat had landed in the shallow waters by a cleft in the rocks (it was the trysting-place where May and I had so often met), two men had waded round the sea-wall, and, climbing into Mr. Shaw's grounds, had committed the crime, and departed in the same fashion. Their footprints were still quite legible, and most careful measurements had been taken of every mark.

Two surgeons then bore witness as to the cause of death. They were agreed that poor Ned had been killed by a blunt and heavy instrument — probably a club, or life-preserver, and that his death had been instantaneous.

I was next called, and entered the box amid a deep hush. While I was being sworn I met Mr. Shaw's eyes. He was seated in an arm-chair beside the coroner. He seemed in a sort of coma as regards his body, which was still as stone, but his eyes were blazing. They seared my very heart; they seemed to say, accusingly: "You should have died, not Edward."

I told my story in a faltering voice. I concealed nothing. Often my self-control gave way; I suffered agonies. At the end I cried out brokenly to my friend's father: "Would to God. sir, I had never allowed your son to carry out his jest. Would to God I had been killed instead of him!"

Mr. Shaw uttered a hollow groan, and a deep sigh resounded through the room. I was questioned as to the exact position in which I had first seen the body, and then the coroner addressed a few kind words to me, and assured me that not only could no possible blame attach to me, but that my grief did me the greatest honour.

My sweetheart was next called. She entered the box and took the oath, her face white as a lily, but her fortitude was marvellous. Her voice did not once falter; she did not once break down. The coroner invited her to tell her story in her own way.

She said: “We had been seated on the bench, Mr. Rowe and I, for perhaps twenty minutes, when I felt of a sudden very cold, and he insisted upon going to the house for a wrap. Immediately he had disappeared I heard a queer grating, scratching noise by the sea wall. I felt a little frightened, for I had been nervous all the evening, but I could see nothing for the dark, and I reassured myself with the thought that nothing could harm me so near the house, and that Mr. Rowe would presently return. In another moment I heard a rustling in the couch grass near my feet, and a light was flashed into my face. It appeared so suddenly that I would have thought it a flash of lightning except that I perceived a bull's-eye lantern in a man's hand. I was just about to scream when someone else caught me roughly by the throat. I struggled desperately, but I could neither cry out nor escape. Meanwhile the man who held the lamp caught my left wrist and tore away two bangles I was wearing, also a diamond ring from my smallest finger. It was then that my cousin, whom I now know was intent upon his jest, came softly down the steps. He must have seen me struggling with my assailants. I did not hear his approach, but I heard him give a shout as he threw himself upon them. The robber who held me while his companion tore off my jewels did not release my throat, but the other left me to grapple with my cousin. Of a sudden I was flung roughly against the bench, and I heard as I fell a dull crashing sound behind me. I heard next a loud thud as though someone had fallen to the ground. I was quite sensible, but very weak, and I was more than half choked. I tried very hard to scream for help, but I could not get my breath. I heard a low voice say, ‘Is he dead?’ A second voice replied, ‘His head is mashed in!’ Then the first speaker muttered, ‘Get his ticker and then let's back to the ship before we're caught!' ‘But what about the woman?’ asked the other. ‘Oh, she's right, she's fainted!’ ‘But what about the woman?’ asked the other. ‘Oh, she's right, she's fainted!’ replied the first. It all happened in a few seconds. When my strength came to me they had gone. I kneeled down by my cousin's body and touched his head. My hand was instantly covered with blood; it was welling out from a terrible hole in his head. But it was very dark, I could see nothing. I knew he was dead; I did not know it was my cousin. I thought it was——” She paused a second and caught her breath,

then continued, “Mr. Rowe. I — I do not remember any more. I swooned.”

After she had ceased speaking, an impressive silence reigned for some moments. A policeman handed my sweetheart a glass of water, some of which she drank. She was so pallid that I thought each moment she would faint, but her hand did not tremble as she held the glass to her lips. The whole court watched her in absolute wonder, marvelling at her strength. The coroner and the sergeant of police asked her a great number of questions. Had she seen the face of either of her assailants? Could she remember were they tall or short, stout or slight? Would she be able to recognise the hand which she had seen holding the lantern? Was it in her opinion the hand of a labourer? Was it black or white? clean or soiled? These and a score of others such were put to her. But the poor girl could not help the cause of justice in the least. She had not seen the faces of the murderers at all; the hand which she had seen had held her glance for such a fragment of a second, that she could remember nothing. It might have been the hand of a negro, or that of a gentleman. Even their voices had been so hushed that she could distinguish no peculiarity of intonation. Before the examination was concluded the court was in despair, for everyone had hoped much from Miss Denton's testimony. Once again had the Dogs' Push conducted a murder with the skill and cunning of a company of fiends. I had listened to my sweetheart's story with the most painful anxiety, thinking every second that she must disclose some fact which would inevitably connect the crime with the larrikins. But when it was over I saw at once that unless I chose to stand up and incriminate them and myself from my connection with them, they would once more escape scot free of even a breath of suspicion. One of the murderers had said, “Let's get back to the ship before we're caught.” I knew the ship he had referred to. It was the hulk owned by John Robin as a store for old iron, which was always moored in Kerosene Bay, and which the Push used as a sort of prison house for incarcerating its members to await recovery when they had been punished with the “sock.” Doubtless the actual murderers were the caretakers of this hulk. It may have been my duty to tell all I knew. In the sacred cause of justice I should have dared all, and fearlessly sacrificed myself. But I was not strong enough to follow so stern a course. Thereby I must have lost my sweetheart, and incurred the hate and contempt of all the world, even should the law finally spare my life. The instinct of self-preservation was more powerful than duty; the desire for happiness, for love, stronger than all. I kept silence. Only those who in my place would have done otherwise should dare to condemn me for my silence.

The coroner addressed the jury very shortly, but he made a stirring appeal to the police to use their utmost skill and diligence in capturing the criminals. He laid special emphasis on the one murderer's reference

to the “ship,” and quite naturally, under the circumstances, declared that the murderers were, in all human probability, a pair of ruffian sailors belonging to some ship in the harbour, who had rowed ashore for the purpose of robbery, and on being disturbed had heartlessly murdered poor Edward Shaw to avoid capture.

Thus was suspicion diverted from its proper course. The murderers, on account of Miss Denton's long swoon, during which no clue could be obtained as to the direction of their flight, had made good their escape; and it seemed to me that the police might search for ever and a day and still be none the wiser.

The jury returned the only possible verdict, “Wilful murder against two or more persons unknown”; and added a rider respectfully sympathising with the family and relatives of my poor dead friend. The court was then cleared, and we returned, my sweetheart and I, to the house of mourning. Poor Mr. Shaw, who had driven home in solitary state, waited for us in the hall. He drew us into his own study with an air of mystery, and closed the door. He kissed May, and silently held out his hand to me. The kindly action almost broke my heart. It prepared me very badly for what was to come. He begged me in a hushed voice to leave his house at once, and not to come back, at all events for several weeks.

I implored him for a reason.

He replied, the tears running down his cheeks the while: “My dear boy, my poor wife has conceived a terrible aversion for you, and in a lesser fashion for May. She thinks it is your fault, shared together, that my son is dead, and there is no use in trying to persuade her to the contrary. The doctor whom I have just seen tells me that he fears for her reason, and it is absolutely necessary to keep you out of the house. If she heard your voice even it would do her harm!”

I bowed my head. Alas! I felt in my deepest soul the justice of the poor lady's feelings! But for me and my blighting fate Edward Shaw would be still alive, and his mother's pride and comfort. I could not speak nor move.

“Don't think too hardly of her, Lucas,” whispered Mr. Shaw, “she — she is really not responsible just now. Grief has turned her brain.”

“I do not at all!” I muttered. “It was my fault; if I hadn't let him go he would be alive and well, and — I — where I ought to be!”

May caught and pressed my hand. “Hush, dear!” she said.

“Is Mrs. Shaw very ill?” I whispered.

“No; that is the worst of it. She has not shed a tear. She seems quite strong, and since we left her for the inquest has been wandering about moaning like a lost soul. I — I must go to her now. It is dreadful to see her!”

He wrung my hand and slipped from the room.

“Good-bye, May,” I said, in a choking voice.

“Wait!” she said, and for a few minutes she too departed. I heard through the silence an occasional long wailing sigh. Ah, poor lady, what anguish I had brought her! but God knows I suffered too.

May came back to me and thrust a folded slip of paper into my hands.

“Read it afterwards!” she muttered. “Come, dear, you must go now. Aunty is in the library, and uncle will keep her there while you slip out.”

She came with me to the gate. I said to her, “When shall I see you again?”

She shook her head slowly and sadly. “I shall write to you.”

Our farewell kiss was sad as the grave.

I drove into town, and at Lassetter's purchased a very small but heavy revolver, and a case of cartridges. Then I drove out to my cottage; I thought that the Push would attempt again to murder me that night, but I was determined to sell my life as dearly as possible. When I reached home I opened the note which May had given me. It consisted of two separate slips of paper, which had been folded together. Judge all who read these lines if Miss Denton really loved me from the fact that in all the horror and grief which encompassed her she had still been able to remember the request which I had made a few moments before the murder of poor Ned.

One slip of paper was an open cheque for £1,000. The other contained these words: “With my heart's unfailing love and tenderest sympathy. — Your sweetheart.”

I kissed the writing and I said aloud:

“Thanks, May. Through you I shall now be able to leave the wretches whose crimes have darkened your life and mine, indebted to them for nothing. I shall repay them every penny they have spent on me!”

I forced myself a little later to eat the dinner which my servant had prepared, for my frame needed sustaining for the trial which was to come. When the woman had gone, I barred every door and window in the house, save one, and pulled down all the blinds. I knew that no precaution would protect me, but such a disposition would give me warning of the direction from which my enemies must enter to seek my life. I selected the library as the best vantage-ground for myself in the struggle I foresaw; then, intrenching myself behind a table in a corner of the room so that none could attack me from the rear, with loaded revolver close to my hand, I set myself to wait.

XXVI A Respite

AT nine o'clock the street bell rang. I got up noiselessly; I turned the gas low and peered through a crevice of the blind. Two men were standing on my tiny garden path. By the light of the street-lamp opposite I recognised them — they were society acquaintances: Dr. Berry and the Rev. Mr. Thorpington, who had probably come to pay me a visit of sympathy, having read of my trouble in the newspapers. After ringing several times they departed. A little later came Mr. Richard Greville, the secretary to the P.G., with Captain Sebright, the Governor's aide-de-camp. After they had gone, Mr. Rupert Percival, accompanied by two senior reporters of different journals, knocked at my door. Last of all came Captain Ballack, the man who had followed May out from England. I very nearly admitted him. He looked so strong and sturdy standing in the lamp-light, and also so brave, that in a moment of weakness I was almost for calling upon him to assist me in my hour of trial, and, although I was his successful rival, I do not doubt he would have accorded me his help, for he was an Englishman, and I believe a gallant fellow. However, I subdued my inclination. I said to myself, “This is your own affair, Lucas Rowe; you have embroiled too many already in your quarrel with the Push; you have no right to require a stranger to risk his life for you!”

I was touched by the kindness of so many people having come so far fruitlessly to see me; the more because during the past few weeks I had given up society and refused myself to all callers, so as the better to devote myself to my sweetheart.

After Captain Ballack had departed, two hours uncoiled their leaden-footed parts in intensest stillness. Never a single wayfarer passed my door, never a sound did I hear except the beating of my own heart, which grew louder and more solemn as midnight approached. I heard the clock bell of the University tower toll the hour which most men regard superstitiously, but still my fate loitered. One o'clock chimed before a warning came. Then a furtive rap sounded on the panels of the street door. Three times was it repeated, before it changed into a more imperious summons. I made no move. The window beside me was slightly rattled. I watched it, gripping my revolver. Silence reigned again. I knew that my enemies had gone round to the back of the cottage. I heard each window tried in turn. My heart felt like a red-hot ball within

me when finally there reached my ears the thud of feet in the passage. I swiftly rose, turned the gas on full, and reseated myself. Doors were opened and shut. At last, guided by the light, the handle of my library door was turned. Simultaneously with the click of the lock I cocked my revolver. The door was flung wide, and my uncle crossed the threshold. Meeting the revolver and my flaming eyes, he started and stopped dead. He seemed to be alone.

"What's this?" he gasped.

"Who is with you?" I rapped out.

"No one."

I laughed sardonically.

"S'elp me Gord!" he said, earnestly.

I saw at once that he was telling the truth, for but few men can lie with their eyes, and my uncle was not of that few. I put down my pistol.

"What have you come for?" I demanded. "Has the Push failed in courage after their mistake, their double failure? Is my execution postponed?"

"I thought you'd think that," he replied, with a sullen frown. "I knew as soon as I'd read the inquest that you'd think the Push killed your friend in mistake for you. But you're entirely wrong. The Push had nothing whatever to do with his death."

I gave a bitter sneer. "I suppose I am also wrong in thinking that the Push had a hand in burgling Mr. Finlayson's office?"

My uncle took a chair, sitting astride it, and leaning his elbows on the back rim. "Well, you're right in that," he admitted. "I wanted to get back that paper, you see."

"And make a few pounds into the bargain?" I suggested.

He gave an ugly laugh. "I see you don't believe me, Lucas."

"About the murder of my friend?" I retorted; "no, you murderer, I don't!"

He turned quickly livid, half started up, but just as quickly controlled himself.

"I excuse you, 'cause you're in a mistake," he muttered, thickly. "An' it's natural you'd think as you do. But I tell you again, Lucas, I had nothin' to do with the killin' of your friend. Your death's not decreed, and never will be, if you're sensible. That's true, Lucas, s'elp me Gord!"

His eyes were perfectly sincere; they never wavered in their glance. I stared at him in horrible doubt and dismay.

"Who killed Edward Shaw?" I demanded.

"The Push didn't!"

"If not, who did?"

"You did!" he grated out. "Yes, you needn't look at me. As true as you sit in that chair, you killed your friend yourself."

"You are mad!" I cried. "Mad!"

“Am I? Wait! The night you turned Judy out of your door you killed your friend. It was intended for you, but he got in the way, an' that's how you killed him.”

I sank back in my chair of a sudden, weak and trembling.

“You mean — Judith killed him?” I gasped.

He nodded. “She got two blokes who are both mad on her to do the work; but she was there. They tossed up for her afterwards, accordin' to agreement, and Sam Pagney won. She went to live with him then straight off as his donah, thinkin' all the while she'd done you up for good. The other cove, in revenge, came and put the show away to me.”

“Where is she now?” I forced myself to ask.

“At home, an' terrible cut up. She won't try her hand at that game again, I reckon.”

“And the — the murderers?”

“On the hulk.”

“What will you do with them?”

“The sock for disobeyin' orders; but I don't think they'll live long, they're bound to cut each other's throats over Judith some time or other; they're damn well balmy on her.”

“Oh, uncle!” I groaned out, “what dreadful men you are! why do you do such things, you and your Push?”

He twirled his thumbs and shrugged his shoulders — a picture of bestial indifference. However I could once have thought him capable of any finer feelings, capable of anything, indeed, but gross and hideous brutality, I do not know. He seemed to me then a callous and most perfect demon, and yet I think I was doing him injustice. In the past I had seen him fight and beat a man bigger than himself for ill-treating a dog. Of what strange and extraordinarily diverse fragments are human brutes composed!

He said, harshly: “Stow that gabber, Lucas! I came out to talk business. We've decided to-night, the council and me, to let you marry the woman you want, provided you come to our terms.”

“What are they?”

“You'll have to sign another paper.”

“The Push Book, you mean!”

“That's it; you'll have to sign you was in the murder of young Shaw, along with the other blokes, what really did it. You see we must have a hold over you, and we reckon you're not likely to go back on us if we have a paper like that. You wouldn't like the girl to know you had a hand in killin' her cousin; and, anyway, as this business is outside the Push altogether, the Push, as a push, havin' no hand in it, we can use the paper free like; leastwise, through Judy, she'd be glad of the chance to fix you. We reckon it'd quit us up for the paper you've gave to Mr. Finlayson. You see, I keep nothing back from you; those are our terms; take 'em or

leave 'em! You've got a hold on us, and we'd have a hold on you, an' I reckon it's a workable plan."

My uncle did not meet my eyes. I noted, but attached little importance to the fact; I was so deep in thought. I was straining my wits to find a way to deceive him. I know now that he was engaged in the same task in my regard. It was a case of diamond cut diamond between us, but each pretended otherwise, and each of us was deceived.

"I must have time to consider," I said, at last.

"You can have till next Saturday; we have a private meeting fixed for then, and everythin' will have to be arranged that night."

"I would have to attend the meeting?"

"Most certainly!"

"That gives me five days."

"Yes."

"Very good, you shall have my answer before Saturday."

"I'll come out on Wednesday night."

"I may not be ready then!"

"I'll chance it."

"As you please!"

I let him out at the street door. He did not offer me his hand, nor say good-bye. These circumstances impressed me, in spite of my preoccupation. I remembered then that he had failed to meet my eyes on stating his terms. I wondered if his offer had been sincere, but could not fathom the problem. He evidently stood in deadly fear of the paper which he believed I had given Mr. Finlayson, and his failure to secure it had probably dictated his recent offer and so far saved my life.

I decided that no further attempt would be made upon either my sweetheart or myself before Saturday, at all events, but I thought it very probable that Mr. Finlayson's office would be visited again in the meantime. I could not convince myself, however, that the Push had really resolved to let me have my way. They must have regarded me as a traitor, and they had never yet pardoned a traitor for the least act of treachery. I thought it likely that they intended to lull me into a sense of false security, that they would even allow me to marry my sweetheart, and later try and persuade me to recover my confession from Mr. Finlayson, whereupon they would strike us both down.

I determined to make my first attempt to secure the Push Book on the following night. I wrote a letter to my sweetheart and went to bed, thankful that I was still alive. I had not expected to be.

XXVII The Last Week: Monday

IN the morning's papers I discovered an announcement that poor Edward's funeral would take place that afternoon at three o'clock. No letter arrived from May during the morning, so I had to conclude that she had been too much occupied to write.

I attended the funeral in a cab, and took up an unobtrusive place in the rear of the procession. Mr. and Mrs. Shaw and Miss Denton followed the hearse in a closed carriage. I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Shaw's face, it was wild and haggard. May was weeping behind her veil. Poor Mr. Shaw looked at death's door. He tottered as he walked to and from the carriage. I told myself that I had wrecked the lives of the sweetest old couple in the world, and my remorse was a constant agony.

My poor friend was buried in Waverley Cemetery. I watched the ceremony from within my cab outside the railings; I dared not enter on account of Mrs. Shaw. A surpliced minister read the burial service over the remains. I heard the earth rattle on the coffin, wishing it had been mine. I saw the grave filled, and at the last Mrs. Shaw cast herself upon the mound with a cry which tore my heart. I could stand no more; I drove off, always urging speed, like one possessed.

A gentleman was waiting for me at my cottage. The servant gave me his card. “Mr. David Green!” “A stranger,” I muttered.

A tall, thin man; well, rather than fashionably dressed, rose to greet me as I entered the library; he held out a large strong hand, covered with diamond rings, and gave me a metallic grip, literally, for his rings cut my fingers. I swiftly decided that he was not a gentleman.

“Glad to meet you, Mr. Rowe.”

“I haven't the honour,” I suggested. He seemed to be a Scotchman; he had very high cheekbones, a sweeping yellow moustache, a powerful chin, and keen blue-grey eyes.

For answer he opened his vest, and showed me, pinned within the lapel, a small silver badge, surmounted with a crown.

“I beg your pardon,” I said. “I fear I must be stupid. I don't catch you.”

“I am a detective, Mr. Rowe, and have charge of the Shaw case; that (and he tapped the badge) is my credential.”

I begged him to take a seat, and shut the door. Presently we faced each other, separated only by my writing-table. He eyed me up and down as though taking my measure, or a mental photograph.

“You have come?” I suggested.

“For a chat with you, Mr. Rowe. This is a strange case, a very strange case; indeed, I may say the most strange and difficult which has ever come beneath my notice, Mr. Rowe. Now of course I have the reports and the evidence taken at the inquest to go upon, but I always make it a practice never to depend upon the work of other people, however skilful they may be, especially in a difficult case like this. Personal impressions are most valuable; most valuable, Mr. Rowe.”

I nodded. “I quite understand.”

“Pre-cisely. I may tell you that I am the chief of the N.S. Wales detectives, under Mr. Fosbery, Mr. Rowe, and I believe I owe my present position to the method I have mentioned.”

“Quite so.”

“Well, I should like you to tell me all you know of this sad affair, if you will, Mr. Rowe.”

“Certainly!” said I, and without further parley I recounted exactly how poor Ned's murder had been discovered by me, and how he had involuntarily taken my place.

He listened with the greatest attention, and his glance did not once waver from mine.

He sighed when I had concluded. “Hum! ah! a very sad affair, Mr. Rowe, and I can quite understand your feelings; a terrible position for you to be in as regards his family. Hum! ah! by the way, you are an Englishman, are you not, Mr. Rowe?” His eyes gave a sudden steely glitter as he put the question. I felt, in a flash of inspiration, that it behoved me to be careful, perhaps candid.

“I am not,” I replied.

Mr. Green looked disappointed. “There is that impression abroad,” he said.

“I created it, and purposely,” I replied.

“Ah!”

“You doubtless know my antecedents,” I suggested.

He smiled. “To be frank, I do. You are related to Daniel Rowe of Miller's Point; a sad rascal, I am afraid, Mr. Rowe, though a clever one.”

I nodded. “Knowing him you can understand why it is that I do not wish the relationship made public, especially as I am engaged to be married to Miss Denton.”

“Ex-actly; but er — excuse me, does not your conduct resemble er — ah — a sort of sailing under false colours, eh?”

“If you refer to Miss Denton, you are mistaken.”

“I beg your pardon, I referred to the public.”

“In that case I cannot agree with you. The public can have no concern in my private affairs; it is, at most, an innocent deception which I have practised upon them. I am an ambitious man, Mr. Green. You who know

my antecedents must be aware that my father was a gentleman. Well, I wish to rise in the world. I come from a gentlemanly stock, however unfortunately, and it was not my fault that I was born with the bar sinister. I wish to make myself a gentleman. I propose to enter the law, and carve out an honourable name for myself — honestly. Such a thing would be impossible were I weighed down with the obloquy which must attach to me if my origin were publicly known. Surely my ambition is a legitimate one, an honest one. I injure no one by my deception. It surely cannot enter into your plans to betray me and so cause my ruin."

He threw out his hands. "By no means, Mr. Rowe, by no manner of means. I would be the last in the world to cast a stone unnecessarily at any man, especially one like you, who are honestly striving to succeed. I admire your ambition, Mr. Rowe; believe me, I admire it. And I assure you your confidence in me will not do you any harm!"

"Why did you bring up the subject, sir?"

"Ah, Mr. Rowe, in a case, a difficult case like this, an intelligent officer before committing himself to any theory of the crime, first exhausts every possibility. Now there is a possibility in my mind regarding I beg your pardon, of course not in any criminal fashion — and with your permission I shall ask you a few questions."

"I am at your service."

"Well, sir, it is within my knowledge that a disreputable secret society, calling itself the Dogs' Push, has its head centre in Miller's Point, and I am by no means sure that your uncle — ahem, Dan — excuse me, Mr. Daniel Rowe, is not concerned with them. Now, by any chance before you came into your fortune, some three years ago, Mr. Rowe, did you in any way incur the enmity of any of these vagabonds?"

"No, Mr. Green. I did not. I never mixed myself with the larrikins at all. I was a studious lad, and always kept strictly to myself. In fact, I detested the larrikins, and also feared them too much to ever be anything but friendly to them."

"Ex-actly; that fact is well known. Your life in that quarter did you great credit, Mr. Rowe. But you must have been aware that such a Push existed."

"Oh, yes, I knew that; everyone knew it!"

"Did you ever by any chance hear the name of their king mentioned, Mr. Rowe?" His eyes were like twin gimlets.

I affected to reflect. After a moment I replied, looking at him quite frankly:

"I'm afraid, Mr. Green, I can't help you there. I believe it is their practice to change their kings every year. I think one year a man named Dwyer was the king, but I could not swear to it. They never spoke to me of those matters, and in any case I fear I would not have paid any attention. I was not in the least interested in them, you see."

For a second time Mr. Green looked disappointed.

"Do you know if your uncle is a member?" he asked.

"Well, he often spoke about them, Mr. Green, but generally to their discredit, as if he despised their brutal methods. But whether or not that was merely a blind——" I shrugged my shoulders expressively.

"Hum — er — ah. Your uncle occasionally visits you, Mr. Rowe. He was here last night?"

"You are quite right, sir; he is the curse of my life."

"Blackmail, I suppose?"

"It was hard to satisfy him, Mr. Green."

"And situated as you are, you can neither prosecute him nor defend yourself. I sincerely sympathise with you, Mr. Rowe. Hum — er — ah! are his demands excessive?"

"Rather constant than excessive, sir."

"You find it perhaps sometimes impossible to comply with his requests?"

"Sometimes," I admitted.

"Lately?"

"Of late he has been more reasonable, for some cause or another. Last night he did not ask me for any money at all, but came out merely to state he would want something done for him later on."

"To give you timely warning, I suppose."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Has he ever threatened you?" pursued Mr. Green.

"Occasionally he has."

"In a criminal way?"

"I scarcely understand you. His favourite threat, if I do not at once comply with his demands, is to publish our connection. Not that I think he ever would; he is too canny, and would not dream of killing the goose that lays golden eggs for him."

For a third time Mr. Green looked very disappointed.

"Another theory slain," he disgustedly announced. "I may inform you, Mr. Rowe, that I had entertained the idea that your uncle, defied by you, had planned to kill you, and mistaken his victim in the dark."

I shuddered. "That was a very terrible idea, sir, and pardon me if I say rather far fetched. It seems almost certain that the motive of the crime was robbery."

Mr. Green favoured me with a pitying smile. "Robbery is often a cloak, Mr. Rowe. In my experience — but there, I shall not bore you. I am now, I may say, forced back on to the theory of the coroner, that some sailor-men murdered Mr. Shaw."

"Have the ships in the harbour been searched?" I demanded.

"Every plank and corner, Mr. Rowe."

"And nothing discovered?"

“We have made several arrests, but we cannot detain the men long. They have all brought up sufficient alibis already. The whole affair is shrouded in mystery. However, I shall do my best.”

He rose to his feet.

“It is a terrible case!” I said, quietly, “and it is not the only one of its kind. I do hope, Mr. Green (pardon me for saying such a thing, but Edward Shaw was my dearest friend), I do hope that even should your efforts prove for a long time unavailing, that you will not give up the quest. One hears nothing now of any effort being made to trace the murderers of poor Senior Constable Tobin. I think it is a terrible thing that those brutes should be allowed to rest.”

Mr. Green struck an attitude. “No good policeman,” he declared, “ever gives up his quest in a murder case. There is blood on the earth crying aloud for justice. We are paid to discover crime, and, apart from that, we take a professional interest in our work. If we fail at first, we persevere, whether our labours are made public or not; be sure of that, Mr. Rowe.”

“I am glad to hear you say it,” I replied; “but what of your ultimate success? ‘Murder will out’ is not a true saying, is it?”

“There are some crimes, Mr. Rowe, which from their very nature baffle all human ingenuity. No one saw them committed but the Almighty, and the murderers left no clue. I refer to such cases as the Balmain stabbing case, the kicking to death of a man by larrikins at Woolloomooloo, the murder of a man in the Domain, the murder of constable Tobin, and others, all of which have occurred within the last few years. In such we are helpless, and can only wait, watch, and hope. Then, again, there are crimes which, though passing publicly as undiscovered, are not really so. In some arrests are made, and though we know we have captured the criminal, the evidence is insufficient for a jury to convict. In others, though every man in the force is morally certain that he can put his hand on the murderer, the details that can be proved are insufficient to justify placing the accused on trial! The police cannot perform miracles, Mr. Rowe, and the greatest detective who ever lived cannot create evidence where none exists.”

“Or where it is locked up in the breasts of desperate men,” I muttered.

“Exactly so. I shall promise you, however, never to let this case drop till I have unravelled it.”

“I wish to God I could help you,” I exclaimed, and the cry came from my heart.

Mr. Green took my hand between his huge fingers, and pressed it firmly. “I wish you could,” he said. “I am glad to have met you, Mr. Rowe, and I thank you for treating me so frankly; you won't regret it. Your secret is perfectly safe with me, and if ever I can help you in any way, you have only to command my services.”

And thus Mr. Green left me, having no suspicion that at my instance he

had abandoned the only proper clue which existed whereby he might have tracked to death the murderers of Edward Shaw. I felt a criminal in misleading him, but I dared do nothing else. My misery was sufficient punishment for an even greater crime. Throughout the day no letter came to me from my sweetheart. There seemed no comfort in the world. I paced my room, seeing no one, though many called, until two hours before midnight. Then I issued forth, and took a train to Balmain. At Darling Street. I got out, and descended the hill to the Darling Street wharf. There I hired a boat, and having, much to the waterman's astonishment, dismissed him, rowed myself across the harbour. It was my design to search for, and discover, the orifice of the old pump stream, which I knew emitted its waters underneath one of the wharves of Miller's Point. My plan was, having found the entrance, to fasten my boat to a pile, and then enter the dark tunnel of the stream, and wade along its bed, until I should reach the cross tunnels leading between my uncle's shop and John Robin's foundry. For this purpose I had provided myself with a small lantern of the bull's-eye pattern, and had donned very old clothes. I had not the least idea where my uncle kept the “Push Book,” but it seemed to me most probable that it should be hidden in some secret receptacle in the cellar beneath my old bedroom, or else concealed, perhaps buried, in the walls of one of the secret passages. I resolved to explore the whole place thoroughly.

The night was very dark, but the sky was clear, and there was no wind. I rowed as silently as I could as I approached the point. Luckily I was so familiar with the topography that I easily distinguished landmarks in spite of the gloom. Judging a point equidistant between my uncle's shop and the foundry, I cautiously glided under the first line of wharves. Several large vessels were drawn up at their piers. Some were dark and silent, others were ablaze with light, and noisily loading or unloading cargoes. The tide was very low, and still on ebb. I lighted my lantern and flashed it upon the sea-wall, but it was a blank as far as I could see. Drawing my sculls into the boat, I pushed my way from pile to pile, making not the slightest noise. I found the entrance at last, about ten feet from the side of a huge iron ship. Tying the boat's painter to a pile above my head, I sculled the stern round, and, standing up, forced it into the orifice as far as I could; then touching bottom I stepped over the side, and found myself standing in slime to my knees. With great difficulty, for at every step I slipped, I pulled up the boat several feet, until it rested on its side, firmly held in the filthy harbour mud. Then, lantern in hand, I started up the tunnel. The ascent was fairly steep and fearfully unsafe, and the smell was horrible. Slimy creatures writhed under my feet, and once an eel wriggled and twisted round my leg. I almost screamed out, the sensation was so revolting. Presently I opened wide the lantern slide, and looked about me. I stood by then in the pump stream itself, and was

glad enough to rinse my muddy extremities in its crystal waters. Proceeding up stream I strode along fairly swiftly for about a hundred yards, when it suddenly struck me that I had gone too far. I returned, narrowly scanning every foot of the cemented walls both left and right, but no opening rewarded my search. And yet I remembered that, as my uncle and I had turned from the pump stream into John Robin's passage, I could distinctly hear the swish of the waves. I once more ascended the stream, this time for quite two hundred paces; still no opening. It became convincingly evident that either there must be two pump streams, or else the Push, for some csoteric reason, had carefully filled up the passages. I proceeded to test the latter assumption, and after half an hour's minute examination, discovered on the right hand side of the tunnel, facing the exit, unmistakable traces of recent masonic work. A patch of almost fresh cement, about four feet high by two across, stood out in distinguishable relief from the more ancient masses of the wall. I tested it with my boot-heel and the butt of my revolver, but it was spread upon a solid backing, and rang as true as any other portion of the stone. Further down I encountered an exactly similar occurrence. There was only one conclusion to arrive at. The Push had blocked up the passages. It was, therefore absolutely impossible for me to steal a march upon my uncle, and secretly enter his domains to seek the precious “Book.” Thoroughly dejected, I returned to the boat, and pushing out to sea, rowed back to Balmain. It was so late when I arrived there that the trams had all stopped, and neither cab nor public conveyance could I find. The six-mile walk to my cottage did not alleviate the gloom of my misfortunate condition. Not only had I failed in my mission, but not a glimmer of hope remained to me of its possible accomplishment, unless I were to try and wrest the book from the possession of the assembled gang, a wild idea, which I confess I shrank from; for not one of the Push but would have cheerfully committed the blackest crime in its defence.

XXVIII The Last Week: Tuesday

ANOTHER morning came and waned, and yet no letter from my sweetheart. I became acquainted with new shades and tones of anxiety and wretchedness. I could do nothing but wait. I spent half the day feverishly revolving a score of desperate and fanciful designs conceived in the vain idea of getting possession of the Push Book. I could perfect none of them. Each was more faulty and impossible than the last. I racked my brains to invent a plan of campaign regarding my sweetheart. How to obtain her consent to an immediate marriage; how to induce her to accompany me immediately abroad, and in such a manner heartlessly abandon the stricken and childless old couple, her uncle and aunt; that was the difficulty which faced me. It was almost as great a task as obtaining the Push Book. It seemed just as impossible. Worn out at last with the travail of ceaseless thought, I drove into town and changed May's cheque into banknotes. I then proceeded to the University, and packing up my few belongings — cap, and gown, and books, removed them to my cottage. It was a sadness to say good-bye to the old grey building, but it was a necessity. My career there had ended, and I knew that never again should I enter its coldly hospitable halls. One feels a pang in quitting for ever any place with which one has been long associated, even though it may possess but few pleasant memories. I had not loved the University nor my life there overmuch; but, nevertheless, tears came into my eyes as I slowly descended the terrace, and often I looked back regretfully.

At my cottage waited a telegram: “Expect me to-night, Denton.” I wondered a great deal at the message, but it brought me a certain comfort. I found it impossible to understand why my sweetheart intended to visit me; why had she not made an appointment to meet me elsewhere? It was no use wondering; again there was naught to do but wait. I passed the time in reading a host of sympathetic letters sent me by acquaintances and friends, which had collected during the past two days, and in replying to them. I dined as late as I could. Nine o'clock chimed in the University tower, ten, then half-past, and still I was alone. My impatience developed into a positive pain. I paced the floor of the room, and the hall. I threw the street door wide. Without, a fine rain was falling, driven by a thin icy wind: it was bitter cold. I piled wood and coal on the library fire, and resumed my restless walk, fretting like a caged wild

animal. At a few minutes to eleven a cab drove up at my door, and my sweetheart sprang on to the pave. I rushed out, and in my gladness, gave the man a sovereign. “Go and get something to warm yourself. Return in two hours!” I cried.

Together we entered the cottage. I shut the door, and drew her into the warm library; she was cold as death.

She threw off her wet wrap and faced me. “Lucas,” she cried, “I want you to marry me at once!”

I stammered out in my surprise. “To — marry — you — at once!”

She gave a weary little smile; I saw that she was fearfully wan and haggard, her face was deeply lined, she looked as though she had not slept since I had last seen her, only sorrowed.

“Not to-night,” she said, “but soon. Oh, Lucas, I have had a terrible time!” With that she fell weeping into my arms. I comforted her as best I could, and kissing away her tears, besought her to tell me everything.

“It is aunty,” she explained, at last grown calm. “Ever since the——ah! she has hated both you and me, me especially, I think, and to-day the doctor warned poor old uncle that he will not be responsible for her reason unless I — keep away from her. Oh, Lucas, think of it. She — she is the only mother I have ever had, and — and I love her so, and she hates me. She wants to kill me!”

“My poor darling!” I muttered, heart-broken.

“Uncle has resigned his position in the civil service,” she continued, presently, “and Lucas, dear, he has been ordered a long sea-voyage, both for his health and aunty's sake!”

“Are they going soon, dear?”

“They ought to go at once; but — well dear, they will have now to live on his pension, and that won't allow them enough. You see they have always lived up to every penny of uncle's income — they had to, being in society, and having to entertain. You know that, Lucas, and — and they haven't any spare money; so, so unless——”

“Could not you help them, dear?” I asked.

Her face lighted up. “I would love to,” she cried, “but of course I had to ask you first, although I told uncle you would be only too glad!”

“May!” I said, huskily, for a sudden lump had risen in my throat, “you were wrong, utterly wrong. It was sweet of you to think of me like that, but your money is your own, and always will be. I shall never control it, and every penny you advance me I shall one day replace!”

She put her fingers over my lips. “Do not say such things,” she whispered; “they hurt me. I, and all that I possess, are yours, and must be yours. I am not a ‘new’ woman, dear, except that I want and shall have my way in certain things, and this is one of them. When we marry you shall be the master, because it is proper for the husband to be the master. You shall take my money as you take me. It will belong to you just as

thoroughly, and you must do with it just as you do with me, use it as your own."

"Ah, dear!" I said, sadly. "No man in the world is worthy of such generosity!"

She sighed and smiled. "I think that one at least is worthy, Lucas. You must never let me find out my mistake if I am wrong."

"God helping me!" said I, and for a little while a reverent silence fell between us.

At last I whispered, "Shall we marry before they go, sweetheart?"

She shook her head. "They will set out on Saturday in the English mail steamer, now that I have your permission to help them, dear. You see the doctor wants them both to leave that sad house at once. After they have gone I shall stay in some hotel, the Australia, I think, for I should not care to live with any of my friends. I would be hampered in seeing and meeting you, and besides I would be but a dull companion for any one of them just now."

"But our marriage, sweetheart; when do you wish it to be?"

She sighed deeply. "I wish it could be at once," she murmured. "I wish that we could be quietly married, and go somewhere — anywhere, anywhere out into the world, far, far away from here, so that we might forget. But how could it be, Lucas? We must wait for some months at least after poor Edward's death (her voice broke), and besides there is your career at the University to think of; you will want to take your degree."

I gazed at her, lost in thought. It seemed to me that I had an excellent opportunity now to acquaint her with a portion of my designs. I wished to heaven I could take her into my full confidence, but that I did not dare, at least not yet.

"Do you know what I should like to do, May?" I muttered, presently.

"No, dear; tell me!"

"I should like to finish my career at some English University — Oxford, for choice. I think I could obtain admission there *ad eundem gradum*, and by the change I would lose very little time!"

"I do not quite understand. Do you mean, leave here before you take your degree?"

"Yes, dear; at once. I could take my degree there, you see. We could be very quietly married before we set out, and no one need know anything about it; or should you prefer, we could be married when we arrived in England. An English degree would give me a better standing than a Colonial one. The only drawback is that I should have to be entirely dependent on you, dear, for the fact is I am at the end of my own resources."

"That is not a drawback, Lucas!"

"It is a drawback which many men would regard as an insuperable

obstacle. Indeed, I am sure that if the world knew I had proposed such a course to you, I would be universally condemned as a meanspirited adventurer."

She smiled, ah, so sweetly! "Love makes all the difference," she said. "If you were the rich one, would you not help me, and do all in your power to promote my happiness? I think it is stupid of the world to make such a difference between the sexes. Why should it be thought perfectly right for a woman to receive all from a man, and wrong for a man to accept anything from the woman he loves, and who loves him? But I really believe we wrong the world. I feel sure that sensible people have long ago abandoned such absurd prejudices. In any case, if we are satisfied, why need we care what the world might think, especially since the world need never know?"

"It is my thought!" I replied, gravely. "I feel no shame in taking from you, darling, because I know that one day I shall be able to repay. Of course even that power I should owe to you; but do not I owe everything to you in the great blessing of your love? Material benefits cannot be weighed against a gift so splendid. After all, nothing matters except love!"

"Nothing in the wide world, dear!"

"You consent, sweetheart?"

She put her arms about my neck. "Do you remember what I once said to my uncle in your presence, Lucas?"

I nodded.

"I told my uncle then that I was yours when you wanted me; I am of the same mind still, dear."

"May," I muttered, dreamily, "how greatly I mistook you in our first acquaintance. I thought you then a wayward, wilful girl, only anxious to win your own pleasure in all things."

"And now?" she asked, with a loving smile.

"Now I know you for what you are — a woman, the most unselfish and generous on earth!"

"You were not mistaken," she whispered. "Before I loved you I was what you said, a wayward, selfish, self-willed girl. If I have any merit now, it belongs more properly to love than me. It was love and you that wrought the miracle. But, dear, I must go now; it is very late."

"Tell me why you came here to-night," I asked.

She blushed a little. "It was forward of me, was it not? But uncle had intended to come with me. He would have, too, except that poor aunty could not sleep, and he had to stay with her, as she cannot be left alone. But I came with his consent. There was nothing clandestine in it; he did not want me to at first, but I asked him how could there be any wrong in it seeing that we are engaged! And so he consented."

"I may see you home, dear?"

“Ah, yes; I shall be glad.”

I went into my bedroom to get my greatcoat. To my dismay I found the window wide open, and marks of muddy feet, leading to and from the window, upon the carpet. Whoever had been my visitor had fled. I knelt down quickly to examine them. They were wet! I was seized with a great fear, less for myself than for the woman I loved! What if my uncle or one of the Push had spied upon our conversation! In that case the Push would know that I contemplated departing immediately from Australia! I asked myself what they would do. I found the answer in my heart, which had suddenly turned icy cold. The answer was “Murder!” *They would murder my sweetheart!* I shut and bolted the window and hurried back to her.

She turned pale when she saw my face. “What is it?” she cried.

I sank into a chair unable for a time to speak, so great was my agitation. And yet I dared tell her nothing. I feared, feared too much to lose her. I could not believe that were I to confess to her, to tell her all my dreadful story, to tell her that through me Edward Shaw was dead, she would do anything but turn from me; abandon me for ever! Yet I knew the danger in which she stood, the full measure of it, made now to overflow by this night's work; I felt it in my bones.

“What is it?” she repeated, sharply, and came towards me, trembling with sympathetic fear.

I looked at her despairingly. Suddenly a thought, an idea, flashed through my mind. “May!” I muttered, huskily, “a terrible thing has happened to me! I cannot tell you of it yet. I cannot explain it to you. Some day I shall; but I cannot yet. If you love me do not ask me to. If you love me, May, I implore you to believe what I say, to help me, to do what I ask.”

She stood quite still, gazing at me in the greatest amazement.

“What is it you want me to do?”

“I want you to hurry on your uncle's and aunt's departure. I want you not to let them wait here till Saturday, but to make them take the mail train *to-morrow*, to-morrow for Melbourne. You can do this, for it is only a matter of money, and you have money. I want you to go with them to Melbourne, to wait with them in Melbourne till they go, and then wait there for me. I want you not to return here, not to come back to Sydney. Ah, May.” I sprang to my feet and wildly threw out my arms. “If you love me, do this for me. I implore you. I beg you to do as I say.”

She always stared into my eyes; she was trembling a little.

“Why, why?” she said.

“I cannot tell you,” I groaned. “If you love me do not ask me, but do as I have said!”

She bit her lip. “You have some terrible reason for making this request! Lucas, your face is ashen white (she caught my hand), your hand is cold as death, you are shuddering, you are in an agony of fear!”

“For you!” I groaned.

“Tell me!”

“Your life is in imminent peril,” I cried, wildly. “Every hour you stay in Sydney the danger grows greater. It is all through me. I am a cursed creature. I bring a blight on all I love — already. Ah, what am I saying!”

She put her hand upon my breast. “Tell me, Lucas!”

“I cannot!”

“Trust me, Lucas!”

“I dare not!”

She drew back, her eyes cold and bitterly reproachful. “If you do not dare to trust me, how can I trust you?” she asked.

“God knows I am worthy of neither your trust nor love!” I cried, despairingly. Suddenly there came into my mind all the dastard thing I was. Till that moment I had determined, if I could, to somehow seize and destroy the Push Book, and thereafter escape from Australia with my sweetheart; to make her my wife, with the dark shadow of my life unconfessed upon my soul. I had thought to confess all to her on some future day, but when that day came she would be bound to me, and I secure, having her for my wife. With a great flash of light the scales fell from my eyes. There had not until that moment appeared to me anything dishonourable in my designs. But with a sense of utter despair I now realised that I had purposed dealing to the woman I worshipped the greatest wrong in my power to inflict upon her. She would have wedded me believing my past that of a free man, whereas I was, and always must be, a crime-haunted being. I had done no great wrong to my fellows, it is true; my crime had consisted in concealing my criminal knowledge from society; but that crime blackened me in my own eyes then. For I realised that if in the first instance I had known and done my duty as a proper man should without fear or reck of consequences, many men who had been ruthlessly murdered might have been alive and well that day.

I came to a sudden resolution, the strongest and saddest of my life. I saw my duty to my sweetheart, and prepared to follow it; feeling, knowing in every fibre of my being that I was about to lose her, but at least I would save her life. Afterwards nothing would matter, and my own life, so rendered valueless, I would devote to the welfare of society. I would betray the secrets of the Push. I would go to Detective Green and place myself in his hands, so that thereby justice might be done, and the world presently rid of a gang of unexampled malefactors. I would suffer with them, but my fate would be but just, since I deserved to suffer for my weakness, my cowardly irresolution of the past.

During the silence occupied by these swift and fateful reflections, my sweetheart had watched me, trying, I think, to read my thoughts from my expression.

I turned to her at last, and pointed to a chair. “I shall tell you

everything," I said, "but it will take long."

She sat down silently, and with blurred eyes I of a sudden kneeled before her. "May, darling May!" I whispered, huskily, "give me one kiss, it — it may be the last."

She smiled in my face; a divine, sweet confidence in her eyes.

"No, Lucas," she murmured, "not the last," and she put her arms about my neck. I kissed her on the lips, as a man might kiss his best loved about to die, and then I rose, and in a low, hoarse voice commenced my dreadful story. I dared not look at her; but stood always with fiercely clenched hands, staring miserably at the floor. I told her of my parents, their sad and shameful end; the deceit I had practised on her regarding my place of birth. Thence my life upwards I recounted step by step, much as it has been narrated in these pages, concealing nothing, sparing myself nothing, revealing even the cowardice which had been my cruellest taskmaster in the past. Last of all I confessed the deadly wrong which I had dreamed to do her. She uttered no word; not once did she interrupt me with a single comment, not once did I glance at her face. The silence was so deep and unbroken, save for the husky mutterings of my voice, that I might have been confessing to a spirit. The University clock chimed the hour of two before I had concluded. But at length I stood speechless before her, and the silence was supreme. I was cold, cold as stone. Long ago had the fire died out in the grate, but I was still as well as cold. I had no hope, but I also felt neither pain nor fear. I had experienced every torture, every agony during my confession which it is possible for a human heart to endure, and the reward was a dull paralysis of sense. The silence lasted long; it was scarcely broken by a faint, still whisper from my sweetheart.

"That day — at the picnic — at Maroubra," she whispered, "the men whom you drove off when you saved us, were they of your Push?"

I looked up into her eyes. I scarcely know how I found strength to do it. "No," I muttered; "at first I thought they might have been, but they were strangers to me!" Her eyes were very dark and troubled, they had lost their brightness. Her face was wan and grey as that of a ghost.

"I am glad of that!" she said, and very slowly, very quietly she got to her feet.

"What will you do?" I muttered.

"I do not know," she answered, and moved slowly to the door; she seemed weary to death.

"At least you will go, you will go to Melbourne. For God's sake do so much!" I muttered, hoarsely.

She looked at me over her shoulder. "And you — what will you do?"

"My duty; the duty I have failed in for so long."

"You will try and bring those wretches to the scaffold?"

"Is it not my duty?"

She shuddered violently. “Is it so? Blood for blood — is it duty to exact vengeance? Murder for murder? Would it do the poor dead people any good to kill their murderers? Rather prevent those wretches from working further ill to humanity.”

“But how?”

“Obtain from them their dreadful book. In your hands it will be an instrument to force them into leading better lives. Better that way than the other. In any case without that book how can you succeed? Would they confess their crimes when you accuse them? I think not. It would be simply your word against the words of hundreds. You could not prevail against them; you would merely sacrifice yourself!”

The justice of her thought confounded me. “It is true!” I cried. “I have been mad to think otherwise!”

“Let me go,” she murmured; “it is late, very late, and I am cold.”

I opened the drawer of my desk and took out my revolver.

She shuddered to see it. “I must accompany you!” I muttered. “They might attack you on the road.”

She made no response, but when we entered the cab I thought she shrank from me. We said no word during the drive. I felt that I was committing a sacrilege in being so close to her; but I could not help myself, it was certainly my duty to guard her life. I escorted her through the gate up to her door, which she opened with a latchkey, for I thought it even possible that some agents of the Push might be lurking in the garden to work her ill. So great was my fear for her, that every shrub became an enemy, every shadow a dreadful peril.

As she crossed the threshold, she turned. “Good-bye, Lucas!” she whispered.

“It is for ever,” I muttered, in reply; “but ah, May, for the sake of the love you had for me, for the sake of the love I have and which I shall always bear to the last hour for you, I implore you to leave Sydney to-morrow.”

“It is your wish,” she said.

“My last wish!” I whispered, humbly. “Grant it, May!”

“Yes.”

“Thank God!” I muttered, gazing steadfastly into the shadows that enveloped her, for I could not see her face. “The money!” I whispered. “The money you gave me. I have not touched it yet. I shall send it to you to Melbourne; you will stay at Menzies, will you not?”

A sudden choking sob issued from the gloom in which she stood. She gave me no other answer, and the door closed softly on my face. I kissed the handle very reverently, it was the last place which her hand had touched, then I turned and walked slowly to the gate, and in my heart was a prayer to Providence that I might be struck down in swift, merciful death, for I had lost everything, everything.

Whirling homewards I laughed. I was a little mad, I think. I laughed out like a maniac, and my frantic peals woke strange echoes in the deserted thoroughfares through which I passed. Tired-looking policemen, the lamplight glinting on their dripping waterproofs, stopped in their dreary beats to gaze at the flying cab, setting me down perhaps as some wild, belated reveller returning from a drunken orgie. I cared for nothing. The thought which moved me to mirth was this: “I am now free. I have now no one in the world who depends on me for anything. May leaves to-morrow, she therefore will be safe, for the Push's power of vengeance extends no farther than the confines of Sydney. I am free to fight the Push as best I please, and fight them I shall, until either they have killed me or I have bested them!” Also there came curious fanciful plans into my mind as to how I should fight them, and I thought of the surprise with which my new methods would be regarded; so I laughed and laughed!

XXIX The Last Week: Wednesday

A WOMAN, drenched and shivering, was walking up and down my verandah, an outcast seeking shelter from the rain. I scarcely glanced at her; she could stay there and welcome, but I did not think to offer her a better hospitality. And yet she never thought to wait an invitation. She pushed past me when the door swung wide, and turned to face me in the glowing brightness of the hall. I laughed blithely at her cool effrontery; everything amused my present mood. When I recognised Judith Kelly, I laughed still more. And she was ludicrous! The rain had sopped her hat; the once proud triple tiers of feathers hung limp and inexpressibly dejected. Her hair was out of friz, and straggled in dripping wisps, lank as dead rats' tails, from her forehead; her nose was blue with cold, her teeth chattered in her head, and her cheeks were streaked with thin black lines from the water which had trickled through her sodden hat brim, and grown discoloured in the passage. I shut the door behind me, and led her to the study. I could not take her into the room where May had been. I poured out two glasses of spirit, laughing all the while. My mood grew savage; she had not yet spoken; her eyes were dazed with surprise. I handed her a glass, and took up my own. I clinked my glass with hers; I said, “Your health — murderess!” and drained it to the dregs.

She fell back staring and shivering.

“Drink!” I commanded. She obeyed. The liquor was coursing through my veins. It made me reckless, fit for anything. I said to her, “Did you come out to kill me, Judith? Where is your weapon? Is it a pistol, poison, or a knife?”

“I came out to warn you!” she gasped.

“What of?”

“Danger!”

The notion tickled my sense of the ridiculous. I laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks. I clapped my hand to my side, and cried out affectedly, “Judith, you will be the death of me: it must be written so! You failed with the club; you will succeed with laughter. You warn me of danger — you — you — oh, it is too rich.”

She shrank back to the wall; she thought me mad. She put a chair before her as a shield.

“Stop laughin'!” she muttered. “I did. I tell you I did.”

There was a touch of earnestness in her voice, a note of tragic pathos

that sobered me. After all, my mirth was spurious.

I looked at her of a sudden, chilled into gravity.

“Go on!” I said.

“It's dada.”

“Of course!” I felt my lip involuntarily curling.

“I listened at the keyhole to him an' Jack Robin talkin'. It's over — your — ” she chewed the word — “young lady. They're goin' to do for her.”

“When, Judith?”

“I don't know. Soon. They've got a plan rigged. I couldn't hear but enough to know. I cleared out as soon as I could. I had to wait till dada was asleep. I've been here 'most an hour.”

“Why — why?” I demanded.

“Don't look at me so. I'm sick of it, Lucas. I've been that sorry ever since! I'm glad it wasn't you, Lucas. I wish it wasn't anyone. I wish I was dead myself. Sammy's just a beast. I loathe him!”

“You are not living with him?”

She shuddered. “He's layin' for me. He beat me the first night, because——”

“You heard nothing of the plan?” I interjected.

“Only somethin' about gettin' hold of her with a letter. Jack's goin' to have it done on a machine by to-morrow night, and dada's goin' to copy your writin' on the cover, an' they're putting in it to bring it with her.”

I smiled grimly. By to-morrow night Miss Denton would be far on her way to Melbourne. “Did they say anything of me?” I asked.

“Dada said you were hopeless, an' Jack said the decree ought to have been slicked weeks ago; an' something about a paper of yours someone's got. Dada just hates you, Lucas. Why don't you go 'way quick with your young lady? He'll put out your light if you don't. An' all the boys is that down on you besides; they do nothing but curse you, day and night.”

“I should think that would please you, Judith!”

“What?”

“Their cursing me.”

“It's what first turned me!” she cried. She caught sight of herself in the mirror. “My! what a fright I look!” She sidled up to it like a cat, and commenced pecking at her hair and face. I was amazed to realise that murderesses are women. I had believed them fiends of less complex type, entirely unsexed perhaps. I felt quite a sympathy for this one. Her vanity appeared a sort of saving grace. I fetched her a comb from the bedroom, and she gave me the ghost of a coquettish smile. It was almost interesting.

“She'd look just as big a fright if she'd walked 's far 's I have in the rain,” observed the murderess.

“Who?”

“Your young lady.”

“But then she is not a murderess!” I replied. I spoke reflectively, but without an afterthought.

“You needn't jaw. I've said I'm sorry.” The amazing creature appeared to consider that her tardy and superficial repentance perfectly atoned her crime. Her voice was quite reproachful, and the queer thing was, it implanted a sting in me. Somehow I seemed to have failed in chivalry.

“What's the time?” asked Judith.

I glanced at my watch. “Half past three.”

“What are you goin' to do?” She was frizzing her hair, the rats' tails, which she had dried with a serviette.

I yawned. “When you leave I shall go to bed.”

She glanced over her shoulder, but without ceasing to friz. “But about what I've told you?”

“I'll look after myself.”

“Don't give me away!”

“Certainly not.”

“You might thank me for what I've done.”

“Thank you!”

She sighed plaintively. “My! you must hate me!” and rubbed her cheeks vigorously to reduce the black impressions. “I never had a proper chance with you,” she continued.

“Indeed!”

She turned to me quite a blooming countenance. “You don't happen to have a bit of powder in the house?” she asked.

I shook my head. “I am very sorry.”

“I'm afraid I'm awful!”

“You look very well,” I replied politely.

She sat down and drank another glass of whiskey without being asked. “I ought to go home,” she observed.

I handed her a sovereign. “You had better take a cab.”

She took the coin, and hid it somewhere in her gown, but did not offer to rise.

“It's beastly belonging to a bloke you don't love,” she informed me.

“Indeed!”

“Yes. I guess I'll clear out soon.”

I shrugged my shoulders.

She drank a third glass of whiskey.

“Don't you feel any remorse?” I asked, curiously.

“For — the — him?”

I nodded, shuddering in spite of myself.

“I'm sorry. I told you before.”

“But aren't you haunted? Don't you see him always before you — a wan, accusing ghost? When you lie in your bed of nights, are you not

terrified to think of his ghastly body, the head, the poor, crushed head, with its blood and brains oozing out upon the gravel?”

She watched me like a fascinated animal.

“Was he like that?” she gasped. “My! I am glad I never saw him!”

I turned from her, sick at her brutal callousness. I thought to myself, “Ah! what a revelation would this woman be to those fools who prate of the tortures suffered by criminals who, by force of circumstance, outstrip the law, yet are forced to live on for years carrying the awful burden of their blood-guiltiness.” Her awful burden weighed upon her less heavily than a single one of her draggled hat feathers, and yet the most abandoned woman is supposed to be more sensitive than any man.

“You had better go,” I muttered.

“I suppose so.” She stood up. “Anyway, I'm square with you. I've done you a good turn,” she said combatively.

“I am very grateful.”

“Which is a lie,” she declared, and walked to the door.

I followed her. “If you'd married me, there'd a-been none of this fuss,” she muttered.

“I wish I had!”

“Honour bright! do you mean that?” she flashed round at me.

“I do indeed; but not for the reason you have fancied. If my time were to come over again, I would marry you or go through any fate, rather than——But there, what use speaking of it now?” I flung the street door wide. “Goodnight to you, Judith, and good-bye. Please God, we shall never meet again!”

“Kiss me!” she pleaded.

I looked at her. She shivered, and passed silently out into the rain. I closed the door softly behind her, and wandered about the cottage like a lost soul. Only one room I dared not enter, the room wherein the woman I loved had rested.

The hours passed. I dozed in my wanderings, dozed and dreamed. I went to hell a hundred times.

I breakfasted on a glass of soda, and then dismissed my servant with a week's wages instead of notice, for I felt I could never eat a meal in the cottage again. I went into town and brought out an auctioneer to inspect my furniture. I sold it to him for a hundred pounds. I sent a bank draft for a thousand pounds to Miss May Denton, Menzies' Hotel, Melbourne. I lunched in town at the Australia on a single anchovy and a small bottle of champagne. Then I strolled down King Street to do the block. A man followed me everywhere I went. I could not detect the spy, but I knew that I was shadowed. Perhaps several shadowed me. There were ill-dressed loafers wherever I turned. I did not recognise their faces, but then a great number of the Push were unknown to me. The consciousness of being watched brought me an exhilarating sensation of excitement. It

prevented me from thinking of Miss Denton, and to smother thought was my whole ambition. She passed me in a closed carriage twice, driving from shop to shop. She was very beautiful, more beautiful than ever she had been; but there was something terrible in her expression. The first time she did not see me. The second time she saw and met my eyes. There was no sign of recognition in her glance. I turned away and laughed. Several people glanced at me so curiously that I laughed all the harder. I could not stop laughing. I went into Warby's Hotel and drank another bottle of champagne. Then I walked to the Marble Bar and ordered a third; but I could not drink it. Instead, I poured it over the roots of a palm tree growing in a great tub of earth. Several people laughed to see me do it, and I laughed with them. It seemed the funniest thing in the world; but time passed so slowly. The Melbourne train did not start until seven, and it was yet no more than five! I went into a billiard room, and offered to play the marker for a five-pound note. He gladly accepted. I was a very poor player, but I won; and when we doubled the stakes I won again. Then I gave him his money back, and wandered into the street. It was six o'clock! I walked to the Redfern station; but it was only a quarter-past six when I arrived there. I knew that I must do something to prevent myself from going mad. A group of children were gathered about the automatic sweet machines. I changed a half sovereign into pennies, and stole half an hour from time by emptying the machines of their contents, and feasting the news-boys with butter-scotch and almond rock. It was amusing to watch their eager faces and the selfish way in which the bigger boys struggled to the front; but I found that I could not laugh any more. At a quarter to seven I bought a platform ticket, and made my way to number five. I stood beside the engine, and gave the driver a sovereign, also the fireman. They promised me most solemnly that no accident would happen to the train. In five more minutes, She arrived. She was heavily veiled; Mrs. Shaw also. Mr. Shaw seemed better than when I had last seen him. His carriage was more upright, his steps more firm, and his face was well controlled. They entered a sleeping carriage. She sat beside a window and raised her veil; the others were invisible. No doubt they did not wish to be seen. There was a great hurry and bustle on the platform. The great seal-splashed mail-bags were put into the van, and porters brushed people about like flies. I stood just behind her, waiting until she should pass me as the train moved out. I was hungering for her, as one of the damned might thirst for a draught of water, buried in flames. Yet I watched everything. I marked the anxious expressions of people looking for their friends, worrying over their luggage, or searching for the tickets they had hidden away in their secret pockets. I saw a man in uniform kick a stray cur off the platform. I saw a pretty girl kiss her lover through a carriage window. I saw a thief pick a woman's pocket, and curiously noted his expression of dismay when he

got nothing for his trouble but a ball of wool and a bunch of keys. He pretended to have seen her drop them, and she gave him a shilling for his honesty. At last the stationmaster rang his bell, the guard blew a whistle, and slowly, very slowly, with a great steam snorting from the front, the train started on its journey. I stood with bared head; I could have touched her as she passed. Her chin was leaning on her hand. She looked at me long and full. Her eyes were unseeing, inscrutable, fixed. Her brows were full of gloom. Distance wore out her glance.

As I turned, the pickpocket jostled against me. I seemed to recognise his face. He whispered in my ear, “A good thing for you you stayed here, Lucas Rowe!”

“Why?”

“There's six of the Push on that train!” he muttered, and quickly disappeared among the crowd. In the seconds of our intercourse he had deftly robbed me of my watch, my penknife, and a handful of silver which had been in my vest pocket. From this circumstance I realised the measure of estimation in which I was held by the Push. No member would have dreamed of committing such an outrage a month before; but evidently I was now an object for any of them to despoil or injure at pleasure, all fear of punishment removed. I wandered from the station into town, seeing everywhere my sweetheart's eyes. I went to the back of the Lyceum Theatre, and in the office discovered one of the lessees seated alone before a great heap of placards and papers. He was a tiny little man, with a queer, peaked face, and the kindliest heart imaginable, who went by the nickname of the “Mighty Atom.” “Jimmy,” said I, “I have the blues. You must help me drive them away.”

The “Mighty Atom” responded to my appeal. He was one of the most popular men in Australia, a bird of passage who flitted from city to city, everywhere earning a warm welcome because of his brilliant social gifts. He was the most skilful conversationalist and the cleverest raconteur whom I have ever met. He devoted himself to my entertainment with hearty and whole-souled warmth. But not all the fire of his wit could make me see anything but a pair of eyes which always gazed at me. I laughed, but they did not. They stared at me steadily, gloomily, from picture, from floor, from ceiling, from light and dark, from the glass I lifted to my lips.

At length I gave up the struggle. “Thanks, Jimmy!” I muttered, dreamily looking into the eyes. “You have helped me a lot. Good-night.” He looked at me with her eyes, and I fled from him like one possessed.

My uncle was waiting for me in the empty study of my cottage; he had, as usual, entered through a back window. He was reading a letter, which he instantly put into his pocket, but the envelope fluttered to the floor. I picked it up, but in the act of handing it to him saw the superscription. It was addressed to myself, and in Miss Denton's handwriting. The blood

so madly leaped in my veins that for a second I staggered dizzily. I looked at him. “My letter!” I demanded.

He said to me, “This morning you sold your furniture to Mr. Lawley!”

“My letter!” I repeated.

“You are going to clear out!”

“My letter!” I shouted. “Give me my letter. How dared you open it, you thief?”

“Lucas,” said my uncle, in a low but strident voice, “the last tie is broken; you are a traitor to the Push. You have broken your promises, you have robbed us of our money! You have fooled us, deceived us, mocked us, and betrayed us!”

“My letter!” I screamed, and threw myself upon him. We fell to the floor, and fought like two wild beasts, silently, savagely, for the mastery, I with the strength of fury, he with the strength of hate and foiled ambition. He overcame me; he kneeled upon my chest, and with slow deliberation struck me several times upon the face, until at last I lay perfectly still, not stunned, but not quite sensible. “This is your last night on earth!” he hissed. Glancing about, I perceived that the room was peopled with silent, set-faced figures; the whole council was present.

I panted out, “Very good, kill me, you brutes. It will mean your own extermination; you will follow me very soon. Mr. Finlayson will avenge me!”

My uncle stood up, and sharply jerked me to my feet. “I'll not leave you even that poor satisfaction!” he grated, and, dragging me into the kitchen, threw up the back window, which faced, from an eminence, the stretched-out, sleeping city. “Look!” he growled.

The sky to the east shone with a great red glow; an immense mass of flames, topped with black clouds of fume, reared into the heavens, and licked at the stars with a thousand tongues of fire. It was almost bright as day, and the fire seemed immediately upon us; but the clangour of a hundred brazen bells, toned by distance into a sort of harmony, told me that it was in reality quite far away. I did not understand my uncle's meaning.

“It is a great fire!” I muttered.

“Where?” he asked, grimly. His face, crimsoned with reflected light, made him look like an exultant fiend.

“I do not know.”

“Waverley Chambers!” he cried, triumphantly. “Long before this your precious paper is in cinders!”

Mr. Finlayson had his office in Waverley Chambers. I did not need to be informed that my uncle had caused to be ruthlessly committed the crime of arson, in order to destroy the fictitious paper which he believed I had entrusted to the hands of Mr. Finlayson. But, none the less, the knowledge almost overwhelmed me, for I realised that, through me,

however innocently, one of the finest buildings in the city was in process of destruction. Perhaps even human lives might be sacrificed in the consequent battle with the flames! My uncle jerked me back into the room, and someone shut the window.

"We have now nothing to fear from you!" he said; "and having nothing to fear, there is nothing to prevent us executing the decree which has been pronounced against you."

I was face to face with death, and knew it thoroughly. I knew that it would be useless to struggle, useless to make an outcry. My first shout for help would be cut short by a stunning blow, and only hasten my end. Curiously enough, now that all hope was gone, I did not wish to die, although at any time during the last twenty hours I would have welcomed death. I thought of Miss Denton's letter in my uncle's pocket. I wondered what message it contained, wondered fiercely.

"Have you anything to say?" demanded my uncle.

"Yes. If you kill me, paper or no paper, the whole Push is lost. Miss Denton knows everything! She will avenge me!"

"Ah!" said my uncle, grinning cruelly; "you deserve a vote of thanks for telling us. We'd been doubtin' that. Boys," — he turned to the silent councillors — "it's a stroke of luck I come here early to-night; it's saved the Push. It's given us both our enemies into our hands — just like a stage play."

"My letter!" I gasped, thrilled with a sudden foreboding of ill.

"Yes, your letter!" hissed my uncle. He took it from his pocket, and offered it to me. I seized it with trembling fingers; but even as I held it up to read, a crushing blow descended on my head, and, my ears ringing with my uncle's mocking, diabolic laughter, I fell to the floor senseless as a log.

I opened my eyes to the stars. I seemed to have slept for hours. I was aching in every limb. It was still night, but a rich crimson glow pervaded the sky. I became conscious of a softly rocking, gliding motion. One by one I recovered the faculties of sense and memory. I was lying on my back in the bottom of a boat rowed by two men. I was bound hand and foot, and securely gagged.

An hour passed, and still the men rowed on. Their backs were turned to me. I could see nothing but the sides of the boat, the rowers' rhythmically moving bodies, a slant of sculls between the rowers' hands and the rowlocks, and the great dome of the flame-tinted sky. Several times I tried to sit up, but my strength always failed. At length the rowers ceased their labour. The nose of the boat immediately behind me — for I lay with my head to the bows — grated against wood, giving me a shock throughout my frame. The men stood up, one of them trod upon me (I saw his face distinctly; it was Jack Robin), standing so he did something which I could not see. He then gave a spring which forced all the breath

from my body, and the boat shot backwards, lightened of a load. With another little shock it swiftly returned. The second rower, Dave Gardner, stooped and roughly hauled me from my position by the collar; he passed a noose of rope beneath my arms, and threw the free coil into the ear. I was dragged upwards, swinging round and round like a bale of goods, on to the deck of a ship. It was Jack Robin's store hulk, the Push's prison-house; and one swift glance around assured me that it was still in its old position in Kerosene Bay, a rugged and uninhabited inlet of the harbour, situated to the north of Balmain and Goat Island, but separated from either by a wide tract of unfrequented water. About five hundred yards to my right were moored two large deserted steamers. Not a single light gleamed from the rocky shore. Save on public holidays, when picnic parties visit the place, Kerosene Bay is the most lonely and desolate spot within ten miles of Sydney. I was permitted no second glance. My captors, almost immediately I reached the deck, dragged me to the black mouth of a hold. I was lowered down by a rope, and fell into the curved fragment of a broken iron cylinder. They slipped down a ladder, and swiftly lighted a lanthorn which was hanging from a beam. I saw that the hold was half filled with steel and iron scraps and filings, and pieces of broken steam engines. They lifted me between them, and carried me along a twisting path amongst the rubbish to a sort of cabin in the bows of the hulk, fifty feet from the mouth of the hold. On the floor of this they tossed me, none too gently, and immediately departed, putting out the lamp as they climbed to the deck. I had never known what true darkness was till then. I shall try and convey some idea of it. The cabin in which I lay was half under water, as I could tell from the lapping noises which reached me through the sides of the hulk. It contained neither porthole nor window, and the door was blocked with piles of iron lumber, through which no ray of light might penetrate. Beyond the lumber lay fifty feet of dark; then the mouth of the hold was small, and was probably already covered over by my gaolers as a last precaution. In ordinary darkness, if the eyes be strained, either wide open, upwards, or downwards, or if the eyeball be pressed by the finger, a distinct impression of circular light is invariably produced upon the mind. But, in the darkness wherein I lay, such an impression was incapable of production even upon the fancy. I had leisure to test the matter very thoroughly. When I grew weary of that occupation, I counted thirty thousand by moving the fingers of my left hand against my thigh. I could not feel with my right hand at all; it must have been more tightly bound than the other, and was probably numbed. Counting the thirty-first thousand I fell asleep. I awoke horribly thirsty, and tried to chew at my gag. The blackness was as thick as ever; my tongue commenced to swell and bleed, and I had to swallow my own blood; it made me ill. The writhing torture was too horrible for words; it made me perspire so freely

that the moisture trickled through my thick eyebrows into my eyes, and my clothes were simply drenched. Insects crawled all over me. A great rat ran over my face, twice; the second time I swooned.

XXX The Last Week: Thursday

A LIGHT flashed in my face recovered me. I was propped up against a mattress, unbound and ungagged. A kneeling man was chafing my limbs with rough hands, another stood at a little distance looking on.

Upon a box close beside me stood a jug of water and several slices of bread and cheese.

“Water!” I gasped. My tongue was so big that I could scarcely articulate.

The man who was chafing me put the jug to my lips, and I drained it at a single draught.

“Good?” he asked.

“God bless you!” I mumbled, and both men laughed. They were the murderers of Edward Shaw — Samuel Pagney and Bill Jones.

“The day?” I muttered.

“Thursday!”

“Time?”

“About six; it's gettin' dark outside.”

It was Pagney who had answered me — Judith Kelly's husband.

“Take me on deck!” I implored them.

“No,” said Jones.

Pagney looked at his companion. “Be damned!” he growled, and gathered me up into his arms; he was a big, strong man, as was his rvial. Jones shrugged his shoulders, but made no comment. In another moment I was lying on the bare boards of the deck, breathing the clean, sweet air of heaven. Pagney sat on his haunches beside me, silent as a wooden figure. I spoke to him twice, but he growled out, “Shut your mouth!” and the second time kicked me in the temple with his boot-heel. Soon I was in a great physical agony. My numbed nerves commenced to wake, and in the process venomously stabbed and re-stabbed every inch of my body with long needles of pain. I forced myself to bear the torture without a groan, fearing lest did I make a sound Pagney would consign me to the hold again. After a long while, or what seemed so, I could move my arms. I drew them up softly one after another across my chest. My right hand was clenched about a piece of paper. It was shut with the rigidity of iron, and refused to obey my will. I knew it held Miss Denton's letter.

“Sam,” I muttered, daring in my great desire his anger, “do you want to make some money?”

He started violently. “Ay,” he said, “ay.”

“Open my vest!”

“Ay, ay!”

“Do as I bid you!”

He tore it open. “There is a pocket in the lining!” I whispered.

He searched for and found it presently, and took out the hundred pounds I had received from the dealer for my furniture.

“Notes!” he gasped. “Notes!”

“They shall be all yours. Sam, if you help me a little. It's a hundred pounds.”

He chuckled, stuffing the notes into his pocket. “I guess they're mine now,” he cried, triumphantly.

“For how long?”

“For good, I reckon.”

“You fool,” I muttered. “I have only to tell Bill you have them and he'll put the Push on to you. You wouldn't be allowed to keep threepence, and if you hid it away they'd tear you to ribbands.”

His jaw fell. “What do you want me to do?”

“Very little — force open my right hand.”

He did so; I groaning with pain the while.

Bill Jones came to the deck at that moment. “Stow that!” he growled.

“You go to hell!” said Pagney. Jones walked to the other end of the hulk without reply. Evidently the rivals were at daggers drawn; it seemed to me that I might turn their mutual hate to my advantage.

“There's a paper here, it's a letter,” said Pagney.

“Strike a match, I want to read it.”

He held it away from me. “Straight wire, you won't put me away; the oof's mine?” he muttered.

“Straight wire, Sam!”

“Swear!”

“I swear!”

“Very good!” He put the letter into my left hand, and struck a wax match upon his thigh. I read these words:

“I shall obey you, and go to-night to Melbourne, Lucas; but I shall return. I think you have not behaved well to me, but if what you have said is true, and you are in danger, I shall not desert you yet. On Saturday night I shall wait for you on the University bridge at nine. Risk nothing in the meantime; I have a right to ask you so much.”

“MAY ELIZABETH DENTON.”

“My heaven!” I muttered; “she is mad, she has not believed me. She does not realise her danger! And ah, God! my uncle has read this letter. He knows. He will be there to meet her. She is doomed!”

“What's that you say?” growled Pagney.

With the strength of despair I sat upright, heedless of shooting nerves

and rasping joints. As I did so some loose money jingled in my pockets.

"You've got more," gasped Pagney; "my eye, the bloomin' ijits never searched you, they was —— fools!" Like a flash he was on me, going through my pockets. But a wild thought, a desperate, if feeble hope, flashed through my mind. "Jones!" I shouted. "Jones!" Pagney dashed his fist in my face, and I fell back groaning, but Jones came running up.

"What's the fuss?" he growled.

"He's robbing me!" I panted.

Pagney sprang to his feet, felling me to the deck as he rose. As he did so a coin clattered on to the boards, flashing gold in the dim light of the watch-lamps. It rolled into the scuppers. Jones rushed to secure it, Pagney after him. In a second they were locked in each other's arms, fighting and cursing like incarnate fiends. Then was my chance. I slipped my hand down to my hip-pocket, and with a thrill of wildest rapture realised that my revolver rested there untouched.

My uncle and his council had, for some mysterious reason, entirely neglected to search my pockets when they had had me at their mercy. Possibly they had been too entirely content with my easy capture to think of such a detail. Possibly they had been in too great a hurry to do so at the time, assured that so trifling a matter could be properly effected at their leisure. Whatever may have been, however, the reason of their remissness, the glorious fact remained that the pistol was still in my possession; and a chance of freedom was right within my grasp already. My gaolers had forgotten me in their furious combat. All I had to do was to sit up, draw my revolver, wait for the finish of the fight, and then force them under the muzzle of my pistol to row me ashore, a free man again. But when I essayed the first of these tasks I was forced to utterly abandon hope of immediate escape. I was as weak as an infant. Not only could I not sit up, but, try as I might, I could not extract the pistol from my pocket with my left hand, for the pocket was situated over my right hip; as for my right hand, it was useless, completely paralysed; and I could not yet move either of my legs more than a few inches at a time.

I groaned aloud in my despair. My gaolers heard, and by mutual consent sprang away from each other and silently approached me. No doubt their lives depended on guarding me securely. Pagney sullenly emptied his pockets upon the deck and strode off. Jones picked up the coins and replaced them in my vest pocket. I noticed with a thrill of satisfaction that Pagney had not parted with my bank notes. After an hour spent by us all in deepest silence, Pagney returned from his retreat, and between them the ruffians lowered me into the hold, and carried me back to the cabin. They allowed me to eat my prison fare, which I did hungrily, although each mouthful tore my already lacerated tongue. Afterwards they bound me and replaced the gag. I managed, however, so that the cords were less rigid than before, in this fashion. I had already

discovered that the pair hated each other with such jealous thoroughness that one could not suffer the other to carry out his will in the smallest particular; therefore, I played them off one against another. When they were binding my feet, I groaned and appealed for clemency to Pagney. He cursed me to be silent. Jones immediately was up in arms, and swore that the bonds should be relaxed. Similarly I appealed to Jones when my hands were being tied, and Pagney was then my champion. I offered to share between them all the money I had if they left off the gag, but they sullenly refused. They placed me on a mattress when all was finished; it was hard and knotty, but elysium compared with the iron-covered floor. In spite of the apprehension I suffered on account of Miss Denton, I slept that night, for I was in comparative comfort, and exhausted nature demanded its own restorative. Beyond that, I felt that my condition was no longer quite hopeless. Doubtless on the morrow my gaolers again would free my hands, and by then strength must have returned to my limbs. Thank heaven, I did not dream.

XXXI The Last Week: Friday

I FELT as if I had scarcely closed my eyes when I was awakened with a rude kick, and yet I must have slept for many hours, for I found myself much restored, and hungry as a hunter. I thought it wise, however, to affect the greatest lassitude and weakness. Pagney freed my right hand, and removed the gag. Jones stood beside me, a short iron club in his hand — probably the very weapon with which Edward Shaw had been slaughtered. They had brought me water, bread, and butter. I pretended that I could not use my hand, and let it fall limply to my side, imploring Pagney to feed me. He angrily refused, a circumstance which induced Jones to push him roughly out of the way, and assume the office of sick waiter. I ate every crumb he gave me, and swallowed the water greedily, then I fell back and moaned and moaned. My right hand was in reality paining frightfully, and it was still half useless; but I need not have moaned. The brutes cursed me; but they showed some pity. I pretended to be ill, vowed that I endured the most terrible abdominal pains, and besought them, if they had a spark of human feeling in their bodies, to brain me as I lay. Pagney at last went off in search of some whiskey, and he took with him the lamp. This was the chance for which I had waited and planned. Moaning and groaning so that I filled the cabin with the horrid sounds, I managed somehow to drag the pistol from my hip pocket and hide it underneath the mattress. My hand was still so weak that it would have been impossible for me to use the weapon; but I hid it in this fashion because I feared a visit from my uncle or some of the councillors, and feared to be searched, in which case the revolver must infallibly have been discovered, and my last hope torn from me. Oh, how I cursed my weakness! When I thought of it my groans were real enough. I drank the whiskey, and then pretended to swoon, hoping that on that account they might allow me to remain unbound. But, to my chagrin, although they left my mouth free, they triced up my arms with the utmost care, and thereafter I was not left alone. One or other of them remained always in the cabin, bludgeon in hand. Through the morning I worked my hardest to seduce them both. By turns I told them brilliant lies of hidden riches, and made them the most specious offers to share secret gold I pretended I possessed. I tried to work upon their fears, their cupidity, their common love, their mutual hate. I promised them wild impossibilities. I beseeched, I implored, I threatened. But all to no purpose. I was not mad

enough to try and suborn them to help me escape. All I wished them to do was to slip ashore and send a telegram to Miss Denton, warning her not to visit my cottage on Saturday night. Their orders must have been very strict, for they were quite ignorant of my uncle's designs on Miss Denton's life, and my golden stories and promises moved them I saw it in the cupidinous glitter of their eyes; but, in spite of all my efforts, they refused to do my bidding, and at last, sick of the matter, Pagney condemned me to the gag again. The day passed with awful speed, to me at least. I jealously resented the encroachment of each moment, for I thought of the woman I loved, of what she was doing, must be doing; of her preparations for departure, for return to Sydney. I followed her to the station, to the platform, to the train. I saw her take her seat, the door close, the train move, slowly at first but soon fast and ever faster, flying on its way to Sydney, bearing her to her doom, — unless, unless, I could recover my strength while yet there was time, induce my gaolers to free my hands — and then!——

The brutes grew tired of being kind. When luncheon hour came they commenced to bait me. They brought my meagre fare, set it on the mattress beside my head, and took off my gag. Then they forced me to eat it, browsing in the manner of a horse, and if I dared to murmur, kicked my helpless body or cruelly pinched my skin. They obliged me to lick up every crumb, and because I could not drink the water in the same manner they allowed me to go athirst. Few people in the world know what it means to hate, because — and thank heaven for it! — few people in the world are ever called upon to endure at the hands of human brutes such hideous indignities. They found so much amusement in tormenting me that they almost forgot that they loathed each other. I hated them unspeakably.

They pursued the same brutal jest at dinner, save that, as a variation, they smeared my bread thickly over with mustard in order to watch my choked contortions as I chewed and swallowed it, or listen to my involuntary groans when the horrid mess cut my raw and smarting tongue. When I cried to them for water they responded by emptying the jug into my mattress. “Lap it up!” they said.

“My uncle shall hear of this!” I cried.

“Oh, don't tell! Please, dear Lucas, don't tell on us!” they pleaded, and burst into shouts of laughter.

With that they gagged me, and my sufferings were intensified by an ever-increasing thirst. But this was later on relieved by Pagney, who brought a jug of water during his hour of watch, and offered to give it me, provided that I took a horrible oath not to betray the fact that I had given him the hundred pounds.

I took the oath; I would have sold my soul for the water. Ah, those poor devils down in Hell, if such exist, who are supposed to languish in

eternal fires, yet whose thirst is their greatest torture! I had learned to pity them profoundly in the course of a single day. I have never thought of them without compassion, since.

My uncle, attended by his councillors, visited me during the night. They searched me thoroughly, and seemed cast into the greatest rage when they failed to find more than a few pounds in my possession. Well was it then for me that I had already removed and hidden my revolver.

I was ungagged, and subjected to a rigorous cross-examination as to what I had done with the hundred pounds which I had received for the furniture. I refused to answer, in accordance with my promise to Samuel Pagney. They beat me with a rawhide whip; but I kept my faith, and at last they desisted in despair. Pagney, however, did not look happy until I was bound and gagged again. The wretch! I wonder what sort of faith he would have kept under like circumstances.

My uncle said to me, “Enjoy your last hours of life as best you can, you —— hound! You'd be dead before this, only the girl's still loose; but as soon as we've got her the both of you go under! Think of it, you ——! Dream of it, —— you!”

He thereupon sternly commanded my gaolers to give me no more freedom, but to keep me constantly bound, and never leave me for an instant! Pagney, shaking with laughter, described to the king the manner in which I had been compelled to take my meals during the day. It was then that I perfectly understood the keenness of the ill-will which now animated my uncle in my regard. He stood for a moment gazing at me steadily, as if lost in thought, nor did he join in the mirth of his subjects aroused by Pagney's story.

“He looks quite comfortable!” he observed at last, and his voice contained a mixture of displeasure and cruel suggestion.

The larrikins were not so stupid that they did not thoroughly understand him.

“Cracked corn or gravel next his skin to lie on!” hinted Robin.

My uncle shook his head disdainfully.

“Wet the cords so that they'll shrink and cut him as they dry!” suggested Gardner.

“No.”

“Cut off his ears. He can't bleed to death!” said Daly.

“No.”

“Slit his nose!” contributed Murphy.

“No.”

The fifth councillor also made a bid for fame; but it was reserved for the man Pagney, in whose behalf I had just endured a beating, to please my uncle, and to awaken the whole-hearted enthusiasm of the entire gang.

“Pull off a couple of his finger nails!” he suggested. “I had one torn off

in a machine a bit ago. The pain doesn't let up for hours!” My uncle's rather brutal face was transfigured with an expression of such perfect appreciation that he appeared for a moment almost beautiful.

“Sam Pagney,” said he, “you're the cleverest of the lot. Fetch a pair of pincers!”

My uncle watched his subjects perform the operation, his lips twisted in a grin of gratified malignity. My spasmodic writhings won from him several short gruff laughs. For the time I believe he was happy; my sufferings ministered such sweet balm to his raw and itching malice. I cannot describe the business, so I shall not try. One thing, the pain was so sharp that it restored to me my strength. I struggled like a maniac, and although without success, nevertheless the cords were so strained by my frantic efforts that afterwards my bound limbs were able to repose in comfort and my blood to course freely through my veins.

They took leave of me with derisive ceremony, bowing in mock humility, and grimacing. Each found something insulting to say. My uncle's farewell is worthy of record. “Good-bye, my dear boy. God bless you!” he said earnestly, and stooping, kissed me on the forehead. The others shrieked with laughter. No doubt they considered his blasphemous wit excruciatingly funny.

Pagney was evidently a queer mixture of a man. About midnight he came to me carrying a tube of lanoline.

“I've been thinkin' of the time I had when my nail was torn off,” he observed. “Are they painin' you still, Lucas?”

I nodded.

He kneeled beside me and anointed my two bleeding fingers thickly with the balsam. The blessed stuff gave me such infinite relief that I gratefully forgave him for having inflicted the torture; if I had been free I would have kissed his hands. This may seem strange to those who have not been similarly injured. I have read of the sufferings of martyrs and brave gentlemen of noble birth, and the heroic pride which enabled them to withstand their sufferings and laugh in the face of their torturers. I do not credit these stories any more. Believe me, physical pain, if it be acute enough, is the most masterful tyrant in the world; the most stubborn pride faints impotent before it. I entertain now the greatest contempt for certain historians, and all the chroniclers of the saints — they are liars, liars.

XXXII The Last Week: Saturday

MY gaolers merely ungagged me for my breakfast, and not all my prayers could induce them to unbind my hands. I essayed everything; I even pretended to be violently ill, but they only laughed at me. The worst of it was I was quite strong. I felt that if I could have got one of my hands free everything would presently be well. Despair came because I gradually perceived how vain it was to hope that I should ever be released again. What reason could there be for such a thing? All they now required from me was my life. Of that they could most easily deprive me in my helpless state. It was my worst day. I thought of the past, the present, the future. I speculated what the few friends I possessed would think of my disappearance. I did not remember the name of one who would be sufficiently interested to make investigation. They would conclude that I had left Sydney in sorrow for Edward Shaw's death, then think no more about me. I supposed that my uncle had seized all my luggage and personal belongings the night he had captured me, and had conveyed them secretly to his own house. Every circumstance would, in that case, point to the fact that I had quietly departed of my own accord. No suspicion of unfair play would ever probably be excited in the matter unless my body should be subsequently discovered. Even then, I knew that the Push would so arrange that it must appear that I had committed suicide.

So much for myself. Now as to Miss Denton. If no kind providence prevented, she must infallibly fall into my uncle's hands and share my fate. What must happen then? When she arrived in Sydney, her first act would be to proceed to some hotel and there engage a room. In the evening she would take a cab out to the University gate. The police would be able to trace her so far, but how much farther? She, a well-to-do woman, could not disappear without remark. Her evanishment would cause a great stir, and the whole police force would be urged by her lawyers and the public to spare no effort in unveiling the mystery. The Push must know this; they must also know that her disappearance must probably be connected with mine. Were they relying on the hope that the public would think that we had quietly eloped? Impossible, even for such ignorant brutes as they! What then? Ah! I had it! They perhaps intended to depart from their time-honoured custom. They would not kick us to death; they would stab or shoot us, and dispose of our bodies in some

lonely spot, so that it should appear I had killed my sweetheart and then myself. The romantic death of the poor Dacres was still fresh in the public memory. It would be supposed that in an insane fit I had sought to rival that sad tragedy.

I considered the chances which Miss Denton possessed of escaping my uncle's trap. They were very thin. She would have no suspicion, and would approach the trysting place without fear. Larrikins would be lurking in the shadows beside the bridge. It was a lonely spot after nightfall, although only fifty yards from a busy thorough-fare. A man would approach her from each end of the bridge. One would ask her a civil question, which she would answer. She would probably be stunned, bound and gagged, unsuspicious still, for no one, however quick-brained, can immediately comprehend the unexpected. The larrikins would have a cart waiting, in which she would be carried off to Glebe Point, to a boat. Her only chance then rested in remote haps of fate. She might fall ill in the train. An accident might occur to the cab while on her way to Forest Lodge, or a policeman might across the bridge and loiter there out of curiosity while she waited for me. I prayed to the Almighty in speechless fervour that one or other of these things should come to pass, and in such desperate imprecations and reflections the cruel day passed. My gaolers were ever stolid as owls; only at meal times did they exhibit any animation, and that was only in the hope of extracting some fun from the situation at my expense. But even of that they grew tired at last, and Pagney fed me at dinner with his own hands, and also gave me a glass of whiskey. The brute must have had some pin-point of heart hidden somewhere in his frame, which had perhaps been touched by my keeping faith with him regarding the hundred pounds. Bill Jones never opened his lips. The hate which existed between the two was something to marvel at; it was so deep and sullen, and yet held under such constant, fierce restraint. I asked them once if they had been socked for killing Edward Shaw. They said “No,” and laughed grimly. I spoke to them of Judith Kelly, and tried to stir them into a more active enmity. They glared at each other when her name was uttered, but made no reply; and when I persisted Pagney gagged me into silence. It was my last chance of making any attempt at escape, for I was kept gagged thenceforth until midnight, about which time my uncle arrived, accompanied by his council and twenty of the Push. The councillors carried between them the body of a woman. I could not see her face until she was laid upon the floor at full length beside me. She was bound hand and foot, and gagged, like myself, with a thick linen bandage covering a wedge of wood, but I met her eyes, and saw it was my sweetheart. She was perfectly conscious, and her eyes did not seem afraid. The Push remained outside the cabin door grouped about it. They nearly all carried lighted candles, which smoked horribly. Only my uncle and the councillors entered the

cabin. When they had deposited Miss Denton, they seated themselves upon some iron cans and boxes arranged beside the wall opposite my mattress. Not a single word was spoken. I noticed that Pagney and Bill Jones had disappeared. The silence lasted for several minutes. I gazed always into Miss Denton's eyes. I was trying to tell her of my terrible grief for her. Her glance was very sorrowful, hopeless, and resigned. There was a dreadful purple bruise upon her forehead; she had evidently been shamefully ill-used. My heart beat so fast that I was almost suffocated. Constrained to breathe through my nose because of the gag, my breath came and went in sobbing, snoring gasps. The air in the cabin quickly became thick and foul, and many of the Push commenced to smoke cigarettes. At length the crowd at the door parted, and Pagney appeared, carrying in his hand a small tinsmith's brazier filled with glowing coals. Thrust through the bars were three thin pencils of steel, having handles of wood. The brazier was deposited just outside the door.

My uncle moved for the first time. He opened his vest and drew out the Push Book, then commanded Pagney to fetch a box. A gin case was quickly deposited on end before him. Upon this he placed the book, a small bottle of ink, and a pen. He then addressed the Push.

“You know, boys,” said he, “this is the worst affair we've ever engaged in, and you've all been selected and picked to take part as the best men in the Push. None of the rest of the Push knows what we're goin' to do, and it's not our business to tell them. But there's been a traitor among us, and that traitor's sprung from your own king's family. Well, it's not likely I'm goin' to rate my own less than any one of you. When Lucas Rowe turned traitor, I reckon it's time for each and all of us to take precautions, and for each man to distrust the next. For that reason I'm goin' now to ask each and all here present to sign a paper I've written out, not that I distrust one of you, but it's a protection to me, and will be a protection to you all. You can't grumble, for the council is going to sign first; and as you'll all sign the same sheet you'll all be equally bound and equally protected. I reckon after that we can breathe easy. Well, boys?”

“Read it!” they cried.

He opened the book. “We, the undersigned, hereby state and declare and solemnly swear that we killed Lucas Rowe this —— day of —— for being a traitor to the Push, and his girl, May Denton, for being concerned in his treachery, by cutting their throats with his own razor, and leaving their bodies on the embankment at Glebe Point so as to look as if they committed suicide. So help us, God.”

“That's the ticket,” added my uncle. “Jack Robin, you sign first.”

Not a single murmur was raised. The councillors one by one signed the paper, and then the Push silently filed in and followed their example, returning thereafter to their places without the door. My uncle at last turned to me. “Pat Daly,” he commanded, “free the male prisoner's

hands, and take off his gag."

I almost swooned with joy. The blood rushed so wildly to my heart I thought it would burst. Daly kneeled on Miss Denton's shoulder to get at me. In a second my bonds were slashed off, but I quickly found that my hands were still too cramped. I needed a little time to rally my strength.

"Sit up!" said my uncle.

With an effort I obeyed.

My uncle got to his feet, and, reaching across Miss Denton, placed the Push Book upon my knees; then a loose sheet of paper upon the book; lastly he handed me a pen, and resumed his seat.

"I want you," said he, "to write a short letter explainin' to the world that your girl's jilted you, and that you've made up your mind to kill her out of jealousy, and then yourself."

"What if I refuse?" I muttered hoarsely. I hardly recognised my own voice.

He pointed to the glowing brazier. "I'll damn soon find a way to make you, my boy. I'll burn out your tongue first, and if that doesn't do — well—— Sam, hand me one of them solder irons."

Pagney extracted one of the steel pencils from the coals, and gingerly handed it to the king. Its free end was red-hot. My uncle flourished it in my face.

"Will you write?" he asked.

"Yes!"

I stooped over the paper, but my hand was numbed; I could not form a single letter. "You'll have to rub my fingers!" I gasped. "They're so cramped I can hardly hold the pen."

My uncle signed to Robin and Daly, who at once came forward, and grasped my hands, which they vigorously chafed for about five minutes. I felt the blessed life returning to the members, but I still required strength for the task before me.

"A drop of whiskey!" I pleaded. My uncle nodded.

While it was sought for I looked into my sweetheart's eyes and tried to convey to her some message of hope. But her regard was fixed and scornful; she probably thought me a coward for my prompt obedience.

The whiskey warmed every fibre of my body, and stimulated each nerve to action.

I signed that I was ready to write, for by this I could move my stiff fingers back and forth, and I took up the pen. But Daly stood stolidly before me. He was too close.

"You are in the light!" I grumbled. He stepped back, and as he did so, stumbled over Miss Denton's feet, and fell to the floor, cursing horribly. It was my opportunity. For a second the eyes of all were bent on the stumbler. I slipped my hand under the mattress, felt for, found, and snatched at the revolver, then with pounding heart pointed it at my

uncle's breast. I cried out to them all:

“One move and your king dies!” I gazed, however, only at my uncle. His face wore a dazed and stupid look; for several seconds he seemed unable to comprehend the position. Suddenly, and I daresay without knowing what he was doing, he stood up. I pulled the trigger sharply; there followed a blaze of light — a terrible noise — loud as a clap of thunder, a wild shriek of pain, and a confused babel of rushing sounds, oaths, curses, and shrieks. In the flash I saw my uncle throw up his hands and pitch forward. All the candles were extinguished by the concussion, and though the lanthorn still burned, nothing could be distinguished for the thick sulphur-smelling smoke. I thought that the Push were rushing forward to cast themselves upon me, so I fired twice more blindly in the direction of the door.

Cries followed the reports, but distant cries. In a second I realised that panic had seized the Push, and that they had fled. The brazier of coals, which had been overturned, burned red as blood through the black haze. I dragged myself over to it by my hands, and tore from the bars one of the glowing solder irons. With this I seared through the cords which bound my legs, and tottered upright. I heard a stamping of many feet on deck, and wondered what to do. After a moment's wild irresolution I seized the lanthorn, and staggered and stumbled through the door along the passage of the hold, until I almost reached the mouth. A number of heads leaning over the orifice were framed in weird silhouette against the sky; it was raining heavily without, and a drenching shower pattered into the hold, while a thick stream of white smoke swirled upwards, only, however, to be pushed back and spread out in mushroom form by the rain. “Is that you, sir?” muttered a voice.

I took steady aim, and fired my fourth shot. It evoked a fearful howl, and every head instantly disappeared. With a recklessness born of a total suspense of my reasoning faculties, I lumbered to the ladder, and painfully toiled up the steps. There was the larrikins' opportunity; I was helpless for more than a minute, having both hands engaged, but they had not the courage to avail themselves of it. Perhaps, however, they could not see what I was doing, for I had dropped my lantern on firing the last shot, and the night was dark as Erebus. I sat upon the deck at last, and looked around me, my legs dangling over the hold. A mass of figures was grouped before the gangway, elsewhere the deck was clean. I dragged myself to stand, and staggered towards the bunch, my pistol in advance. I wanted to kill them all. I fired my fifth shot, and they melted before me; many of them hurled themselves over the side of the hulk into the water. When I reached the bulwarks not one remained. I glanced over, but could see nothing. To encourage them, however, I fired my sixth and last shot into the water. It was then that reason revived in my brain. I realised, with a gasp of horror, that did they return now they

would find me defenceless; my pistol was empty. With a groan I tottered over to the hold, and slipped and slid down the ladder, falling heavily upon the sharp iron fragments at the bottom. But the pain helped. I got up and forced my numbed limbs back towards the cabin, seizing the lantern on my way. The smoke had by this much thinned. The brazier and its scattered coals had ceased to glow, finding no food to feed on in the iron rubbish heap upon which they had been cast. My uncle lay face downwards on the floor, across Miss Denton's feet, moveless as stone. I put down the lantern, and turned him over in order to search his pockets for a knife with which I might free Miss Denton. I found two loaded revolvers before I came upon a knife, and felt happy, and a match for twenty pushes. My uncle's head was covered with blood. I thought him dead, but was not at all troubled; I had intended to kill him when I shot. I opened his knife with teeth and fingers, and then quickly slashed my sweetheart free. When I took the gag from her mouth I noticed that her lips were cut and bleeding. I said as I helped her to her feet, “I have been a prisoner here since Wednesday night. That is why you have suffered these indignities. I could not go to help you, nor give you any warning.”

She shuddered so violently, and swayed so, that I had to support her. “Is he dead?” she asked.

“I think so.”

“And the others?”

“They have gone for the present, but I think they will return when they recover from their panic. You must pull yourself together at once, and come with me on deck. If they find us in the hold they will shut us in, and it will be our death-trap. They will starve us to death here! and no one could ever hear us, however loudly we cried for help!”

She stood erect, still swaying a little, but her will was very strong; she pointed to my mattress. “Bring that — it is the Push Book, is it not?”

I stooped and quickly gathered up the scattered papers of the portfolio, marvelling at her forethought the while. But I wanted my hands, so I slipped the book under my vest as I had often seen my uncle do. Then I turned to her, boiling with a sudden fever of haste and apprehension. “Come!” I cried, “come quickly!”

We hurried from the cabin; I did not stay to assist her, but went in advance with the light, for I heard strange, dull noises and thudding sounds against the side of the hulk. I sprang up the ladder without a thought to Miss Denton, so great was my alarm. I was not an instant too soon. The Push were already swarming over the side of the hulk, and they waved in their hands what seemed like logs of wood. When I appeared they came at me in a body, in a quick, silent run. I fired in their faces — twice. One man fell to the deck, the rest paused, halted in confusion. I had by then a revolver in each hand. I cried to them: “You had better go; I have a bullet ready for each one of you. I shall

commence firing as soon as I count ten; if by then you have not left the ship — one, two, three, four, five, six——” I paused between each word about two seconds. When I reached “six,” they retreated; “nine,” they were scrambling into the boats; “ten,” the deck was clear. I walked to the side and peered steadily over: a great stick whirled through the air, and pounded the railing within a foot of my left hand. I made out the form of a boat, because the splashing of the heavy raindrops was interrupted in a certain space. As the raindrops fell in every other place, they gleamed. I fired at the dull tract, and the shot was answered by a volley of iron and wooden missiles. Several struck me on the body, and one grazed my forehead, but I felt no great pain. I called out to them, “Pull off, or I'll smash your boat with bullets, and drown every mother's son of you!”

Jack Robin's voice answered, “We want to talk with you!”

My reply was a shot, and it evoked a low howl and much groaning. I called out, “I have nothing to say to any of you. If you are wise you'll clear out; someone is bound to hear the shooting soon!”

“Where is the king?” demanded a voice.

“Dead!” I shouted, “and more than one of you with him!”

I heard sculls splash the water and the creaking of wooden rowlocks. Presently the sky was illumined with a brilliant stream of forked lightning. During the flash I saw that the Push were making towards the city, in two big boats very close together, each loaded heavily and riding deep in the glass-calm water. I fired a last shot to speed them on their journey. The lightning had revealed no sign of life on the whole bay save what I have described; but it showed me an overturned skiff floating beside the hulk, and fastened to the bulwarks by a painter. A low moan from the rear made me turn swiftly round. Miss Denton was kneeling on the deck attending to the man I had shot down, and whom I had utterly forgotten, by the light of the lanthorn which she had brought with her from the hold. I walked over to her.

“Is he much hurt?” I asked.

The man was Pat Daly. He was quite conscious, but seemed very weak.

“He is wounded in the arm,” replied the girl. “I think he will bleed to death if it is not bound up.” I ripped open the fellow's sleeve, which was drenched with blood, and between us we bandaged his wound with our handkerchiefs and a strip of muslin which Miss Denton tore from the bottom of her skirt.

“I suppose you are saving me for the gallows?” said Daly when we had finished, and had propped him up under the shelter of a broken piece of deck house.

“Suppose what you like!” I retorted. “Keep silence, if you want to live!”

I moved to the gangway side of the hulk, still fearful that the Push might venture to return. It rained and rained a perfect deluge, but,

curiously enough, the water was quite warm, although the middle of winter had barely passed. I was sodden through and through, and my boots splashed with every step. I judged that dawn could not be far off, for the darkness seemed much less dense than it had been. While straining my eyes into the water, trying to make out the boats, Miss Denton gave a sudden scream. I spun round just in time to avoid a sledge-hammer blow from a long iron bar swung in a man's hands. The man himself lost his balance from striking only the air, and sprawled on the deck. I pointed a revolver and waited for him to rise; but he lay still save that he moaned. “Bring the light!” I cried.

Miss Denton did so, and I saw it was my uncle! He looked up at me with his little baleful eyes gleaming wickedly. His forehead was covered with congealed blood; but the flow seemed to have ceased. Evidently my bullet had only grazed his scalp, and stunned him for a time.

“I thought you were dead!” I exclaimed.

“Not yet!” he panted, and made as if to get up; but I put the revolver to his head. “I want to kill you!” I cried. “Give me the least excuse, and I shall!”

He fell back groaning.

“What are you going to do?” whispered Miss Denton in my ear.

“I don't know,” I replied. “We can't get away from the hulk without a boat, and the only boat there is is floating bottom upwards alongside. I cannot right it without help, at least in the dark. We shall have to wait for daylight.”

“How terrible!”

“Are you brave?” I asked, glancing at her sideways.

“What is it you want me to do?”

“Go down into the hold, and fetch me some ropes from the cabin.”

She gave a shiver of dread.

“Never mind,” said I.

“May I take the light?” she asked in a minute.

“You are the bravest girl in the world!” I cried, warmly. “I hate to put this work upon you; but you see how it is — I cannot leave my precious uncle!”

“Is that man your uncle?” she asked, shuddering back a step, and gazing at him.

“I cannot help myself. I did not choose him!” I replied, and put the lanthorn in her hand. She descended the ladder step by step and was gone for five minutes, so that I became alarmed; but she brought me some papers as well as a coil of ropes, and I guessed what had been her business — the papers belonging to the Push Book.

I thrust them into my pocket, and gave Miss Denton one of the revolvers ready cocked, and instructed her how to use it. I made her stand immediately opposite my uncle, and him sit up, then bade her to

pull trigger on him if he moved an eyelash; the light burned right in his face. For myself, I took up the iron bar with which he had sought to kill me, and, having forced him to crook his arms close to his sides, passed it through his elbows and behind his back. Then I roped him, and, when satisfied with the knots, turned him over, face downwards, flat upon the boards. In that position he was helpless, and even more entirely so when his feet were tied, for the bar protruding far on each side acted as a lever to prevent him from even rolling over. Through all, the rain beat pitilessly down, a solid flood sheet. There was no shelter to be had, and not so much as a rag of canvas could I find, for the hulk had been stripped of her top hamper years before, and only the bare sweep of lower deck was left, save for one or two bits of roofless cabin and the broken cuddy, in which Pat Daly lay. The shutter boards used for covering the hold were piled in a heap beside the mouth; but they were useless.

When I saw that I could do nothing whatever for the comfort of my companion, I strode to the gangway and peered out over the waters. It must have been almost three o'clock, for a haze of grey light swam on the horizon, and the dark sky gave faintly luminous signs of breaking. Nothing was to be seen of the boats, and the nearest light was a distant twinkling lamp on the northern corner of Goat Island. Beyond that lay Balmain, and, farther still, the city. I was wondering how I should win there, wondering what Miss Denton must be thinking, and feeling very worn out and altogether wretched, when she came to me.

“It is very wet,” she cried.

I found nothing better to say than “Very!” I almost added “ma'am.” A whole universe appeared set between us.

“Did they use you very badly?” she muttered presently.

I held out my left hand to the light. “They tore the nails off my middle fingers. That was the worst!” I replied.

“Tell me everything!”

I made shift in a halting, disjointed fashion to do as she requested; but I felt all the while like conversing with a stranger. She told me thereafter how they had caught her. She had proceeded to the Newtown Junction in a tramcar, and walked thence to the University Bridge. While she waited, under the shelter of her umbrella, a man came behind her, and as she turned, thinking it was me, he struck her half senseless with a club. In a flash others arrived, who gagged her, and made her walk between them across the deserted park to the Camperdown Road, where a cart waited, in which they drove to Glebe Point. There the Push awaited them in boats, in which they rowed out straightway to the hulk. There had been neither hitch nor hindrance to the Push's plans. Except for their own carelessness in not searching me when first they had me at their mercy, nothing on earth could have saved us, and we both knew that, at the time

we spoke, we should, in all human likelihood, have been already dead. Miss Denton recounted her adventures with the utmost coolness. Her manner to me was restrained and chilling.

"I thank God I have been able, so far, to guard your life," I said at last. "The pity is, that we are not yet out of the wood. The Push may return at any minute, armed; and in that case nothing can save us."

"But," said she, "it is no more than two hundred yards to the shore. I can swim."

"I cannot," I replied; "besides, the water is alive with sharks! It is but a choice of deaths!"

"Do you think they will return?"

"I do."

"God help us!" she muttered, and for awhile we were both silent. From time to time my uncle cursed, or Pat Daly groaned, and always the rain poured down perpendicularly from the leaden skies. There was not so much as a breath of wind. I commenced to entertain a sense of injury, or, rather, to perceive that I entertained it. I thought that Miss Denton, however much I had wronged her, might have shown me a warmer manner, for, after all, I had saved her life. No first-met stranger could have been more cold, not once did she even look in my direction.

"I am cramped," she said at last. "I must walk to warm myself," and she left me. I watched her proceed right to the stern and peer over the side, where she rested for a time. I bitterly told myself that she had gone there to escape my company, but of a sudden she came running back. "Lucas," she muttered, "there is a little boat fastened to the rail — at least, it looks like a boat."

With an excited thrill I sped to look, bearing the lantern with me. Sure enough a small dingey, at the end of a long painter, swam on the stream. I pulled it in, and lowering the lamp with a bight of rope, found it furnished with sculls and lug sail all ready for us to embark. It was, no doubt, the boat used by the caretakers of the hulk in going shore-wards for provisions, and the Push had forgotten it in their confusion, although they had taken care to sink the skiff before they departed. In a very few seconds I had lowered Miss Denton into the dingey, and was about to descend myself, when suddenly I recollected I was penniless, and possessed nothing in the world save the clothes in which I stood. Muttering an excuse to the lady, I slipped back and searched my uncle's pockets, despite of his curses. I found in all upon him less than four pounds, but it was something. I then despoiled Pat Daly of his hat, and, so accoutred, rejoined Miss Denton.

Pushing off, I headed, not straight for Balmain, but in a slanting course down the harbour, so as to mislead our enemies should they return and seek to pursue us. An hour's hard labour at the oars brought us opposite Circular Quay and Miller's Point. It was still very dark, but guided by the

pier lights I worked quietly into the little crescent bay, and presently brought up alongside of Prince's Stairs. Not a soul was in sight, not even a policeman, for the rain had driven all the loafers and night hawks to cover. We landed, and I pushed the dingey back into the stream, to drift where it or the tide should decide. Then, making our way to the splashing wood-blocked road, we stood for a moment before the Custom House. The clock told us half-past three.

"Where are you staying?" I asked, and the words broke a silence which had lasted since we left the hulk.

"At the Metropole," she replied.

"Let us go there at once, then."

"May I have your arm? I am very weary."

I offered it to her with a forlorn bow. I was almost dead myself, and in this manner we climbed up Young Street, and in less than five minutes halted in the porch before the great door of the sleep-wrapped hotel. Miss Denton looked terribly bedraggled and forlorn. She had lost her hat, and her long hair streamed about her. Woman-like, however, she kept her back to the light, and I could not see her face.

"You will come in?" she asked.

"No," said I.

"Where will you go?"

"I do not know. I have nowhere to go," I replied dejectedly.

"You have no money?"

"About four pounds which I took from my uncle; nothing else in the wide world, and not a rag to my back except what I stand up in. They despoiled me of everything."

"I received the thousand pounds which you sent me."

"Which I returned to you," I corrected.

"Let me lend you some money," she whispered.

"No thanks," I answered, rudely, I think, for I felt a scorn in her words, and my pride was stung.

"What will you do then?"

"I shall go somewhere and sleep when I leave you — afterwards, I neither know nor care." Indeed I was past caring.

"You have the Book safe?"

"Yes."

"Then you should not say you do not care what you do. You have a duty to perform — a duty to society."

"You mean I should go at once to the police?"

"No, I do not mean that. You should at once escape from Sydney, taking with you the Book, and then make those terrible men know and realise the power you hold against them. Make them understand that they must never commit another crime. If you act wisely you can oblige them, through fear, to reform. They know you have the Book, and if you assure

them that you intend only to use it in case they are wicked, but would certainly use it then, I am sure that they would never dare to resume their evil courses."

"You are right, I think," I answered wearily. "But for yourself, what do you intend to do? You must not stay in Sydney. Here, whatever happens, your life is in constant peril."

"No more than yours."

"Oh!" I cried, "what does it matter about me? Please answer my question."

"I shall go away to-morrow night, by train, to Melbourne."

"I am glad of that. You must never return to Sydney — never again. The Push know that you know their secrets. If you came back ten years hence they would kill you if they could. They never forget, they never forgive."

"But if you hold the Book?"

"I would not trust them in your case or mine. It will be now with them a question of vengeance where we are concerned, and no consideration would affect them if they could ever get us in their power. Now, a last word of warning. To-morrow, keep to the hotel all day. Do not go out once until you leave; and when you reach the station get immediately into a ladies' carriage, not a sleeping-car. You must not attempt to leave your carriage on any pretext until you cross the border. Some of the Push may follow you to Albury, but I do not think beyond. Above all, do not sleep, and keep near the alarm-bell, so that you can stop the train should a man attempt to enter the carriage. If you follow these instructions I think you will be safe."

"Thank you very much. But what of yourself, Lucas?"

"Lucas!" I muttered.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

I swung off my hat. "I daresay I shall do very well. Of necessity, I have no plans just yet. I shall have to look around me a bit before I can get away. But be quite easy; I shall take excellent care of myself. Good-bye, Miss Denton," and I bowed again; I dared not offer her my hand. I did not wish to, very much.

She did not offer to move, but in a second she muttered:

"You have not asked me why I returned to Sydney!"

"No."

"Have you no wish to hear the reason?"

"I have, Miss Denton, but I have not the courage to ask it. I have done you so great a wrong that I felt myself committing an impertinence even in saving your life."

"You feel like that still?"

"I do."

"Shall I tell you?"

“If you please.”

She shook her head. “Do you know, sir, your humility savours of the pride of Lucifer. Confess, is it not true that you nourish a grievance against me?”

“It is true,” I said.

“What is it?”

A hardness came in my throat which tasted bitterly. It was difficult to articulate. I muttered, “You ought to know. I hate myself so much on your account that it seems unnecessary that you should hate me, too!” I was burning with a sense of great injustice as I spoke; it had been steadily accumulating, and was born of the coldness of her demeanour to me from the moment I had released her in the cabin of the hulk. Heaven knows I had no right to expect anything but coldness from her; but then one is not the author of one's emotions, at best their master, and at the moment I was far from even being that.

“I do not hate you,” whispered Miss Denton, “and you are not quite frank with me. Your grievance is not because you think I hate you, but because you think that I have ceased to love you.”

It was as though she were reading my heart like an open book. I shivered, and was silent.

After a moment she pursued: “I returned to Sydney to obtain from you a ring.”

Involuntarily I raised my hand. The ring which she had put upon my finger the night of our engagement was still there. I tried to remove it, but I had not the strength; for touching by chance the raw tip from which the nail had been so lately torn, I turned of a sudden sick, and almost swooned.

Miss Denton saw and vigorously tugged at the bell. The night porter opened the door, and I made no protest against entering; I was almost done. The man led me to a chair, and gave me a glass of spirit. As in a dream I heard the girl explaining away our plight with some specious story of a boating expedition, a broken oar, and a long pull against the tide with naught but a pair of broken paddles. Still dazed, and quite incapable of resistance, I was led to a room on the first floor of the building, and put to bed by the good-natured porter, who brought me a pair of pyjamas, and took away my sopping clothes. I do not remember saying good-night to Miss Denton. I had just sense enough left to collect the papers which she had brought me from the hold of the hulk, and to hide them and the book beneath my pillow. I did not remember to lock the door, but fell into a dull, heavy slumber the moment my head touched pillow.

XXXIII The Last Week: Sunday

IT was noon of a glorious sunlit day when I awoke. Two men were in my room — a hotel waiter, and a gentle-man of my acquaintance, Dr. James Cavanagh, a surgeon of great repute in the city. Beside the bed stood a table, on which reposed a basin of hot water, a case of instruments, lint, and salves.

"Ah!" observed the doctor, with a genial smile, "awake at last, I perceive; we shall now be able to get to work; your left hand, is it not?" Dr. Cavanagh was a perfect modern replica of the great Roman, Marc Antony; his face, cut like an ancient cameo, was just as beautiful, just as clever, dissolute, and wicked; the skin was marble white, and seemed smooth as silk. He was a great figure in Sydney society, and charged two guineas a visit, cash! I looked at him stupidly, and thought of the hole about to be made in my little treasury.

"How did you know?" I gasped, and drew my injured hand from the clothes.

"Your fiancée, Miss Denton, called at my rooms an hour ago. She told me of your little accident; quite an adventure, was it not? Lucky for you the sea was smooth when you came round Middle Head. A dangerous spot that for a small boat, with broken paddles."

"I'm sorry you were disturbed for such a trifle, doctor; on a Sunday especially. I should have gone round to you."

"Not at all, not at all!" He examined my fingers.

"Was it a blow?" he asked. "The nails appear to have been torn off. Miss Denton said you knocked your hand."

"I scarcely know how it happened," I muttered. "The only thing I'm thoroughly sure of was that it hurt like the deuce!"

"The wounds look quite old," said he. "They have commenced to heal already; your blood must be in first-rate order, and yet you don't look too well."

"Oh, I'm knocked up; the long pull!" I explained.

He shook his head, glancing at me curiously; but presently he got to work, and in a few minutes my hand was washed, dressed, and very neatly bandaged.

"You'd better come and see me to-morrow morning: no need to dress it in the meantime," he observed, and gathered up his things.

"Your fee, doctor," I said, and pointed to my money on the dressing

table.

"Was paid in advance," he returned, with a smile. "I wish all my patients were as thoughtful. Good-day to you, Mr. Rowe. Eleven to-morrow morning I shall expect you!" and he closed the door behind him.

So Miss Denton had paid the doctor for me! I thanked Providence that I possessed even so much as four pounds. I determined to oblige her to take back the money, for I discovered a sudden fiery impatience of being indebted to her for anything.

"Where are my clothes?" I asked the waiter.

He pointed to a chair; my suit was beautifully pressed and folded, it looked as good as new: but my shirt and collar made me feel inclined to weep. However, the man for a consideration undertook to obtain for me fresh linen, and a new hat, from a shopkeeper who lived on his premises near by, and who entertained no religious scruples about Sunday trading. While he was gone, I indulged in the luxury of a good hot plunge bath, and by lunch time was able to present quite a respectable appearance to the world.

My first act was to properly bind up the Push Book, and all its loose papers; I made up my mind to give it into Miss Denton's charge as the best chance of procuring its safety, for I did not know how I was going to escape from Sydney without money, and I felt that in my possession it would be in constant peril of recapture by the Push. Counting over my money I found that I had £2 18s. left. Of this I had to give Miss Denton £2 2s. The room would cost me five shillings, my lunch 3s. 6d., and I must give half-a-crown to the waiter. This would leave me exactly five shillings upon which to commence life anew. I confess I found the prospect very disagreeable. I had now not a friend in the world from whom I could confidently expect even so much as a night's lodging. I had no profession to depend upon, and my broken University training had supplied me with the poorest possible equipment wherewith to fight the world. The most I could hope for was to seek and obtain some petty clerkship during the next day or two, while my five shillings lasted, and before my new linen became disreputable from constant use. After that I knew that I should have no chance at all, and I should be constrained to either enter the army of houseless beggars and Domain loafers, or else join the ranks of the sundowners, and make my way out into the country in search of work as a day labourer; and this, of course, provided that in the meantime I were not caught and "dealt with" by the Push.

With a shoulder shrug, and the reflection that crying would not cure my state, I took up the Book, and passing into the corridor, sought the dining hall. Miss Denton was seated alone in the farthest corner of the room. I went straight up to her, bowed, and asked might I share her table.

"Why of course!" she replied, but she did not meet my eyes. She was perfectly dressed, and looked so composed and beautiful that I could

have thought the wild happenings of last night the dream of a fevered and diseased imagination. It was with a sense of strange coldness and diffidence that I took a chair and sat to face her.

"I have a favour to ask," I said.

"Yes." She did not look up.

"I want you to take charge of — of the Book." I placed it on the table before her. "You see I shall not be able to leave Sydney as soon as you, and in my custody it can never be safe — while I am here. Do you mind?"

"No." She took and placed it on her lap. Still she did not glance at me.

I put before her two sovereigns and two shillings, while a waiter was helping me to soup. "Thank you very much for sending Dr. Cavanagh to me," I said; "I think, however, it was unwise of you to disregard my advice. You should not have left the hotel."

She blushed hotly, took up the money, and gave it to the waiter; a creature of impulse she was ever, and ever will be. The man stared at her aghast, quite unable to realise his good fortune.

Miss Denton stamped her foot. "Go!" she said.

The fellow hurried away, muttering incoherent thanks. Then we looked at each other, long and full. I know that my eyes were hard and defiant. My heart burned with angry pride. Whatever her feelings may have been, her eyes were hot and brilliant; their message was illegible in everything, save that I knew she disapproved me.

I held up my left hand, and pointed to the ring, steadily holding her glance the while. "I cannot give it to you yet," I said, "you see it is on my bandaged finger. You must leave me your address, so that I may send it after you. I am very sorry!"

Her lower lids showed swift tracts of light above the lashes, and two diamond tears overflowed and trickled down her cheeks.

"You are very cruel!" she muttered, and rising suddenly, left the table and the room without a single backward glance. The Push Book fell to the floor, but she did not heed. I picked it up, and thought at first to follow her, but on a swift reflection refrained. What right had I to intrude upon her; what right to dare impute her tears to anything but a sudden woman weakness, or perhaps a sense of angry resentment at my ingratitude?

I called in philosophy to my aid; I told myself that this was probably the last proper lunch I should have a chance of discussing for years. In truth, I was very hungry, but such was my preoccupation and the turmoil of my feelings, that though I ate what was placed before me, every mouthful tasted bitterly, and in my throat was a painful constriction which often made me choke.

I was glad to have done. I hurried back to my room, and having hidden the book beneath my vest, placed in my coat pockets my uncle's two

revolvers, and then made my way downstairs to the office to pay my bill and go. I had made up my mind, acting on a blind emotional impulse, to leave without saying “good-bye” to Miss Denton. Indeed, I feared to, I was so worked upon, and strung to such a pitch of nervous feeling, that I dreaded breaking down before her, and rendering her final impression of me, one of unmanly weakness, meet only for contempt. Issuing from the office, I came face to face with her. She wore a hat, she carried a sunshade, and was dressed completely for the street. Her face was white as milk, but her eyes shone like stars.

“You are going out!” I cried.

“Are not you?”

“Oh!” I said, impatiently. “It is not the same. I must. I have no excuse to linger here. Besides, I am a man, and armed!”

“You were going for good; you would not have said ‘good-bye’ to me!” she muttered, huskily, it seemed to me.

I was silent.

She swept past me. She descended the steps and turned to the left, towards the gardens and the Domain.

With a curse on her folly, I followed her, but at a distance. It was my duty to defend her, my duty to see that while in the city which I had rendered perilous to her she should come to no harm. No more dangerous place could she have chosen for her walk. On Sunday afternoons both the Botanical Gardens and the Domain are invariably invaded by the more youthful class of larrikins in force. At such times their habit is to occupy the benches, or lie upon the grass, and, in their parlance, “nark the nobs” — that is, “guy” respectable foot passengers as they passed. Miss Denton walked up Bent Street and entered the Domain. Without a pause she proceeded down the long avenue of giant fig-trees leading towards Woolloomooloo Bay. I could not but think that her purpose was deliberate. For a Sydney-bred girl, she must have known that she was going to the heart of danger. It would have been better for her to have entered the Gardens, for there the crowd was always greater and more mixed, and consequently our peril less. The Domain was filled that afternoon with scattered groups of ill-clad folk. Stump orators, standing on benches, harangued the idlers on every subject under heaven; and wild-eyed religious fanatics danced in rings, loudly confessing their sins to the music of hand-organs and derisive outcries. Larrikins were much in evidence. When half-way down the avenue, we passed two large groups squatting on their haunches upon the damp grass about fifty yards apart, each mob pelting the other with twigs and gravel, and exchanging laughing but foul-mouthed “chiack.” Either group might have been composed of young Dogs. Fortunately they were too much occupied to notice us. Miss Denton walked with proud carriage, her chin in the air, as though defying fate. Her gait, like all about her, was beautiful to watch,

but I should have been more content to enjoy its contemplation elsewhere. A stone hurled by a practised hand might at any minute bring her to earth, stunned and bleeding, dead perhaps. I confess I gripped my revolver continually. I should have drawn and used it on the smallest provocation. On reaching the Art Gallery, I saw two policemen mounting guard before the doors, and I muttered a prayer that she might be inclined to end her ramble there. But she passed on, and descending the little hill upon which the Gallery is perched, took a seat at last in a lonely glen, entirely shaded by myall and mimosa trees. Perhaps my fears made me over-anxious, but nevertheless it seemed to me to be mercilessly tempting fate to linger long in such a spot. It was hidden, certainly, from the gaze of passers-by but if any young Dog had chanced to mark our progress, it would have been child's play for him, with a few companions, to creep up and put a term to our existence with one flight of stones. Larrikins are practised and skilful stone-throwers. Many of the more youthful ones can depend upon hitting quite a small mark from a considerable distance, and it is their pride to excel each other in a pursuit which they have exalted to a science. Miss Denton did not appear to know that I was within a hundred miles of her. She laid her parasol upon the bench, folded her hands, and seemed to give herself up to dreams. Hot with anger, I strode over the grass and stood before her. She started a little, but made no pretence of surprise.

"So you followed me?" she said.

"Why did you do it?" I cried, bitterly. "There was no need to risk your life again."

She looked at me with big inquiring eyes. "I wished to discover if you cared."

"Are you still curious?"

"No, not now."

"You think because I followed you——"

"I know," she interrupted. Then, "Lucas, you were wrong — about — about the ring."

"I was wrong? How — how do you mean?"

"I did not wish you to return me the ring I gave you."

"What then?"

She looked down, blushing faintly. "I — I came back to Sydney to — to ask you — for — for another."

I did not understand. I told her so.

But she was cast in confusion. She turned her face away. "Think," she muttered.

"I cannot," I answered harshly, and added, "I shall not, I do not wish ever to think again. Would to heaven there were no such thing as memory."

"Ah!" she cried, "you make it very hard for me," and got to her feet.

She was trembling; she hid her face in her hands. “We are not strangers,” she whispered.

“Not yet,” said I.

“You are cruel!”

“You repeat yourself!” I said, hoarsely; “but I am willing to confess myself the greatest brute in your regard.”

Suddenly she stood erect and faced me. Her eyes were luminous and tender, yet strangely defiant.

“It was a wedding-ring!” she said, and blushed to her brows.

I fell on my knees before her, of a sudden grown so miserably lonely, so craving to be comforted that I had to bite my lip to keep from tears. I kissed the hem of her gown, and cried, brokenly, “You are an angel of goodness, May, and I am almost cad enough to take you at your word! But not quite” — and I stood again. “You must go back at once to the hotel!”

She put her hand upon my arm. “With you?”

I nodded. I dared not look at her. We climbed the hill and turned into the avenue, citywards. It was a great while before I could conquer my emotion. She spoke to me only twice, and at long intervals.

“You are my lover — my lover!” she whispered first, and pressed my arm.

“I shall always be that,” I replied.

Then again, “We can be married in Melbourne.”

I shook my head. I think she smiled.

At the Domain gates we came upon my uncle and John Robin. They seemed to be waiting for us. My uncle had his head bandaged, and wore a low slouch hat, which half concealed his condition. Both men were respectably attired, and their demeanour was nervous but restrained. Miss Denton turned deathly white to see them, and leaned heavily upon my arm. I was surprised and a little shocked, but I can honestly declare I was never cooler nor more self-possessed in my life. They came straight up to us and blocked our path. I did not, however, fear violence then, for within twenty yards two policemen were standing in converse. They bowed gravely to Miss Denton, and my uncle said to me in a low voice:

“Give me back the Book, and you and your young lady can go free. I swear it before God!”

I looked him straight in the eyes and said, “I am glad to have met you to explain. Neither you nor yours shall ever see the Book again. I have it, and shall keep it as a guarantee of the future good conduct of yourself and the Push. If ever you commit another murder, or if ever any person at Miller's Point mysteriously commits suicide or disappears (you understand my meaning?), well, the moment that I shall hear of any such occurrence — and I shall watch your conduct closely, no matter where I may be — that moment I shall place your Book in the hands of the

police. Do not deceive yourself with the idea that I should not dare. The Book is in my power. I have already destroyed the papers which incriminate myself with you; therefore, I should be perfectly safe in giving it to the police, and you to justice. You know what must happen in such a case. You and your wicked associates must inevitably be hanged! This is my last word with you. I bid you for your own sakes reform, and reform at once, or as surely as there is a God in heaven you shall die the deaths you all so richly merit. Now go! No, do not open your lips to me, I forbid it! One word, and I shall give you in charge to the police yonder!"

They shrank aside silently, though the venom in their eyes seemed to poison all the atmosphere.

With a sharp breath I drew the girl on, and we passed them; she was shaking like a leaf. "Do not look back," I muttered. "We must not let them suppose we regard them with a grain of fear."

We reached the hotel and ascended quickly to the drawing-room. There arrived, I shut the door, and she broke down, in a sort of hysterical outburst, laughing and sobbing in a breath. On the hulk and throughout the perils she had passed she had been brave as any man, and exhibited no smallest sign of fear. She had indeed comported herself in such a manner as to make me often marvel at her extraordinary courage. But now she was attacked with an agony of terror as outrageous as it was unreasoning. Even when I finally soothed her from her tears, she could not find calm. She continually implored me to save her; shuddered at the slightest sound. With every step in the corridor without she stood up, her face pallid and deathly, and seemed on the point to scream. Her abandon was as absolute as had been her former immobility, and my heart bled to observe her sufferings, which I found myself powerless to alleviate. Fortunately the room was deserted save for us, and throughout the afternoon no soul intruded on our privacy. She seemed to be haunted with a vision of my uncle's baleful eyes. She cried out constantly for me to take them from her; she talked with them, and besought them to go away, wildly telling them that she had done them no harm. It was not till she was sheer exhausted that her reason gradually reassumed its sway. But at last she lay back upon the cushions, and, weak as a child, implored me to forgive her for the trouble she had cost me. My answer was to kiss her hands and warn her of the time. It was then almost six, and the train set out at seven.

She told me that her luggage was already packed, but I insisted that she should have some dinner before she went, and I noted that her disposition was to yield to me in all things. We dined together silently, I joining her, with a sad reflection on the waste of my last few shillings, but unable to refrain from the pleasure of remaining with her to the end. Afterwards she gave me her purse, and asked me to pay her bill while

she went to dress. My own meal cost me four shillings, so it was that I came down to my last shilling. When she returned, cloaked and gloved, we descended the stairs and entered a waiting cab.

I said to her, “I am extremely sorry, May, but I shall have to ask you for a loan after all, or else I shall not be able to accompany you beyond the platform bar.”

She smiled, and handed me her purse. I took out a shilling and two pence, then returned it to her; she received it still smiling strangely to herself. I paid the cab, and bought a platform ticket, shrugging my shoulders to think that I should have to spend the night in the open air, for I had now not a penny in the world, and I owed Miss Denton the money I had borrowed. She walked to the ticket-office while I attended to her luggage, and presently we met again. I found her seated in an ordinary first class carriage. It was empty save for her. I said, “Not here, May. You must go into a ladies' carriage.”

She held out her hand and showed me two tickets. “I shall be quite safe with you, dear,” she answered, and smiled divinely. A great temptation assailed me. I said to myself, “Why not take her at her word? As her husband you will be able to forget the past, and your life will be one long dream of happiness.” But then I thought, “No, she cannot love me; it is not possible. She is influenced by compassion!” I turned sharply away, and strode towards the bars, my eyes burning with tears forced back. I thought it was for ever. I felt I had not the strength to say farewell to her. I intended to hurry off, where I did not know — anywhere, so that it was a lonely place, would do. It was the sight of a face which made me pause, a cruel, venomous face, with little twinkling hate-filled eyes, which glared at me from the window of a second class carriage — my uncle's face! Quick as a flash I swung on heel; it was almost time for the train to leave. Porters were locking the doors, and the stationmaster stood by the clock, bell in hand. By some magic, May Denton stood before me. She was panting, and her face was very white. “You would not dare to leave me!” she cried. I hurried her back to her carriage, and springing in, sat beside her. The door clanged, the bell rang, and with a great shrill of steam we were off.

May shook my arm almost fiercely. She still breathed very quickly.

“You would have left me! Why was it?”

“Ask me rather why I returned.”

“Tell me.” Her eyes grew big with alarm.

“They are on the train, in a carriage behind us — my uncle, and probably others of the Push.”

I had thought she would have shown some of her former terror; but, on the contrary, she smiled.

“You are not afraid?” I asked, amazed.

“Bless them!” she answered happily. “They sent you back to me,” and

laughing and crying in a breath, she threw herself into my arms.

I had still strength enough to put her from me. I forced her to meet my eyes, and said, “You should not tempt me too far, May. You pity me, I know; but remember that I love you, and am not over-strong.”

She put both her hands upon my breast. “Lucas,” she murmured, gravely, and her voice and eyes were very tender, “you once asked me how much I loved you — and you spoke of crime — do you remember what my answer was?”

“I do.”

“Well, I do not think you have committed any great crime, dear. I have thought and thought, and tried to see how you could have acted differently, but I could not. But even if you could, and failed, even had you been a much greater sinner—— Stay, you say that your uncle is on the train. Well, if it were possible, and you were he, with all his guilt, my love for you could not change. It is true I would loathe your crimes, true that I could never marry you; but truer than all is this, which is truth itself, no man but you could ever be my husband.”

I gazed at her adoringly. “You love me!” I cried; “you love me!”

“Ah,” she said, “I have behaved ill to you, ill to love. I should never have left you, never have caused you the pain of believing that my heart had changed. It had not, dear. I knew, I felt all the while that in my deepest depths I should always be utterly yours, and in my deepest heart I had nothing but pity for your past, for your undeserved sufferings, and admiration for the manner in which you had raised yourself above your cruel surroundings; but — and this is my confession, Lucas — a black, pitiful pride came over me. Because you had deceived me, I thought, I dared to think you had lied to me in love. Worse than that — ah, dear, I am sore ashamed to say it — I thought of what must happen if by any chance your connection with those men, and your birth and parentage should become known. And I thought of the sneers of the world which, as your wife, I should have to share! Was it not base of me?”

“No,” I cried, “it was not base of you to think such things, but it is base of me to dream of allowing you to incur such risks. May, I can never marry you!”

She smiled in my face, and answered very gravely, “Lucas, dear, you shall marry me, and to-morrow, when we arrive in Melbourne. If you refuse, I give you my word of honour I shall return to Sydney, and stay there until you are reconciled to your fate! Is it such a dreadful fate, Lucas, dear?”

Another and better man, more strong in his duty, and his honour, may have withstood such powerful temptation. But not I. I could not, and the crowded happiness of six perfect years has reconciled me to my failure. I took my sweetheart in my arms, and usuriously repaid myself for the wasted hours of our separation, nor did I think again to combat her sweet

will.

Nine miles from Sydney the train stopped at Strathfield Junction, and two gentlemen entered our carriage. I was far from regretting their presence, although it constrained us thereafter to be decorous and converse in whispers. My uncle passed the window, and glanced in, but made no sign of recognition; no doubt he cursed to mark our reinforcement. At Moss Vale we halted for twenty minutes for dinner. Our fellow-travellers departed to seek refreshment, but I did not dare, for I thought my uncle would be waiting some such opportunity to work us ill. I closed the door, and waited beside it, pistol in hand. I had not to wait long. In a very few minutes the platform was quite deserted. Three men sprang from the shadows and approached our carriage. They were my uncle, John Robin, and Dave Gardner. My uncle seized the handle and threw open the door. I presented the revolver in his face. “You cannot come in here!” I said, sternly.

“Bah!” said he; “you dare not use it. You can't play bluff with me. I want the Book, and I'll have it. No use calling the guard. We've got first class tickets, and just as much right here as yourself!”

What he had said was true. I dared not use the pistol except as a last extremity, for I had no wish to figure in a trial for either murder or manslaughter. Seeing his point, I stepped back and sat beside my sweetheart, who was, I believe, in a great terror. “Come in if you want to!” I called out, quite genially. “I cannot say that you are welcome, but if you must, you must.”

The villain looked rather disconcerted, but he entered, and, with his companions, sat immediately before us. Miss Denton was beside the window. I whispered to her, “Go out and enter a ladies' carriage. I shall keep them here.”

“And leave you; no, never!” she muttered.

“It is for both our lives.”

“No.”

I looked her in the eyes. “I command it!”

She gave a little sob, but she obeyed.

The three ruffians watched her departure with the greatest solicitude.

“Where's she off to?” growled my uncle.

I smiled. “Just to have a word or two with the guard,” and taking my sweetheart's place, I crossed my legs, with affected nonchalance. I placed my revolver on the seat between my thigh and the carriage wall, but arranged the stock ready to my hand, then calmly lighted a cigarette. My cool assurance evidently tortured the feelings of my enemies; they shifted about most uneasily.

My uncle cried out: “See here, Lucas, give us the Book, and you can go! I mean it, s'elp me Gord!”

I contemptuously puffed a smoke wreath in his direction.

“My dear uncle!” I replied, suavely, “I am grieved, but what you ask is impossible. Even if I could depend implicitly upon your word — and, pardon me, I am afraid I cannot — I should not depart from my present attitude. You see I have determined to reform the Push. If you will trouble to reflect you must remember that I always had an ambition in that direction, and once was sufficiently a fatuous fool to believe your sworn promise, and the Push's, that the Push would never again dip its hands in blood. My ambition has not relaxed in spite of your broken vows, and now I possess an assurance of your good behaviour which I prefer to trust rather than all the oaths in the world. As reasonable men, you cannot blame me for refusing to part with it, eh?”

“It only means we'll have to kill you!” he grated out.

“You tried recently, and failed!” I observed.

“We are all armed,” he cried.

“Indeed.”

“And we're desperate; we're sworn to die rather than go back without the Book. You'd better give it up!”

“I'll take my chances!” I answered, coolly; for all that I was shaking in my shoes.

They put their heads together, and started muttering, and so they were engaged when the two gentlemen, my former fellow-passengers, returned. Presently a bell rang, and the train recommenced its journey. My uncle stared at me, looking as though he could not believe his eyes on the failure of my sweetheart to return; but I affected to take no notice of him. The gentleman who sat beside me asked me how far I was going.

I replied, “To Melbourne; and you, sir?”

“Wagga Wagga. You must be cold without a rug; these warming pans are not up to much; share mine, won't you?”

I thanked him civilly, and we entered into a conversation which lasted until we had passed both Goulburn and Yass. Then he commenced to doze; his companion was already fast asleep, propped up against the further window. I prepared myself for a struggle, and gripped my revolver under cover of the rug. My uncle said, in a low voice, “I give you one last chance!”

I sat up and cried out very loudly, “Are you addressing me, sir?”

My companion opened his eyes with a start, and looked round.

My uncle spread out his hands; his face grown sickly pale. “No offence, sir; no offence!” he protested in a choking voice.

“I'm glad to hear it,” I said, sternly.

“What was the matter?” asked my companion.

I shrugged my shoulders. “That fellow made a silly remark to me, which I resented. That's all!”

The gentleman settled himself to sleep again, and I pretended to follow his example, but I watched my enemies narrowly through half-closed

lids. In about a quarter-hour my companion commenced to breathe heavily. My uncle glanced at Robin; Robin nodded, and all three stood up. I waited, every nerve on edge; I wanted to lure them to an assault, so that I should have an excuse to use my pistol. They could only approach me from the front, for I was in a corner. All three took vials from their pockets, the contents of which they poured on their handkerchiefs. They glanced swiftly at each other, nodded, and as at a signal, Robin and Gardner sprang upon my fellow-passengers, while my uncle launched himself on me. The whole compartment simply reeked with the fumes of chloroform. I had long been prepared to act. Even as my uncle made his spring, I threw off the rug, and struck out with my pistol. He fell back dazed from the blow. Next second I was on my feet, and standing on the cushions. I struck him a second time, and not waiting to ascertain the result, gave Dave Gardner, who was nearest me, a terrible kick on the forehead, then fired point blank at Robin, who had his back turned.

I was master of the situation. My three enemies were, for a moment at least, quite *hors de combat*. I occupied my leisure by smashing the glass of the alarm, and pushing the electric button communicating with the guard's van, then I retreated to my corner, and waited. Robin, who had pitched over on his face, was the first to rise. My bullet had ripped along the whole length of his back, tearing a long strip from his coat, and had smashed through the carriage wall. He was not wounded; he turned and looked at me with the eyes of a trapped devil. I mocked at him. “The train is stopping! In five minutes you will all be in irons; no, up with your hands or I'll blow your brains out.” He had moved his hand to his breast, where no doubt was some weapon.

My uncle presently staggered up, groaning; his face was covered with blood, perhaps the wound of yesterday had reopened. “Air, air; open the door!” he gasped; “open the door and get off. I can do no more. I'm done, I'm done.”

“Yes!” I said, “open the door and go!”

Robin turned the handle, and with one furious effort of his great strength, forced the lock; the door crashed back, letting in a stream of cold, exhilarating air. Only then I realised how near I was myself to suffocation, but the blast revived me. The train was by then going only at a moderate speed, with all its brakes jarring. Robin dragged Dave Gardner to his feet, and shook him vigorously; the fellow half came to his senses, and with the others jumped or tumbled from the carriage. I sprang to the aperture, and looked out, but could see nothing, except that we were apparently running down a long and steep incline. When I turned, one of my fellow-passengers was sitting up, gasping for breath. I had no time to give him explanation, for presently the train came to a standstill, and three faces almost instantaneously appeared at the open doorway — the engine-driver, and two men in uniform.

“What's the meaning of this!” demanded the guard, who seemed indignant at the stoppage of the train.

Very quietly I told them my story. Three passengers, who had boarded the train at Moss Vale, had, while my companions slept and I was dozing, attempted to chloroform and rob us. I had, fortunately, waked in time to frustrate their efforts, and, having a pistol, had been able to terrorise them while I rang the alarm. When they realised that they must be caught, they had broken open the door, and jumped from the carriage. I had fired at them as they departed, but thought I had missed. I pointed to the bullet mark in the carriage wall, and to one drugged and still unconscious passenger (the gentleman who had been assaulted by John Robin) in corroboration.

All was excitement and bustle. The guard forgot his indignation, and warmly praised me. The drugged gentleman was laid upon the floor, and restored to his senses by a liberal application of cold water; meanwhile the whole train woke up. Several passengers issued from the sleeping-cars, and joined our throng, and heads appeared out of all the other windows, of people, men and women, who were clamorously curious to know what had happened, if the train had broken down, and so forth. I had to recount my story several times, and was presently the hero of the train. A suggestion was made to form a party and return to look for the robbers, but I assured the crowd that they had jumped off immediately the breaks were applied, probably some miles back. The guard came to my assistance, and sternly vetoed the proposal, because the train carried the mails, and it was already behind time. The passengers were presently hurried back to their cars, and once more we started on our way. For an hour or two I was obliged to listen to the perfervid thanks of my fellow-passengers, one of whom, in a burst of confidence, informed me that he was carrying a large sum of money on his person to pay the monthly wages of his employees, in a mine which he owned near Wagga Wagga. He seemed to think that his money was the sole objective motive of the attempted crime, and very glad was I to perceive him the victim of such a delusion. At Junee Junction I was able to communicate to my sweetheart the glad news that we had finally shaken off the Push, whereupon she insisted upon returning to my carriage. A police constable was presently haled before us. He proved a bucolic, slow-brained fellow, but possessed of a most exaggerated idea of his own importance. When he knew all, he was at first for insisting that I should leave the train and remain at Junee so as to be on hand when the robbers should be caught, to give evidence against them. This naturally I flatly refused to do, and taking a high hand, defied him to arrest me. He was plainly very puzzled how to decide; but I had the whole train with me, and he finally gave way before their increasing murmurs. He took my address, which I gave as Menzies Hotel, and then perceiving that I was a first-class passenger, and not a

commercial traveller, became more respectful. My gentlemen fellow-passengers restored his complacency completely by informing him that they both intended to spend the night at Junee Junction before proceeding to Wagga, and that they could identity the robbers quite easily, and give evidence sufficient to convict them without my assistance at all.

When this business was satisfactorily concluded, and the train already quite twenty minutes delayed, the bucolic policeman ambled off to set the telegraph in operation. Really he had done everything in his power to give my uncle a good start. The mine owner, with a cautious tenderness towards his own pocket which he believed I had saved, then took off his hat, and proposed that the assembled crowd should contribute a testimonial to honour my heroism, in fighting and putting to flight three desperate criminals. The suggestion was heartily acclaimed. I protested and protested, but to no purpose, and presently was obliged, between laughter and indignation, to receive and pocket a hatful of miscellaneous coins, which amounted, as I afterwards discovered, to exactly five pounds, six and sixpence.

As we moved out from the station the people assembled on the platform gave me a rousing cheer, which was echoed by every soul aboard the train.

I turned to my sweetheart, my cheeks hot with shame. “I could not help myself,” I muttered in apology.

“You deserved it — deserved it richly!” she cried. Which asseveration proves that Miss Denton loved me with less discretion of rational judgment than emotion, but I take comfort on reflection, for though I have travelled far and studied the hearts and minds of diverse peoples in half the great cities of the earth, I have yet to meet the man who would not rather be loved for the sake of Love, who, like Justice, is a blindfolded deity, than for the sake of reason. The truth is, that if we poor humans were condemned to be loved in proportion to our intrinsic merit, with the exception of a few gloriously sweet and perfect women, in whose ranks is my sweetheart eminent, we should scarcely taste of happiness, if happiness consists, as I believe, in loving perfectly and being perfectly beloved. But Providence, lenient to our frailties, for which perhaps He is in some wise responsible, has mercifully decreed that love may achieve its highest state, in spite of our shortcomings, and often because of them.

For a long while I gazed out of the window, watching the flying spectres of rocks and hills and great, gaunt trees, which sped past, illumined during fragments of seconds, by the yellow carriage lights, or tricked into ghostly chiaroscuro by pale steam clouds from the engine. My mind was swelling with thoughts the like of which I had never entertained before; but they were welcome visitors, however much

unknown, even though their joy was tinged with a sadness inexpressible of speech. I felt my unworthiness acutely, but my happiness still more. It is perhaps the appreciation of our poor deserts which enables us to cherish at their proper value the rich gifts of the gods, and I sometimes think that the happiness of perfect creatures, if there be any entirely such, must be marred of one of its keenest pleasures, by their consciousness of enjoying merely their due reward.

I wished to tell my sweetheart some of these thoughts of mine, and a little wondering, too, at her own silence, I turned to her at last.

She was kneeling, her head bent reverently above her folded hands, like a child at prayer, but as I moved she raised her face and looked at me. Her eyes were infinitely joyous though they shone through tears, and her lips were parted in a tremulous and tender smile. It was as though she were speaking, though silent, and my heart ached suddenly to know. “Yes, dear, yes?” I cried.

Her smile became ecstatic as she answered in a low, sweet whisper, “I am thanking God for His goodness to us, dear.”

L'Envoi

MY uncle, Daniel Rowe, and his councillor, David Gardner, were captured near the spot where they had sprung from the train, each having been severely injured from the fall. They were sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labour, on the evidence of the mine owner and his friend, my gentlemen fellow passengers on that memorable journey. John Robin made good his escape, and returned safely to Sydney, where he assumed command of the Push during my uncle's incarceration.

Through the goodness of my wife, I subsequently repaid to the Push and to my uncle every farthing which I had cost them for my maintenance and education from childhood upwards. Since the day that I departed from Australia, taking with me the Push Book, the Dogs' Push have not once engaged themselves in any crime of moment. No mysterious disappearances have occurred, no Push murder has been committed in or near the district, and not even a solitary assault upon a policeman has been reported. Nevertheless, I continue to watch their conduct narrowly, and four times each year I send a letter to my uncle, warning him of my unabated vigilance and unrelaxed determination. Six years have passed, years of almost perfect happiness for my wife and me, whose only cloud, other than memoried sadness, has been the custody of the Book, with the duties which that custody involves. And yet even that is not all a curse. We recognise it as the fief on which we hold our happiness from fate, and it forbids us to forget, neglect, or value lightly the blessings we enjoy, because of the shadowy possibility, haunting ever like a spectre, of a task which may one day devolve upon us, and which, should occasion arise, we must fulfil. It is our constant prayer that Destiny may avert that task for ever, and that the terrible weapon we hold may never be wielded except as now — a sword of fear, to compel the perverse hearts of my old associates to the paths of rectitude.

My greatest hope is this — with the Push crime was never a necessity, but rather an evil habit into which they had allowed themselves to fall. The whole universe is ruled by habit, the stars revolve in their courses steadfastly of habit, the old earth gives us day and night, summer and winter, from the same cause, and even the sun shines, of habit. We call this habit law, fixed and unalterable, but it is really no such thing. The fixed and unalterable law of the universe and Nature is habit. A course commenced becomes presently a custom. Divert that course, the

direction changes, but not the destiny. The moon was once a living world like ours revolving round the sun perhaps as we do now. Its course was diverted, it died, but its habit continued, and it now speeds round the earth a dead thing, but a thing of habit still. Therefore my hope is that the Push, its course diverted from evil, will assume the habit of virtue, and continue in that custom as steadfastly as in the old.

As for myself, I am now a student at an English University, and it is my purpose to become a surgeon, because that profession affords to its votary a wider scope than any other to confer benefits upon his fellow creatures. I cannot rid myself of the conviction that I owe to the world reparation not only for the death of Edward Shaw but also for those lives wasted by the Push since I was first constrained to join their ranks. I shall strive to pay my debt by doing all within my power to save or help prolong the lives of friendless beings who would otherwise sink to death in lonely poverty and pain, unattended, uncared for, unremarked. In London there are many such who perish day by day. I have seen; I know. London will be my future home, and there I hope to find my destiny. My wife approves; she is my counsellor, my helpmate, guide, and constant friend.

A last word. Mr. and Mrs. Shaw are both long dead. Poor Edward Shaw's sweetheart lives with us. She is a generous and helpful woman, who knows my story, and yet bears me no resentment. Her life is devoted and made sacred to a memory. My wife and she share my ambition. They are together studying the art of nursing the sick, and when I am prepared to enter the arena and do battle with disease, they will be ready to perform their parts in the common work, which as yet it is our dearest joy to anticipate in contemplation.