—that he can pump that mine dry, buy up all the stock practically for nothing except ours, and he lets our little [illegible] keep him from pumping, he's crazy. But if he pumps we shall have an income. It's a gambler's chance, and I am going to take it."

"Yes, sounds gambly," I commented, "what the poker players call a bluff."

"I'm not bluffing; I'm standing pat," Jo reminded me. "And I'm taking the chance because I want to end this work of yours, and these silly—accusations."

WE had walked to the end of the wide hallway, and I dropped down in a window-seat, grossly neglecting my duties and forgetting that my friends were apt to be [illegible]. The prospect of going back to the only little life Jo and I once led suddenly appalled me.

"I don't want you to—to end it!" I stammered, and, seeing Jo's amazed expression, I went on. "Being Secretary of Frivolous [illegible] isn't important, I know, but it's my [illegible] now. I can't go back to things as they were. I should never be satisfied."

"You can't seriously mean that you want to keep on with this, being a well paid servant of the rich?" she asked.

"Yes," I admitted.

Her eyelashes swept her cheeks for a moment. "I'm sorry, Dear," she said softly.

"Why sorry?"

"It's dangerous."

"Why dangerous? I'm quite capable of taking care of myself. You said so."

"You're already in trouble."

"Yes, but my heart's broken now, and there isn't anything more to worry about. I'll never love anyone else. I have a good job and—well, I'm going to stick to it. And if the Hazards don't want me any longer [illegible] do, and there's a long list of [illegible]. I won't bother [illegible] name. I've [illegible] good in my job—[illegible] reminds me [illegible] I don't go look after [illegible] may not have [illegible] long." I rose. It [illegible] occurred to me that I was pushing Jo [illegible] my scheme [illegible] the dress[illegible]. "Use the stock [illegible], Dear, and take a tip from me [illegible] take care of yourself."

"Why, what do you mean?" I asked; but [illegible] sure she knew what I was going to [illegible].

"[illegible] Crowninshield [illegible] looked twice [illegible] woman in his life. He has looked at you [illegible] I don't know how many [illegible], for I don't know how many interviews have been necessary about that stock." I thrust out a forefinger dramatically. "Beware!"

IT was perhaps ten o'clock when Jo took a notion to see the gallery. The notion was [illegible] sudden, too. She even interrupted [illegible] to say so apropos of nothing. We met [illegible] on the stairs as we went up. I remember afterward that he looked puzzled and flushed a little. He shouted to Burrows from the stairs.

"Who locked the [illegible]?"

"No one, Sir."

"It's locked. Have it unlocked! Where is Thomas?"

"I don't know, Sir."

There was more anger in the way he spoke to Burrows than such a simple thing warranted. He came up to the gallery with [illegible] glaring at the cardroom door as we passed.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Do you want to play poker?"

"No, but I want the room unlocked. It's supposed to be [illegible]." He climbed upward in silence.

"Well, you might quit looking like a thundercloud," I suggested presently. "I haven't [illegible], have I?"

He glanced up to where Jo and John Crowninshield were disappearing into the gallery, and apropos of nothing he seized my hand and pressed it to his lips.

Inside the picture gallery was Thomas, the footman about whom Hap had asked Burrows. When Jo and John Crowninshield entered they found him standing in front of the Velasquez, staring at it oddly. He must have been bored, of course. Upon our entrance he turned and stalked out. Hap looked after him with a pucker of perplexity on his forehead.

Jo was surprised at the size of the gallery, as I had been. She hadn't expected it. She walked the length of the room, then turned back.

"Are all these pictures originals?" she asked.

"No," John answered [illegible]. "A few are copies, but valuable [illegible]."

"Let's see if I can pick the copies," she suggested, and walked the length of the gallery again.

Hap and I dropped down on a bench; but John followed her.

"That one," said Jo [illegible].

"Oh, that's easy," John [illegible]. "The original is in the National Gallery, and you know it."

"And this!"

"No, that's a Greuze," John explained.

"Sorry," smiled Jo. "Greuze made so many heads, didn't he? Is the Lely next to it genuine?"

"Yes."

"Is that a Velasquez, or a copy?" Hap asked her, and indicated the disputed picture before which we were sitting.

"I don't know," Jo replied. "I'd say," she chose her distance and looked at it a long time, "copy."

"It's disputed," John told her. "Five experts say it isn't; twelve say it is. Fred—Mr. Hazard—believed it was an original and bought it."

"The old geezer used to frighten me when I was a kid," Hap remarked; "but he doesn't seem so fierce now. His eyes always looked so—well, clean through, you know, 'baleful,' a novelist would say. I'd call them watery now." He regarded the old geezer smilingly. "Pleasant looking customer, isn't he?"

"I'd hate to meet him up a dark alley," John laughed.

"That's a copy, isn't it?" asked Jo, and pointed to a picture on the opposite wall.

"No, a real Vandyke," John replied.

"I'll quit guessing!" Jo exclaimed; but she crossed the room and stood for a long time before the Vandyke.

"Aren't you afraid to leave all these beautiful pictures here in the country?" she asked finally, coming back to where they were.

"They are insured," Hap answered.

"Against fire or theft?"

"Fire. No one wants to steal them. No one has an opportunity. I'd like to see a thief get away with that big fellow! Jenkins sits on the steps all winter with a gun."

"Are they protected now?"

"Well, not with a gun. There's no need when we are here."

HAP tried the cardroom door as we descended. It gave to his touch and swung open. He switched on the lights and looked about. The room was quite in order. I couldn't see any cause for the pucker between his eyes. He lighted a cigarette and smoked it thoughtfully as we descended the stairs. He smoked where he pleased—he had learned to put the ashes in his pocket. Occasionally he would remove his cigarette from his lips, regard the lighted end intently, then smile, or frown, and smoke again. I watched the performance highly amused.

"A clue, Monsieur Lecocq?" I whispered.

"I'm a fool," he replied. "I'm letting my imagination run away with me."

"I can prove an alibi this time," I pursued flippantly. "I haven't been in the cardroom for a month."

"Please don't, Dear," he said quickly.

He was quite serious about it. A silly lump got into my throat. My feelings were always near the surface when he was serious. I glanced up and met that look in his eyes I was never going to be able to take care of.

"Who locked the door, Burrows?" he asked, when we reached the lower hall.

"It wasn't locked, Sir."

"You are quite sure, Burrows?"

"Quite sure, Sir."

"What was Thomas doing in the picture gallery?"

"I didn't know he was there, Sir."

"How long has he been here, Burrows?"

"Since we came to the country, Sir."

Whatever else Hap intended to say was not said. There was a commotion in the drawing room, a scurrying of feet, and the overturning of a chair. Natalie had fainted.

SOMEONE, Mrs. Higginson I believe it was, was shrieking excitedly to get her into the open air; but Jo reached her first, stretched her on the floor, flopped her over, and deftly and quickly unhooked her dress. She gave Natalie's corset strings a pull, and released them. Hardly a minute later Natalie, with her head on Jo's knee, opened her eyes. She was a bit bewildered and confused; but all right.

Jo sent for a wrap to cover Natalie's somewhat disarranged toilet and when she had quite recovered John Crowninshield and Benny Bliss assisted her up stairs.

"I wonder if she lost anything that time?" Jo said to me when we were alone.

I stared at her, startled. "Then you think—"

"I think, if she did, the thief is a woman, as Mr. Hazard thinks," Jo replied calmly. "The men got out when I started to undress her."

"It almost looked as if you did it purposely."

"I did. When I saw her fall I thought of what you told me of her fainting at the reception in town. I acted more quickly than

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