THE LION AND THE MOUSE.

By CHARLES KLEIN.

A Story of American Life Novelized From the Play by ARTHUR HORNBLOW.

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CHAPTER XV.

It was now December, and the senate had been in session for over a week. Jefferson had not forgotten his promise, and one day, about two weeks after Mr. Bagley's spectacular dismissal from the Ryder residence, he had brought Shirley the two letters. She did not ask him how he got them, if he forced the drawer or procured the key. It sufficed for her that the precious letters, the absolute proof of her father's innocence, were at last in her possession. She at once sent them off by registered mail to Stott, who immediately acknowledged receipt and at the same time announced his departure for Washington that night. He promised to keep her constantly informed of what he was doing and how her father's case was going. It could, he thought, be only a matter of a few days now before the result of the proceedings would be known.

The approach of the crisis made Shirley exceedingly nervous, and it was only by the exercise of the greatest self control that she did not betray the terrible anxiety she felt. The Ryder biography was nearly finished, and her stay in Seventy-fourth street would soon come to an end. She had a serious talk with Jefferson, who contrived to see a good deal of her, entirely unsuspected by his parents, for Mr. and Mrs. Ryder had no reason to believe that their son had any more than a mere bowing acquaintance with the clever young authoress. Now that Mr. Bagley was no longer there to spy upon their actions these clandestine interviews had been comparatively easy. Shirley brought to bear all the arguments she could think of to convince Jefferson of the hopelessness of their engagement. She insisted that she could never be his wife; circumstances over which they had no control made that dream impossible. It were better, she said, to part now rather than incur the risk of being unhappy later. But Jefferson refused to be convinced. He argued and pleaded, and he even swore—strange, desperate words that Shirley had never heard before and which alarmed her not a little—and the discussion ended usually by a kiss which put Shirley completely hors de combat.

Meantime, John Ryder had not ceased worrying about his son. The removal of Kate Roberts as a factor in his future had not eliminated the danger of Jefferson taking the bit between his teeth one day and contracting a secret marriage with the daughter of his enemy, and when he thought of the mere possibility of such a thing happening he stormed and raved until his wife, accustomed as she was to his choleric outbursts, was thoroughly frightened. For some time after Bagley's departure, father and son got along together fairly amicably, but Ryder senior was quick to see that Jefferson had something on his mind which was worrying him, and he rightly attributed it to his infatuation for Miss Rossmore. He was convinced that his son knew where the judge's daughter was, although his own efforts to discover her whereabouts had been unsuccessful.

Sergeant Ellison had confessed absolute failure. Miss Rossmore, he reported, had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed her, and further search was futile. Knowing well his son's impulsive, headstrong disposition, Ryder senior believed him quite capable of marrying the girl secretly any time. The only thing that John Ryder did not know was that Shirley Rossmore was not the kind of a girl to allow any man to inveigle her into a secret marriage. The Colossus, who judged the world's morals by his own, was not, of course, aware of this, and he worried night and day thinking what he could do to prevent his son from marrying the daughter of the man he had wronged.

The more he pondered over it the more he regretted that there was not some other girl with whom Jefferson could fall in love and marry. He need not seek a rich girl—there was certainly enough money in the Ryder family to provide for both. He wished they knew a girl, for example, as attractive and clever as Miss Green. Ah, he thought, there was a girl who would make a man of Jefferson—brainy, ambitious, active! And the more he thought of it the more the idea grew on him that Miss Green would be an ideal daughter-in-law and at the same time snatch his son from the clutches of the Rossmore woman.

Jefferson during all these weeks was growing more and more impatient. He knew that any day now Shirley might take her departure from their house and return to Massapequa. If the impeachment proceedings went against her father it was more than likely that he would lose her forever, and if, on the contrary, the judge were acquitted Shirley never would be willing to marry him without his father's consent, and this, he felt, he would never obtain. He resolved therefore to have a final interview with his father and declare boldly his intention of making Miss Rossmore his wife regardless of the consequences.

The opportunity came one evening after dinner. Ryder senior was sitting

"How dare you presume to judge my actions?"

alone in the library reading; Mrs. Ryder had gone to the theater with a friend; Shirley, as usual, was writing in her room, giving the final touches to her now completed "History of the Empire Trading Company." Jefferson took the bull [illegible] and thus accosted his redoubtable parent.

"May I have a few minutes of your time, father?"

Ryder senior laid aside the paper he was reading and looked up. It was unusual for his son to come to him on any errand, and he liked to encourage it.

"Certainly, Jefferson. What is it?"

"I want to appeal to you, sir. I want you to use your influence before it is too late to save Judge Rossmore. A word from you at this time would do wonders in Washington."

The financier swung half round in his chair, the smile of greeting faded out of his face, and his voice was hard as he replied coldly:

"Again? I thought we had agreed not to discuss Judge Rossmore any further?"

"I can't help it, sir," rejoined Jefferson, undeterred by his sire's hostile attitude. "That poor old man is practically on trial for his life. He is as innocent of wrongdoing as a child unborn, and you know it. You could save him if you would."

"Jefferson," answered Ryder senior, biting his lip to restrain his impatience, "I told you before that I could not interfere even if I would, and I won't, because that man is my enemy. Important business interests which you cannot possibly know anything about, demand his dismissal from the bench."

"Surely your business interests don't demand the sacrifice of a man's life!" retorted Jefferson. "I know modern business methods are none too squeamish, but I should think you'd draw the line at deliberate murder!"

Ryder sprang to his feet and for a moment stood glaring at the young man. His lips moved, but no sound came from them. Suppressed wrath rendered him speechless. What was the world coming to when a son could talk to his father in this manner?

"How dare you presume to judge my actions or to criticise my methods?" he burst out finally.

"You force me to do so," answered Jefferson hotly. "I want to tell you that I am heartily ashamed of this whole affair and your connection with it, and since you refuse to make reparation in the only way possible for the wrong you and your associates have done Judge Rossmore—that is, by saving him in the senate—I think it only fair to warn you that I take back my word in regard to not marrying without your consent. I want you to know that I intend to marry Miss Rossmore as soon as she will consent to become my wife—that is," he added, with bitterness, "if I can succeed in overcoming her prejudices against my family"—

Ryder senior laughed contemptuously.

"Prejudices against a thousand million dollars?" he exclaimed skeptically.

"Yes," replied Jefferson decisively, "prejudices against our family, against you and your business practices. Money is not everything. One day you will find that out. I tell you definitely that I intend to make Miss Rossmore my wife."

Ryder senior made no reply, and as Jefferson had expected an explosion, this unnatural calm rather startled him. He was sorry he had spoken so harshly. It was his father, after all.

"You've forced me to defy you, father," he added. "I'm sorry"—

Ryder senior shrugged his shoulders and resumed his seat. He lit another cigar and with affected carelessness he said:

"All right, Jeff, my boy, we'll let it go at that. You're sorry—so am I. You've shown me your cards—I'll show you mine."

His composed, unruffled manner vanished. He suddenly threw off the mask and revealed the tempest that was raging within. He leaned across the desk, his face convulsed with uncontrollable passion, a terrifying picture of human wrath. Shaking his fist at his son he shouted:

"When I get through with Judge Rossmore at Washington, I'll start after his daughter. This time tomorrow he'll be a disgraced man. A week later she will be a notorious woman. Then we'll see if you'll be so eager to marry her!"

"Father!" cried Jefferson.

"There is sure to be something in her life that won't bear inspection," sneered Ryder. "There is in everybody's life. I'll find out what it is. Where is she today? She can't be found. No one knows where she is—not even her own mother. Something is wrong—the girl's no good!"

Jefferson started forward as if to resent these insults to the woman he loved, but, realizing that it was his own father, he stopped short and his hands fell powerless at his side.

"Well, is that all?" inquired Ryder senior, with a sneer.

"That's all," replied Jefferson, "I'm going. Goodby."

"Goodby," answered his father indifferently. "Leave your address with your mother."

Jefferson left the room and Ryder senior, as if exhausted by the violence of his own outburst, sank back limp in his chair. The crisis he dreaded had come at last. His son had openly defied his authority and was going to marry the daughter of his enemy. He must do something to prevent it; the marriage must not take place, but what could he do? The boy was of age and legally his own master. He could do nothing to restrain his actions unless they put him in an insane asylum. He would rather see his son there, he mused, than married to the Rossmore woman.

Presently there was a timid knock at the library door. Ryder rose from his seat and went to see who was there. To his surprise it was Miss Green.

"May I come in?" asked Shirley.

"Certainly, by all means. Sit down."

He drew up a chair for her, and his manner was so cordial that it was easy to see she was a welcome visitor.

"Mr. Ryder," she began in a low, tremulous voice, "I have come to see you on a very important matter. I've been waiting to see you all evening, and as I shall be here only a short time longer I want to ask you a great favor, perhaps the greatest you were ever asked. I want to ask you for mercy—for mercy to"—

She stopped and glanced nervously at him, but she saw he was paying no attention to what she was saying. He was puffing heavily at his cigar, entirely preoccupied with his own thoughts. Her sudden silence aroused him. He apologized:

"Oh, excuse me! I didn't quite catch what you were saying."

She said nothing, wondering what had happened to render him so absent-minded. He read the question in her face, for, turning toward her, he exclaimed:

"For the first time in my life I am face to face with defeat—defeat of the most ignominious kind—incapacity—inability to regulate my own internal affairs. I can rule a government, but I can't manage my own family—my own son. I'm a failure. Tell me," he added, appealing to her, "why can't I rule my own household, why can't I govern my own child?"

"Why can't you govern yourself?" said Shirley quietly.

Ryder looked keenly at her for a moment without answering her question; then, as if prompted by a sudden inspiration, he said:

"You can help me, but not by preaching at me. This is the first time in my life I ever called on a living soul for help. I'm only accustomed to deal with men. This time there's a woman in the case, and I need your woman's wit"—

"How can I help you?" asked Shirley.

"I don't know," he answered with suppressed excitement. "As I told you, I am up against a blank wall. I can't see my way." He gave a nervous little laugh and went on: "I'm ashamed of myself—ashamed! Did you ever read the fable of the Lion and the Mouse? Well, I want you to gnaw with your sharp woman's teeth at the cords which bind the son of John Burkett Ryder to this Rossmore woman. I want you to be the mouse—to set me free of this disgraceful entanglement."

"How?" asked Shirley calmly.

"Ah, that's just it—how?" he replied. "Can't you think—you're a woman—you have youth, beauty—brains." He stopped and eyed her closely until she reddened from the embarrassing scrutiny. Then he blurted out: "By George! Marry him yourself—force him to let go of this other woman! Why not? Come, what do you say?"

This unexpected suggestion came upon Shirley with all the force of a violent shock. She immediately saw the falseness of her position. This man was asking for her hand for his son under the impression that she was another woman. It would be dishonorable of her to keep up the deception any longer. She passed her hand over her face to conceal her confusion.

"You—you must give me time to think," she stammered. "Suppose I don't love your son. I should want something—something to compensate."

"Something to compensate?" echoed Ryder, surprised and a little disconcerted. "Why, the boy will inherit millions—I don't know how many."

"No—no, not money," rejoined Shirley. "Money only compensates those who love money. It's something else—a man's honor, a man's life! It means nothing to you."

He gazed at her, not understanding. Full of his own project, he had mind for nothing else. Ignoring therefore the question of compensation, whatever she might mean by that, he continued:

"You can win him if you make up your mind to. A woman with your resources can blind him to any other woman."

"But if he loves Judge Rossmore's daughter?" objected Shirley.

"It's for you to make him forget her, and you can," replied the financier confidently. "My desire is to separate him from this Rossmore woman at any cost. You must help me." His sternness relaxed somewhat, and his eyes rested on her kindly. "Do you know, I should be glad to think you won't have to leave us. Mrs. Ryder has taken a fancy to you, and I myself shall miss you when you go."

"You ask me to be your son's wife and you know nothing of my family," said Shirley.

"I know you. That is sufficient," he replied.

"No, no, you don't," returned Shirley, "nor do you know your son. He has more constancy, more strength of character, than you think and far more principle than you have."

"So much the greater the victory for you," he answered good humoredly.

"Ah," she said reproachfully, "you do not love your son."

"I do love him," replied Ryder warmly. "It's because I love him that I'm such a fool in this matter. Don't you see that if he marries this girl it would separate us and I should lose him? I don't want to lose him. If I welcomed her to my house, it would make me the laughing stock of all my friends and business associates. Come, will you join forces with me?"

Shirley shook her head and was about to reply when the telephone bell rang. Ryder took up the receiver and spoke to the butler downstairs:

"Who's that? Judge Stott? Tell him I'm too busy to see any one. What's that? A man's life at stake? What's that to do with me? Tell him"—

On hearing Stott's name, Shirley nearly betrayed herself. She turned pale and half started up from her chair. Something serious must have happened to bring her father's legal adviser to the Ryder residence at such an hour! She thought he was in Washington. Could it be that the proceedings in the senate were ended and the result known? She could hardly conceal her anxiety and instinctively she placed her hand on Ryder's arm.

"No, Mr. Ryder, do see Judge Stott! You must see him. I know who he is. Your son has told me. Judge Stott is one of Judge Rossmore's advisers. See him. You may find out something about the girl. You may find out where she is. If Jefferson finds out you have refused to see her father's friend at such a critical time, it will only make him sympathize more deeply with the Rossmores, and you know sympathy is akin to love. That's what you want to avoid, isn't it?"

Ryder still held the telephone, hesitating what to do. What she said sounded like good sense.

"Upon my word"— he said. "You may be right and yet"—

"Am I to help you or not?" demanded Shirley. "You said you wanted a woman's wit."

"Yes," said Ryder, "but still"—

"Then you had better see him," she said emphatically.

Ryder turned to the telephone.

"Hello, Jorkins, are you there? Show Judge Stott up here." He laid the receiver down and turned again to Shirley. "That's one thing I don't like about you," he said. "I allow you to decide against me, and then I agree with you." She said nothing, and he went on looking at her admiringly. "I predict that you'll bring that boy to your feet within a month. I don't know why, but I seem to feel that he is attracted to you already. Thank heaven! You haven't a lot of troublesome relations. I think you said you were almost alone in the world. Don't look so serious," he added laughing. "Jeff is a fine fellow and, believe me, an excellent catch as the world goes."

Shirley raised her hand as if entreating him to desist.

"Oh, don't—don't—please! My position is so false! You don't know how false it is!" she cried.

At that instant the library door was thrown open and the butler appeared, ushering in Stott. The lawyer looked anxious, and his disheveled appearance indicated that he had come direct from the train. Shirley scanned his face narrowly in the hope that she might read there what had happened. He walked right past her, giving no sign of recognition, and advanced direct toward Ryder, who had risen and remained standing at his desk.

"Perhaps I had better go?" ventured Shirley, although tortured by anxiety to hear the news from Washington.

"No," said Ryder quickly, "Judge Stott will detain me but a very few moments."

Having delivered himself of this delicate hint, he looked toward his visitor as if inviting him to come to the point as rapidly as possible.

"I must apologize for intruding at this unseemly hour, sir," said Stott, "but time is precious. The senate meets tomorrow to vote. If anything is to be done for Judge Rossmore it must be done tonight."

"I fail to see why you address yourself to me in this matter, sir," replied Ryder, with asperity.

"As Judge Rossmore's friend and counsel," answered Stott, "I am impelled to ask your help at this critical moment."

"The matter is in the hands of the United States senate, sir," replied Ryder coldly.

"They are against him!" cried Stott. "Not one senator I've spoken to holds out any hope for him. If he is convicted it will mean his death. Inch by inch his life is leaving him. The only thing that can save him is the good news of the senate's refusal to find him guilty."

Stott was talking so excitedly and loudly that neither he nor Ryder heard the low moan that came from the corner of the room where Shirley was standing listening.

"I can do nothing," repeated Ryder coldly, and ne turned his back and began to examine some papers lying on his desk as if to notify the caller that the interview was ended. But Stott was not so easily discouraged. He went on:

"As I understand it, they will vote on strictly party lines, and the party in power is against him. He's a marked man. You have the power to help him." Heedless of Ryder's gesture of impatience, he continued: "When I left his bedside tonight, sir, I promised to return to him with good news. I have told him that the senate ridicules the charges against him. I must return to him with good news. He is very ill tonight, sir." He halted for a moment and glanced in Shirley's direction, and, slightly raising his voice so she might hear, he added, "If he gets worse, we shall send for his daughter."

"Where is his daughter?" demanded Ryder, suddenly interested.

"She is working in her father's interests," replied Stott, and, he added significantly, "I believe with some hope of success."

He gave Shirley a quick, questioning look. She nodded affirmatively. Ryder, who had seen nothing of this byplay, said with a sneer:

"Surely you didn't come here tonight to tell me this?"

"No, sir, I did not." He took from his pocket two letters—the two which Shirley had sent him—and held them out for Ryder's inspection. "These letters from Judge Rossmore to you," he said, "show you to be acquainted with the fact that he bought those shares as an investment—and did not receive them as a bribe."

When he caught sight of the letters and he realized what they were, Ryder changed color. Instinctively his eyes sought the drawer on the left hand side of his desk. In a voice that was unnaturally calm he asked:

"Why don't you produce them before the senate?"

"It was too late," explained Stott, handing them to the financier. "I received them only two days ago. But if you come forward and declare"—

Ryder made an effort to control himself.

"I'll do nothing of the kind. I refuse to move in the matter. That is final. And now, sir," he added, raising his voice and pointing to the letters, "I wish to know how comes it that you had in your possession private correspondence addressed to me?"

"That I cannot answer," replied Stott promptly.

"From whom did you receive these letters?" demanded Ryder.

Stott was dumb, while Shirley clutched at her chair as if she would fall. The financier repeated the question.

"I must decline to answer," replied Stott finally.

Shirley left her place and came slowly forward. Addressing Ryder, she said:

"I wish to make a statement."

The financier gazed at her in astonishment. What could she know about it, he wondered, and he waited with

"You have the power to help him."

curiosity to hear what she was going to say. But Stott instantly realized that she was about to take the blame upon herself, regardless of the consequences to the success of their cause. This must be prevented at all hazards, even if another must be sacrificed, so, interrupting her, he said hastily to Ryder:

"Judge Rossmore's life and honor are at stake, and no false sense of delicacy must cause the failure of my object to save him. These letters were sent to me by—your son."

"From my son!" exclaimed Ryder, starting. For a moment he staggered as if he had received a blow. He was too much overcome to speak or act. Then, recovering himself, he rang a bell and turned to Stott with renewed fury.

"So," he cried, "this man, this judge whose honor is at stake and his daughter, who most likely has no honor at stake, between them have made a thief and a liar of my son! False to his father, false to his party! And you, sir, have the presumption to come here and ask me to intercede for him!" To the butler, who entered, he said: "See if Mr. Jefferson is still in the house. If he is, tell him I would like to see him here at once."

The man disappeared and Ryder strode angrily up and down the room with the letters in his hand. Then, turning abruptly on Stott, he said:

"And now, sir, I think nothing more remains to be said. I shall keep these letters, as they are my property."

"As you please. Good night, sir."

"Good night," replied Ryder, not looking up.

With a significant glance at Shirley, who motioned to him that she might yet succeed where he had failed, Stott left the room. Ryder turned to Shirley. His fierceness of manner softened down as he addressed the girl:

"You see what they have done to my son"—

"Yes," replied Shirley, "it's the girl's fault. If Jefferson hadn't loved her you would have helped the judge. Ah, why did they ever meet! She has worked on his sympathy and he—he took these letters for her sake, not to injure you. Oh, you must make some allowance for him! One's sympathy gets aroused in spite of oneself. Even I feel sorry for—these people."

"Don't," replied Ryder grimly; "sympathy is often weakness. Ah, there you are!" turning to Jefferson, who entered the room at that moment.

"You sent for me, father?"

"Yes," said Ryder senior, holding up the letters. "Have you ever seen these letters before?"

Jefferson took the letters and examined them. Then he passed them back to his father and said frankly:

"Yes, I took them out of your desk and sent them to Mr. Stott in the hope they would help Judge Rossmore's case."

Ryder restrained himself from proceeding to actual violence only with the greatest difficulty. His face grew white as death, his lips were compressed, his hands twitched convulsively, his eyes flashed dangerously. He took another cigar to give the impression that he had himself well under control, but the violent trembling of his hands as he lit it betrayed the terrific strain he was under.

"So!" he said, "you deliberately sacrificed my interests to save this woman's father—you hear him, Miss Green? Jefferson, my boy, I think it's time you and I had a final accounting."

Shirley made a motion as if about to withdraw. He stopped her with a gesture.

"Please don't go, Miss Green. As the writer of my biography you are sufficiently well acquainted with my family affairs to warrant your being present at the epilogue. Besides, I want an excuse for keeping my temper. Sit down, Miss Green."

Turning to Jefferson, he went on:

"For your mother's sake, my boy, I have overlooked your little eccentricities of character. But now we have arrived at the parting of the ways—you have gone too far. The one aspect of this business I cannot overlook is your willingness to sell your own father for the sake of a woman."

"My own father," interrupted Jefferson bitterly, "would not hesitate to sell me if his business and political interests warranted the sacrifice!"

Shirley attempted the role of peacemaker. Appealing to the younger man she said:

"Please don't talk like that, Mr. Jefferson." Then she turned to Ryder senior: "I don't think your son quite understands you, Mr. Ryder, and, if you will pardon me, I don't think you quite understand him. Do you realize that there is a man's life at stake—that Judge Rossmore is almost at the point of death and that favorable news from the senate tomorrow is perhaps the only thing that can save him?"

"Ah, I see," sneered Ryder senior. "Judge Stott's story has aroused your sympathy."

"Yes, I—I confess my sympathy is aroused. I do feel for this father whose life is slowly ebbing away—whose strength is being sapped hourly by the thought of the disgrace—the injustice that is being done him! I do feel for the wife of this suffering man!"

"Ah, it's a complete picture!" cried Ryder mockingly. "The dying father, the sorrowing mother—and the daughter, what is she supposed to be doing?"

"She is fighting for her father's life," cried Shirley, "and you, Mr. Jefferson, should have pleaded—pleaded—not demanded. It's no use trying to combat your father's will."

"She is quite right, father. I should have implored you. I do so now. I ask you for God's sake to help us!"

Ryder was grim and silent. He rose from his seat and paced the room, puffing savagely at his cigar. Then he turned and said:

"His removal is a political necessity. If he goes back on the bench every paltry justice of the peace, every petty official will think he has a special mission to tear down the structure that hard work and capital have erected. No, this man has been especially conspicuous in his efforts to block the progress of amalgamated interests."

"And so he must be sacrificed?" cried Shirley indignantly.

"He is a meddlesome man," insisted Ryder, "and"—

"He is innocent of the charges brought against him," urged Jefferson.

"Mr. Ryder is not considering that point," said Shirley bitterly. "All he can see is that it is necessary to put this poor old man in the public pillory, to set him up as a warning to others of his class not to act in accordance with the principles of truth and justice—not to dare to obstruct the car of Juggernaut set in motion by the money gods of the country!"

"It's the survival of the fittest, my dear," said Ryder coldly.

"Oh," cried Shirley, making a last appeal to the financier's heart of stone, "use your great influence with this governing body for good, not evil! Urge them to vote not in accordance with party policy and personal interest, but in accordance with their consciences—in accordance with truth and justice! Ah, for God's sake, Mr. Ryder, don't permit this foul injustice to blot the name of the highest tribunal in the western world!"

Ryder laughed cynically.

"By Jove! Jefferson, I give you credit for having secured an eloquent advocate!"

"Suppose," went on Shirley, ignoring his taunting comments, "suppose this daughter promises that she will never—never see your son again—that she will go away to some foreign country?"

"No!" burst in Jefferson. "Why should she? If my father is not man enough to do a simple act of justice without bartering a woman's happiness and his son's happiness, let him find comfort in his self justification!"

Shirley, completely unnerved, made a move toward the door, unable longer to bear the strain she was under. She tottered as though she would fall. Ryder made a quick movement toward his son and took him by the arm. Pointing to Shirley, he said in a low tone:

"You see how the girl pleads your cause for you! She loves you, my boy!" Jefferson started. "Yes, she does," pursued Ryder senior. "She's worth a thousand of the Rossmore woman. Make her your wife, and I'll"—

"Make her my wife!" cried Jefferson joyously. He stared at his parent as if he thought he had suddenly been bereft of his senses.

"Make her my wife?" he repeated incredulously.

"Well, what do you say?" demanded Ryder senior.

The young man advanced toward Shirley hands outstretched.

"Yes, yes, Shir—Miss Green, will you?" Seeing that Shirley made no sign, he said: "Not now, father. I will speak to her later."

"No, no; tonight—at once!" insisted Ryder. Addressing Shirley, he went on: "Miss Green, my son is much affected by your disinterested appeal in his behalf. He—he—you can save him from himself. My son wishes you—he asks you to become his wife! Is it not so, Jefferson?"

"Yes, yes, my wife!" advancing again toward Shirley.

The girl shrank back in alarm.

"No, no, no, Mr. Ryder, I cannot; I cannot!" she cried.

"Why not?" demanded Ryder senior appealingly. "Ah, don't—don't decide hastily"—

Shirley, her face set and drawn and keen mental distress showing in every line of it, faced the two men, pale and determined. The time had come to reveal the truth. This masquerade could go on no longer. It was not honorable either to her father or to herself. Her self respect demanded that she inform the financier of her true identity.

"I cannot marry your son with these lies upon my lips!" she cried. "I cannot go on with this deception. I told you you did not know who I was, who my people were. My story about them, my name, everything about me is false, every word I have uttered is a lie, a fraud, a cheat! I would not tell you now, but you trusted me and are willing to entrust your son's future, your family honor in my keeping, and I can't keep back the truth from you. Mr. Ryder, I am the daughter of the man you hate. I am the woman your son loves. I am Shirley Rossmore!"

Ryder took his cigar from his lips and rose slowly to his feet.

"You? You?" he stammered.

"Yes—yes, I am the Rossmore woman! Listen, Mr. Ryder. Don't turn away from me. Go to Washington on behalf of my father, and I promise you I will never see your son again—never, never!"

"Ah, Shirley!" cried Jefferson, "you don't love me!"

"Yes, Jeff, I do. God knows I do! But if I must break my own heart to save my father I will do it."

"Would you sacrifice my happiness and your own?"

"No happiness can be built on lies, Jeff. We must build on truth or our whole house will crumble and fall. We have deceived your father, but he will forgive that, won't you?" she said, appealing to Ryder, "and you will go to Washington, you will save my father's honor, his life, you will?"—

They stood face to face—this slim, delicate girl battling for her father's life, arrayed against a cold blooded, heartless, unscrupulous man, deaf to every impulse of human sympathy or pity. Since this woman had deceived him, fooled him, he would deal with her as with every one else who crossed his will. She laid her hand on his arm, pleading with him. Brutally, savagely, he thrust her aside.

"No, no, I will not!" he thundered. "You have wormed yourself into my confidence by means of lies and deceit. You have tricked me, fooled me to the very limit! Oh, it is easy to see how you have beguiled my son into the folly of loving you! And you—you have the brazen effrontery to ask me to plead for your father? No! No! No! Let the law take its course, and now, Miss Rossmore, you will please leave my house tomorrow morning!"

Shirley stood listening to what he had to say, her face white, her mouth quivering. At last the crisis had come. It was a fight to the finish between this man, the incarnation of corporate greed, and herself, representing the fundamental principles of right and justice. She turned on him in a fury:

"Yes, I will leave your house tonight! Do you think I would remain another hour beneath the roof of a man who is as blind to justice, as deaf to mercy, as incapable of human sympathy, as you are!"

She raised her voice, and as she stood there denouncing the man of money, her eyes flashing and her head thrown back, she looked like some avenging angel defying one of the powers of evil.

"Leave the room!" shouted Ryder, beside himself, and pointing to the door.

"Father!" cried Jefferson, starting forward to protect the girl he loved.

"You have tricked him as you have me!" thundered Ryder.

"It is your own vanity that has tricked you!" cried Shirley contemptuously. "You lay traps for yourself and walk into them. You can tell every one around you to lie to you, to cajole you, to praise you, to deceive you! At least you cannot accuse me of flattering you. I have never fawned upon you as you compel your family and your friends and your dependents to do. I have always appealed to your better nature by telling you the truth, and in your heart you know that I am speaking the truth now."

"Go!" he commanded.

"Yes, let us go, Shirley!" said Jefferson.

"No, Jeff, I came here alone, and I'm going alone!"

"You are not. I shall go with you. I intend to make you my wife!"

Ryder laughed scornfully.

"No," cried Shirley. "Do you think I'd marry a man whose father is as deep a discredit to the human race as your father is? No, I wouldn't marry the son of such a merciless tyrant! He refuses to lift his voice to save my father. I refuse to marry his son!"

She turned on Ryder with all the fury of a tiger:

"You think if you lived in the olden days you'd be a Caesar or an Alexander. But you wouldn't! You'd be a Nero—a Nero! Sink my self respect to the extent of marrying into your family!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "Never! I am going to Washington without your aid. I am going to save my father if I have to go on my knees to every United States senator. I'll go to the White House; I'll tell the president what you are! Marry your son—no, thank you! No, thank you!"

Exhausted by the vehemence of her passionate outburst, Shirley hurried from the room, leaving Ryder speechless, staring at his son.

[To be Continued.]

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