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CHAPTER I.

On the night of the 5th of December, 1882, the first fierce storm of the winter was raging in Brooklyn.

The wind howled and shrieked, and drifting snow clung in crusts on the windows. But the fire burned furiously in John Olmstead's library, where he sat in a comfortable arm-chair, his slippers on the fender, supposed to be listening while his nephew, Robert Stanton, read aloud to him.

The old man was called "crusty" at large, and crusty he surely was. He stood well up among the wealthiest men in Brooklyn, and, having been a widower almost all his life, he had become so thoroughly accustomed to his own way that he had outlived even the passing suggestion that there could by any possibility be any other way.

He was supposed to be listening. His eyes were fixed in a fierce, determined stare upon the glowing coals. His forehead was furrowed. His right hand wandered restlessly over his left arm and shoulder, as though seeking the seat of something that was out of order there.

He was supposed to be listening, but he was not listening. His mind was working back some two-and-twenty years, on a night very much like this one, only later in the winter, when he sat before the fire in that same library and read a letter disclosing, to his horror, the fact that he had a two-year-old nephew.

Then it took another jump backward, indignantly, and he thought of the mother of the boy, his only sister, Mary. From childhood he had supported her; but when his beautiful young wife died and he really needed a sister to help him manage his grand home, Mary deliberately deserted him to marry a farming fellow from away in some romantic, unknown obscurity—a fellow whose only prospects lay in a few miserable, mortgaged acres.

It was made all the worse by the fact that Mary had stubbornly refused to marry Thaddeus Braddon, John Olmstead's best friend, who had been her devoted lover from girlhood, who was then in the west, coining a great fortune, ready to return to Brooklyn to live the moment Mary said the word.

John Olmstead remembered how he had spoken his mind to Mary, and how the only effect it had was that never another word did he hear from her or her husband till the letter that came on that stormy night, 22 years before, written by the selectmen of the unknown obscurity, announcing that his sister had died two years and her husband a week before, leaving nothing but debts and one male child, two years old, named Robert Stanton. It notified him that the child would be held for a limited period subject to his order, and, in default, would be advertised and manipulated as town's poor.

Of course the "thing," as John Olmstead called it, was brought to his Brooklyn mansion and properly cared for, but he had conceived such a dislike at the start that Robert Stanton grew up and actually left for college before the lack of him about the house opened his uncle's eyes to the fact that under his supposed dislike there had sprung up a great, unreasoning, unbounded fondness for the boy.

From that moment there was nothing too good for his nephew, in the old man's estimation, and the happiest days he had known since his wife died were when Stanton came back, after graduating from the law school, and opened an office in New York.

The young lawyer was not a model done in wax, but a very fair result of the conditions under which he had been reared. He was rugged, honest and refined. He had not the remotest idea of the meaning of such words as self-denial or self-sacrifice, or of such a quality as patience in suffering or adversity.

The utter lack of feminine influence about the house left the genial and social side of his nature wholly undeveloped. He thought society a bore, and society thought him cold and proud. Unlimited financial resources overburdened him with persistent friends till he easily fell into a way of holding every one at arm's length and constantly pushing, lest they should come too near and annoy him.

He was generous because it was agreeable. It relieved him of a surplus that would otherwise have been burdensome; it rid him, quickly and easily, of disagreeable things in the line of philanthropic traps. Wholly unwitting, he won for himself a reputation for phenomenal liberality, which, connected with his many conflicting characteristics, produced the universal conviction that he was sure to develop into a prodigy of genius.

His habits were scrupulously circumspect, chiefly, no doubt, because any others would have forced him, more or less, into some sort of society; and underneath it all were sound, native common sense and a rare adaptability to his profession.

Thus far the only disagreeable phase of life to which he had been obliged to submit was his uncle's determination that he should marry, which effectually established in him a determination never to do anything of the kind. It was simply unbroken nature, instinct.

This was the path over which the old man's thoughts were wandering while his right hand wandered over his left arm and shoulder and sometimes down along his left leg and knee. Stanton noticed the inattention, and once or twice glanced up, between the

lines. He fancied his uncle was not feeling well, and would have been glad to offer some relief, but perfect health was the one thing upon which John Olmstead prided himself and which it was never safe to question. His one boast, always pushing his fingers through his white hair, was that he had never consulted a physician in his life.

The tall clock in the corner began striking ten, and the clock in the great tower, a few blocks away, joined it, a single stroke behind. One was regulated by John Olmstead, the other by the official timekeeper, and for more than 20 years they had told the same story as they were telling it to-night.

Stanton paused for an instant and glanced at his uncle, dropped his book and sprang to the arm-chair. The old man's face was flushed. His forehead was wet. He was awake, but he breathed like one sleeping too heavily. In a wild stare his eyes were fixed on his left hand.

With his right hand he clutched the sleeve of the left arm, lifted it a little way, and let it fall, muttering: "Dead, Robert. Dead."

Stanton rang for Sam, the general man-servant, whispering: "Dr. Morton, Sam. Be quick."

Sam staggered out into the raging storm, his mind struggling with the fact that the master was ill, much as his body struggled in the drifts. He was trying to do two things at once, which was always too much for him, and between the two he blundered and rang the bell at the door of Rev. Dr. Borden's home.

John Olmstead was not a communicant, but he was highly valued and respected supporter of Dr. Borden's church. The good doctor opened the door himself. Sam shouted from the storm: "Mr. John Olmstead is sick, sir. Come quick." Then discovering his mistake, he started away, without a word of explanation, to summon Dr. Morton.

A single glance told the physician why he had been called. He asked a few questions, chiefly to test the mind and the face-muscles, looked into the patient's eyes, and, kneeling, began to manipulate the left leg and arm.

"Well?" said John Olmstead, impatiently. Dr. Morton did not stop his examination, but spoke slowly: "I should say it was a slight stroke of apoplexy, probably caused by an immaterial hemorrhage on the brain. There is still sensation here. I think it will steadily return, and in two or three weeks you will—"

He was testing the pulse in the right wrist. Quickly he followed it to the elbow, and his face changed as he uncovered the patient's chest and began a careful examination about the heart.

"Well?" Olmstead muttered, nervously. As though thinking aloud, being called upon for an opinion before it was fully formed, the physician replied: "There's an enlarged area of heart-dilatation and an accentuated second sound and murmur. I'm afraid the apoplexy came from heart disease and arterial degeneration. Are you under treatment for your heart?"

"Never had a doctor in my life," John Olmstead muttered. "Your heart must have given you a great deal of trouble."

"Never troubled me at all." "No shortness of breath?" "Of course. I'm growing old." "Haven't you had to sit down after climbing stairs?"

"I'm too heavy for stairs. I gave up leaving the ground floor long ago, unless there is an elevator." "Doesn't excitement give you palpitation?"

"Sometimes. I smoke too much." "Cold feet?" "Only recently." "Cough?" "Of course, when I am out of breath."

Dr. Morton sat down facing the patient, with his back to the fire. "Every one has weak points, Mr. Olmstead," he said. "Yours is your heart." "Do you mean that I'm in a condition where I might go without warning?" the old man asked, nervously, seeming suddenly to grasp the situation.

Dr. Morton watched his face thoughtfully for a moment, and answered: "Yes." "Robert," Olmstead called, in a weak, trembling voice, "go for Judge Russell. Bring him back with you at once."

"Is my mind right? Can I make my will?" he asked, as soon as Stanton left the room, and, being reassured by the physician, he sat in silence till Judge Russell came and they were left alone together.

"I should have taken your advice," he began, "but fortunately it is not too late. I hoped that Robert would marry first and that the other one would die. Don't mention the other one's name in

the will. Say \$10,000 to the next heir after Robert, if he will surrender all claims and those papers." He paused a moment to gather strength. Slowly he mentioned some minor bequests, three men to act as trustees, and added: "Let the rest be held in trust for Robert for ten years. Let him have the use and income, and if he marries let it all be his at once." "If he should not marry in the ten years—" Judge Russell asked. "He will, he will," Olmstead exclaimed. "He'll not be such a fool. If he don't—if he don't care for me or the money, then let it go where it will. The other one can't get it if he signs off for the ten thousand, and I don't care who else has it if Robert don't want it. Write quickly. I'm not well. I feel afraid."

The rest returned and did what Judge Russell wrote. The storm was still increasing, and to add to it the fire broke out which destroyed the great building supporting the tower with the clock which had so long kept pace with the clock in Olmstead's library.

Thousands must still remember how the hands of that clock moved steadily while all the building beneath it was wrapped in flame; how the great bell rang, clear and loud, above the storm, above the roaring and hissing of the water, above the groaning and throbbing of the engines and the shouting of the men; how it struck the hour of midnight, like a grand, triumphant peal, less than two minutes before the crash, stopping the wheels but leaving the tower with its burden still standing, like a grim minaret rising out of the ruins; for there was something ghostly in those long black fingers that for days remained there, solemnly pointing to two minutes past twelve.

The engines were heard above the storm, in the library, and the glare tinged the curtains closely drawn over the long windows; but the fire received little attention from the anxious ones gathered there.

When the writing was finished, Olmstead read the will, and in a more natural voice remarked: "It is correct. Give me the pen." Rev. Dr. Borden signed as the first witness, and a moment later Judge Russell handed the pen to Sam.

Sam was unused to writing. The solemn scene, the intense excitement, a vague sense of responsibility, bewildered him, and he made slow work at it. Judge Russell could hardly endure the delay. He had left his wife with a sick child at home, without so much as telling her that he was going out. He glanced at his watch as he handed Sam the pen.

"Great Heavens! it's 12 o'clock. Hurry, man, hurry," he whispered. Sam tried to hurry, and was so much the slower in consequence. The tall clock and the clock in the tower were striking. He nervously fingered the pen till they had ceased. Stanton was kneeling by the arm-chair, holding his uncle's hand. Dr. Borden stood behind the chair, with a word for comfort or courage when it could be spoken.

As the last stroke sounded, Olmstead turned his head, resting on the back of the arm-chair, till his eyes looked up at the portrait of a beautiful woman, hanging above the fire, and slowly he repeated: "Twelve o'clock, and all is well."

At last Sam finished writing. Judge Russell bent over him, took the pen, wrote for an instant, and— Suddenly the room seemed to vibrate and shudder. The dull outlines of the windows glared brighter than the lights of the library. The awful crash of the falling walls and the shriek of the crowd about them sounded. Judge Russell caught up the will and hurried from the house. Stanton felt a twinge contract the hand he was holding; forgetting the years that had made a man of him, he laid his cheek upon it.

Dr. Morton glanced at the patient's face, reached his heart, waited a moment, and, laying his hand on Stanton's shoulder, said: "My friend, it is over. He is gone." Reverently Dr. Borden repeated the dying words: "Twelve o'clock, and all is well."

CHAPTER II.

The natural adjustments which time brought about had little comfort for John Olmstead's nephew. The one disagreeable feature in the past which he had not been able to put away was his uncle's determination that he should marry. Now the whole world seemed to have risen up to carry on the argument.

It was natural enough that social attention should be more drawn to him than ever, and especially to be expected that the trustees, Judge Russell and Dr. Borden, knowing of the condition hanging over him, should lose no opportunity to present such of their friends as might aid him to meet it. Stanton failed to grasp the natural philosophy of it, however, and simply realized a state of things that was intensely disagreeable. The fact that his uncle, being dead, was yet speaking, only held him the more firmly in instinctive resistance, and where John Olmstead's arguments failed there was little hope that the rest of the world could succeed. The only result was that Stanton shrank more and more from society, and delved deeper and more earnestly in his profession.

It was an excellent thing for his progress at the bar, and he really began to develop into what everyone had predicted—something of a prodigy. Straightway it began to be commonly acknowledged that he was one of the shrewdest cross-examiners in the state. It only tended, however, to make society more charitable with his eccentricities and more relentlessly adoring.

A weak man would have yielded at once; a strong man never. Stanton was neither. He had elements of strength, but he was not strong. After five years of it he said to himself: "I believe that the only way to make life worth living is to have a wife to attend to the social side. There's no sense in a social side, anyway. What does it amount to? But it is, and apparently it is something that always will be. I can't attend to it. But I'm always expected to, and evidently I've either to keep on making excuses or making myself miserable, all my life or else to find a wife who

will attend to it for me." Obviously he had not the faintest conception of what the agony was all about, nor had his uncle's will anything whatever to do with his considerations. They were carried on upon lines of pure and unadulterated instinct—just as a young duck pokes its flat bill about in a stupid search for the delicious mud which it has never seen nor heard of, except in the sweet babble of some soft nursery clucking over its pipped egg.

"I wonder how the thing should be brought about," Stanton muttered, as he lay on the sofa in the library, smoking and dreaming. Even then the innocently stupid fellow did not dream that he was doing precisely what everyone was bent on having him do; if he had, he would not have done it. In fact, he never even fully realized how the thing was done, it was so quickly and easily accomplished when once he turned his attention that way. But that was unimportant. It was surely done. He unquestionably became engaged, and it was a great relief to him to know and to have others know that so much progress at least had been made towards the relief from society which he sought.

The really strange thing about it was that it was a love-match. At least the Lombards all said so, and every one admitted that they were the last people in the world to be influenced by any man's millions—which proved to be the case, a little later.

The immediate effects of the engagement were not in precise line with the final results he sought, but he reasoned with himself: "I suppose it's a fellow's duty to the lady he's to marry to go with her into society, just as it's his duty to stay with her at home after they're married;" so the poor, deluded fellow honestly, earnestly and patiently plunged into a grand whirl of social life at Miss Lombard's side, only longing to have the transition state over with, that he might arrive at the stage where he could be left alone.

Stanton had hardly adjusted himself to this when another disagreeable feature presented itself. Young Lombard, his future brother-in-law, was a client of his whom he had always considered an ideal business man; but it suddenly appeared that he was also an ideal society man. It was simply a side of him with which Stanton had never chanced to come in contact. He insisted upon putting him up at two fashionable clubs.

"I'm already a member of the professional club over in the city," he said. "That has some points to it. But what's the sense of a social club?" "It's a good place to meet the fellows and kill an hour or two of an evening now and then," Lombard urged.

"But I haven't time enough as it is, without killing any," Stanton objected. Still, he allowed himself to be put up. There was really no help for it; it occurred to him, too, that there was a certain undefined duty which a fellow owed to the brother of a lady he was about to marry; and Lombard took it upon himself to see that, after he was once well inside, he was not allowed to become a dead letter.

"It's astonishing what a difference it makes with a fellow whether it's his business or society he's at," Stanton reflected, as he watched young Lombard, at the clubs. "He has a wonderful facility in adjusting himself and permeating everything. I haven't a bit of it. But it's something a man ought to have. I suppose, especially if he is about to be married. If I could only be let alone, I should rather like to drop in here occasionally and look on. I might pick up some of that facility myself in time."

The thing which he abhorred most intensely and received most abundantly was flattery. Next to that he disliked being questioned. It is often the case with an expert at cross-examinations.

One evening at the club Stanton was fortunate enough to meet a man who was not a bore. His name was Richard Raymond. He was engaged in the insurance business in the far west, and knew the country, even to the Pacific coast, with all the wonders and treasures of its vineage, as well as Stanton knew New York or Brooklyn. He gave him more entertaining and valuable information in five minutes than he had often obtained at the club in an entire evening.

He knew Stanton, too, and said some very clever things about him, but he said them in such a clever way that they were not at all offensive. He didn't stop the moment he had said them and bow and smirk and wait on a broad grin till Stanton had succeeded in saying something equally silly in contradiction or reciprocation.

Stanton smiled as he sat contentedly listening, and commented with himself: "If he were to digress to insurance, now, and ask me to take out a policy in one of his companies, I presume I should do it." But Mr. Raymond did not digress. He hardly mentioned insurance again. Speaking of minerals, however, he said that he had brought on a fine collection; it was at the hotel, and if Stanton cared to walk home that way and stop for a moment he should be glad to show it.

The collection proved thoroughly entertaining, and when, in the course of conversation upon it, the subject of California wines was touched, it appeared that Raymond had brought on some choice samples of these, too, in proof of a pet theory that with proper care in preparation, and proper age, the vineyards of the Pacific could be made to rival the vintage of the world.

While he was speaking of it he poured out a glass of the wine. This was a little different; for among other social habits which Stanton had never contracted was the habit of drinking.

"I have very rarely tasted wine, and should be no judge," he said, in an effort courteously to decline; but when Raymond gently but firmly insisted, it occurred to him that there was something of a social duty in accepting hospitality, after he had been accepting so much other entertainment, and he drank the wine, much as he would have taken out a policy in one of the insurance companies.

Unacquainted as he was with wine, Stanton was forced to admit that it was a wonderful product. Before he realized what he was doing, he had

lighted a fresh cigar and made himself comfortable in one of Raymond's upholstered arm-chairs. It seemed but a moment later when he opened his eyes with a start and a confused chagrin at the conviction that he had actually dropped asleep while Raymond was talking; but his eyes once open rested full upon Sam, who was laying his morning mail upon his dressing case, and over Sam's shoulder upon the clock, which declared that it was after ten.

Six days out of seven Stanton entered his office on the stroke of nine, and this was not the seventh day. Seeing that Sam had noticed his open eyes, he simply remarked: "I am ready for my bath, Sam;" but when the man went out to prepare it, the young lawyer rose slowly and stood looking into his own face in the mirror, as though he might learn from it something which he very much wished to know.

"Society!" he muttered, in unutterable disgust, and began slowly poking the letters about that he might read the postmarks. It is pleasant to have broad shoulders upon which to lay the burden of our shortcomings, even the overloaded shoulders of society.

One letter attracted his attention, more from its weight than from the fact that the handwriting was Miss Lombard's. It had evidently been delivered by messenger. He opened it mechanically and held in his hand Miss Lombard's card and their diamond engagement ring—nothing more.

"Is it broken, I wonder?" he muttered, slowly turning the ring over, before he dawned upon him that it was the engagement, not the ring, which was obviously the broken thing.

A creature of instinct, following instinct, he stretched himself, yawned, and went into the bathroom, saying to himself: "Thank heaven, there'll be no more society, no more clubs, no more wine, for me."

As Sam was leaving the bathroom, Stanton turned upon him and asked, abruptly: "Was I brought home drunk last night, Sam?" "Yes, sir," and then wished he had denied it.

"Did the Lombards bring me home?" "Yes, sir," said Sam; and, as there was nothing more, he went out to kick himself about for the rest of the day.

At the office Stanton found a letter from the elder Lombard. He half expected it. He swung his chair into the best light and made himself secure in the seat before he opened it; but it was very short. He read: "Dear Sir:—After the disgraceful exhibition which you made of yourself at our home last night, my daughter wishes me to say that love or respect from her would be no longer possible. Kindly allow all intercourse with our family to cease with this letter. We require no explanation and would accept no apology."

Slowly tearing it in pieces, Stanton said to himself: "I rather like that letter. It's very much to the point, and there's no ambiguity; but I wish I knew how I got myself to his house and what I did there. I probably shall know, some day, and things will adjust themselves. They always do."

They did adjust themselves, but not precisely as he anticipated. The first intimation of an adjustment came to him through the newspaper, in the announcement of the marriage of Miss Lombard and Mr. Richard Raymond.

He thought of the glass of wine, and with a shudder sprang to his feet. Presently he was restlessly pacing the room, muttering: "Absurd! Simply impossible. Why shouldn't he marry her if he wants to? Why shouldn't she marry him? He can tell her more in ten minutes than most men could in an hour. She'd have been bored to death shut up with me. Upon my word, I believe it was fortunate all around. I've had enough of society. I'm satisfied."

I've come near enough to marriage to know that I'm not adjustable. It's an excellent place to stop." Thereupon he stopped walking, tried to stop thinking of that glass of wine, and, having at last fully made up his mind about marrying, he expressed it so plainly to the trustees, the judge and the clergyman, when they attempted to renew their effort, and, indeed, to society at large, that the hint was finally taken. He was set down as incorrigible, and John Olmstead's will went out of sight and out of mind.

Stanton realized that the time was coming when some distant relative of his uncle's would appear and claim the property, and he was quite content that he should have it.

"I'd like to keep this house, because it's home," he said, to himself. "But that can easily be arranged. It is neither modern nor well located to tempt one who has recently come into a large fortune. I will lay aside enough to purchase this property, and they can have the rest."

With that he dropped the entire matter, to rest until he should receive notice that the term of his possession had expired, leaving the income from the estate, as deposited for him by the trustees, to accumulate for the future purchase.

Life actually began to assume for him a certain degree of serenity. He read of the sudden death of Mrs. Raymond in the far west, and honestly felt sorry for her husband; but a little later the serenity was sadly and suddenly disturbed by a confession from a client for whom he had been doing some charity work in the courts.

In his own rough way the fellow tried to return the favor which Stanton had been doing him by confessing that, some years before, he was in charge of the furnaces of a hotel when, late one night, a guest called him up to his room, showed him a man helplessly drunk, gave him \$50 and a glass of brandy and secured his services in carrying out a little joke. The joke consisted in taking the man to the engine room, covering him with dirt and dislodging him generally, then taking him in a carriage to a certain address and leaving him in the hands of the master of the house, with the message that he had been dragged out of a fight in a low dance hall and had given that number



Raymond was nowhere to be seen.

when asked where he should be taken. "And you was him, an' I done it," the man ejaculated, coming laboriously to the end.

Not a muscle of the lawyer's face moved till he had locked the door behind his penitent client. Then, with his fists clenched and crowded into his pockets for safe keeping, he walked slowly up and down the room.

For the first time in his life he knew what anger—hated—meant. If Richard Raymond had come into his office he would have killed him. A new sentiment had taken such entire possession of him that for a time he had absolutely no control over himself, and the only good fortune of it was that he fully realized the fact.

He walked and walked and struggled with himself for hours before he dared unlock that door. At length the anger was driven into his heart, but it only waited—a most disagreeable companion—waited for its victim.

Late in the fall he saw him, for the first time, walking slowly on the opposite side of Broadway. With his fists clenched, his heart throbbing, his teeth ground hard against each other, Stanton ran across the street.

He was utterly unconscious of what he even wished to do when they should meet; but they did not meet. Raymond was nowhere to be seen when he reached the pavement. He was glad of it afterwards.

"Broadway would have been a bad place to do anything," he muttered, as he walked away; and thereupon he asked himself, for the first time, what it was that he proposed to do. To his surprise he found the solution extremely difficult.

It was still unsettled when, a few weeks later, he walked up the stone steps of his home late in the afternoon, to find Sam waiting at the door. Sam had grown gray in the service of two generations, and was more closely identified with that house than the young master, in his own estimation at least.

His face was even whiter than his hair as he labored through the information that an officer had invaded the sacred library and had calmly taken possession of everything in the name of a new heir.

"It's only a matter of form, Sam," Stanton remarked. "I had forgotten it, but this is the day that my rights expire. I shall purchase this house, however, and everything will go on as usual."

He waited a moment in the hall, to calm himself, for in spite of his prearranged plans there was something, either in the suddenness of the announcement or the manner of it, which disturbed him. It was the one spot in the world that was dear to him; the one place he loved; the one corner he held sacred. It was invaded by an officer, another, who for the moment, at least, had an undeniable right.

He entered the library. A man rose and handed him a legal document. He turned to the light and opened it. One instant his eyes rested upon the paper. Then it fell from his hands. For a moment he stood there, motionless; then, leaving the paper on the floor, he turned from the library without a word, left the house, and like a drunken man staggered down the street.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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