THE DAY OF SOULS

a Novel of San Francisco

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CHAPTER XX—Continued

BUT as the weeks passed, John Arnold's soul, whatever its hauntings, gave no sign. He had no friends save the street politicians, the petty hangers on of the city's life, and these he evaded. He saw Louis Ferreri once and the parting left the slot machine man bewildered as it did others whom, with a sort of insolence, he put aside. And through the days the great loneliness grew on him—the lone wolf cut off in the open that could turn neither back nor onward.

At times he caught Nella staring at him, it seemed with a secret fear and knowledge, but he invited no confidences. He looked back on Grace Wayne, the days of his strength with her, with an inner grim satire at the grotesque suggestion of himself, the repentant. And the renegade was more lonely; he was glad when Sammy Jarbo and his bride returned from the honeymoon which had been unexpectedly prolonged at a country ranch near Monterey.

They had the tang of the country on them, the brown, dusty sweetness of the California oak hidden roadsides winding through canyons to the sea. Granny's hall was blocked with suit cases, parcels and wilted wild flowers that morning, and in it all Sammy and Mary relating the great story. The shopgirl was fired with color from the month by the sea and under the stillness of the pines; she laughed out of pure happiness at all their friendlinesses; she had haphazard gifts for each; a fern on a bit of moldy wood for Granny, a string of cones for the cookhouse waif, and eyes shining for Arnold when he took her hands. Her love weeks had been perfect. She was no piteous drift now of the department stores, the victim of the age's gross commerce, but a woman achieving destiny, triumphing and completing, proving the puzzle of why she was to live.

Amid this clutter of arriving the poet took Arnold aside. He drew from his pockets scraps of bills, dogeared margins, disemboweled envelopes.

"Nixy on the epics for me," he began: "Listen to this, Ham. I was sitting on the beach holding Mary's hand and all of a sudden the whole business hit me this way:

"'Never a bird's song, Sweetheart,
In the gladsome summer morn—
Never a dainty blossom
Whose breath on the breeze is borne;
Never a flower at morning
Rustling with Heaven's dew,
Never a thing of beauty,
But, Sweetheart, I think of you.'

"Ham," continued the poet profoundly, "I got it out of my system at last, and it's the real goods."

"Sammy," said his friend, "that's putting them right over the plate!"

Granberry tumultuously seized the author's hand and swung him about. "Lovely!—just like real poetry!"

"Like real poetry?" quavered the poet injuredly. "Thunder, of course it's real poetry—did you think it was a laundry advertisement?"

And that reminded him — he had stopped at his employers' office on the way home and they gave him a big surprise. He was promoted. He was to take charge of the Oakland branch of the concern—superintend the drivers, and have twenty-five dollars a week! "Wouldn't that freeze you?" said the poet, "me!"

"It's fine," answered Arnold, "only—well, you'll live in Oakland, won't you?"

"Yes. I'll rent a cottage—a whole yard for Mary."

This was much for the rattle brained poet. Who would ever have predicted it? But Arnold was rather quiet. He had depended on Sammy. They had been great, good friends in days before friendships and the simpleness of things had been blotted by the town. Now he was groping about for a friend's hand, and Sammy would not be near. But he smiled.

"All right, little man. It's simply great! Only I hate to have you leave just now."

Granberry's had thus a new sensation, but the old woman wondered who would take the small rooms the two had had. When Sammy and his bride departed, it seemed a little less sunshiny to the dwellers on the hill.

The usual crowd no longer dined at Sedaini's. Ferreri did not come, nor the silent piano player; and with the poet and his wife gone, the dreary little restaurant was blank enough. Bernice Murasky came once and took Nella Free to the Italian's. The Jewess gave a new impression of restlessness, but not of her former sullen disparagement of her surroundings. She looked the other girl over critically, noting with direct eyes the little things that marked the change of which she knew in Nella's circumstances — her dressing, her subdued if careless tone. "Where's your rings—that big solitaire?" she asked suddenly.

"Oh, I don't wear them much now," evaded Nella. "What's the use? I just hang around the old woman's every day."

"I should think you'd go crazy after all you've had! I went to see Du Barry last night—Louis took me."

"Ain't you working?"

"Not steady. I'm going to study typewriting—Louis's going to get me a job with the slot machine house."

Bernice's voice had the greedy little lift of triumph with which women erase the kindliness from one another's hearts. Nella stirred—"I ain't seen you much lately."

"No, I've been pretty busy—having a good time." She lifted her shoulders with a laugh. "I should think you'd go just crazy since you quit Harry. You don't eat at any of the swell places any more, do you? Louis and me was at Marchand's last night."

The other girl was silently breaking Sedaini's sour bread to bits on the flimsy cloth.

"This place is getting fierce," continued Miss Murasky. "Come downtown Thursday and we'll all eat at Green's—you and me and Louis."

"I can't."

"Can't?"

"Oh, I'm just sticking around," she laughed, " for a while."

"Kid, you're getting little lines around your eyes. What's Ham doing? Is he making any money? The bunch at Jack Morgan's said he was down and out—he'd have to quit town after all this political talk about the races and all. Say, kid, your neck's kind-a thin. Ain't you well?"

"Oh, pretty good!"

"You been washing dishes? Look at that little blister!"

"I burned it with a curling iron. Say, you seem to be getting wise—is the Spreckels building still in Market street?"

Miss Murasky sat back idling with a sunburst at her throat at which Nella's eyes had been for five minutes—as Miss Murasky intended they should. She minced over the dinner, criticising each course, displaying wisdom of menus and methods; finally getting her curiosity back to the other girl's diamonds. "Gee, why don't you wear 'em? You'll only be young once, kid; then the town'll throw you hard."

"I know—only I'm kind of tired of them." Nella rose. "Let's go out—I don't want this coffee."

Miss Murasky paid the bill. The pock faced proprietor smirked and bowed at the door. "My las' wee'ek," said he. "I clos-a da Saturday." Sedaini's face was sad. "No beeziness—no one com-a da hill now. Ol' days done—all Japs com-a ove' da hill!"

"It'll be a lonesome corner," said Miss Murasky when they were outside. "I should think you would go crazy with that old woman and the kid. Say, did you see this sunburst? It cost four hundred dollars."

"Sure," retorted Nella, on the steps, but she did not look back, and the other girl departed with a sense of the incompleteness of victory. Nella went to the lodgings. At the table in the hall she found Arnold and the captain, the old man bent over a ragged newspaper map of the Philippines on which, following innumerable pin pricks that marked a gallant campaign, his uncertain eyes were fixed.

"It was here," he muttered, "they crossed the river, and then it must have been a good 30 miles to Bamboang and the transport would be slow, would it not, sir?"

"Yes," answered the younger man, "and the roads—well, it was desperately slow among the rice paddies, the fellows tired and feverish—"

The captain had a finger on a ruddy spot. "Here the reserves were held, I think—and there the skirmish line was thrown forward. It must have been damned rough, sir, on those hills in the night!"

The girl watched them, the captain with his shaggy white head, the young man grave and dark. "And along the road before they came to the church was a fence of bamboos. It was a devil of a thing to take in the night, sir, when the charge came!"

Arnold looked wonderingly at the old man folding his map. The captain had brooded long, evolving a fine theory of Bamboang; he had talked it to the lodgers, to the hangers on at Unc' Pop's, to the policeman down the block and to wondering strangers in the square; it was thus and so, with military terms and great maneuvers—in the darkening portals of his mind the brave, red picture hung.

The veteran put away his worn map. He could see little, but he divined a woman's presence. With a bow he moved off, feeling for the staircase, and as Arnold went to help him, turned with his grave salute.

"The honor of the service, sir."

"The honor of the service, Captain."

"Tell me," muttered Nella, when the old man had gone, "will that Larry get a medal—and when's he coming home?"

"Next month, maybe—I don't know." Arnold evaded her uncertainly.

"He'll be a great man, won't he?" the girl said. "How in the world can we put him in this hole? But you won't be here, will you?"

"Will you?"

The girl laughed. "O, I don't know. I don't know what I'll do! This is a queer house. I'd like to see that fellow, though—that Larry who saved his friend."

"Look here, Nel, don't bother about Larry."

"Why, he must be grand. Ham, why do you stick about the town? Why don't you get away and do something like that? My God, if I was a man!"

He did not answer, and she wondered, idly after a time, if she had hurt him; he had been grave enough of late—she wondered if his thoughts ever went back to Sylvia Spring, if he knew any part of the sorry ending of his evil—and if, to her, he would ever tell of it.

Through the window they watched the moonlight on the bay beyond the city. In the silence the captain's voice came down the stairs, telling a hero's story to the dark. The captain had a grand phrase of life, it seemed to the younger man—it rose above the slang and gabble.

A steamer's wake lay through the shining water, all palpitant as a bird's flight, and with his eyes on this Arnold's mind went back to the old days—the mist on the rice fields, the jungle plazas, the smoke above the nipa nuts, the brown throated soldiers with the dark skinned island girls along the moonlit shores. It had been youth's care free adventure, hot blue seas, treacherous cities, palm lands; and he, a lover of the wide world, her days of danger and her magic nights, was now hemmed in, broken, held here by a shrill voiced old woman, a blind man, a restless girl and an abandoned child—here, amid the kitchen smells and the bed making, the clutter and the gossip.

Well, he would get away—he was finding himself—thank God, he was young yet, even if the triumph of youth was done. He would go away; there was nothing to hold him—nothing!

In the silence Nella heard him stir and turn to her.

"I wonder," he said, "if curious little cobwebs get into your brain, too?"

"I know—I just go wild with nervousness sometimes!"

But he knew that she did not understand—and never would.

"Where's your lady friend?" Nella queried after a while, as he did not continue, "the religious woman—she's not been around of late, has she?"

"No. She turned me away, Nel." He sat closer to her and went abruptly on as if the need of telling was great to him. "She heard that old story about me, somehow—about the girl, you know. I was depending on her, and she broke with me over that. Everybody believes it, Nel. Even granny—I can see it sticking in her old eyes—thinks I robbed that girl and sent her home. Well, you know what every one said of it."

Nella said nothing. She had never heard before this tumult in his voice—the swift rise of feeling. It was nothing like Hammy Arnold of the town; but perhaps the dark was shielding him.

"Well, I can't blame them," he went on. "There's been nothing about me but what looks crooked. But, Nel, I didn't—that country girl went back to the north from me as good as your little sister is at Notre Dame." The stillness troubled him. "I didn't harm her," he went. "Nel?"

"What?" she muttered.

"Do you believe it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you told me it isn't true."

"Why, I might lie to you."

"Why should you lie to me? What difference could it make to me whether you were straight or not? I just believe you—that's all."

His mood was lightening; not in joy, but as a man adrift on the ocean watches the coming day, glad at least that it is not dark.

"No," he muttered, "we don't need shams, Nel—you and I. We know—we've faced it all. I've come to find out how far I've drifted—and to wonder what's beyond it."

"Sometimes I wonder," she answered simply, "but it puzzles so. I'd go crazy if I tried to find a reason for anything. But, Kid, you've changed." She turned to him intently. "Seems like things hurt you so now."

He stirred at her guess; not to himself, all his life long, had he admitted that beneath his mordant play lay acute sensitiveness, a receptivity, a power of feeling hurts. These it had been needful from the first to deny and jest with—he had told himself long years ago that he had succeeded well.

WITH A SMILE HE HANDED THE TYPEWITTEN SHEET TO THE GIRL

"Changed?" he smiled. "I'm tired. No one thing has led me to it, but just everything. And, Nel, I want to go—to break with things. You can't see, but seems that life lays before us, waiting like a black rat. And I want it different somehow."

He wondered if she knew the hollowness he felt, his crippled will, his confused good; it struck him as odd that he should try to guess at Nella's mind—he who had evaded her with gentle indifference the years of their friendship, who had accepted her always for what she was, as he had done all this world. "I want it different," he went on. "Sometimes I think a woman could have made me—it takes a good woman to hold a man out of what I've lived. But I had my chance—two chances. I've never told you, Nel, but there was Sylvia, and then Miss Wayne. You don't know what they meant for just a glimpse of what I might have been. I can't forget—that's why I'm going away. To make myself what they would have liked in a man—that's why I'm going."

She had risen in the dark with his recital, the confused vision that he tried to have her see, groping to make her know. He heard now a glass clink on the sideboard as she set the decanter back. Then she filled the glass again, with a smothered cry. He rose and caught her hand, so that the liquor spilled down their sleeves and on the marble of the sideboard.

"Go slow, Nel," he said. "Here—half of that!" But, eluding him, she drank the whisky with a sob, and wrenching free left him brushing the stuff from his coat.

Nella went swiftly to the kitchen. Miss Granberry was down the block at Wilson's delicatessen and the child was asleep. In the dingy hall the gas burned dim.

The girl, clinging to the door frame, saw the sodden window opening on the shaft, the cheap lace curtains, the dishes piled in the sink, the dirty clothes on a chair. The cooking smells assailed her; the window panes were grimy; from the gloom beyond fearsome shapes were pictured. A desperate fear clutched her heart. Yes, she would come to this—a parrot, a dying hyacinth in a lodging house kitchen window; her hands huge, knotted; her hair gray, frowsy; her back bent—toiling over the stairs of days with great swashes of water, crawling out to a mean purchase of tea and soup; at night lighting the dim hall jets under the hideous wall paper for drunken lodgers; washing her dishes from a lonely meal—to this—this, she would come! The years would crush her—all that brief youth gave, all her pitiful life held; her beauty faded, her vivacity dulled, her pulses yellowed—she possessed one thing—only one thing—and that she was offering, laying down uselessly in this brute dirt and squalor.

Yes, like a black rat it would come.

Already she was feeling old; and raising up her white hands she shrieked fearfully in the silence—shrieked and reeled, falling over the table, so that the young man rushing from the hall, seized her, moaning, and dragged her from the kitchen.

"What's the matter?—are you hurt?" he cried, and she could only sob and moan, sinking lower, until, lifting her, he carried the limp form to his rooms, and laid her on the couch.

"What is it, Nel? What's the matter?"

"I don't know—I don't know!" she shuddered, closing her blue eyes tight, clenching her hands. "Oh, my God—let me go!"

But, kneeling, he held her wrists tighter, and she had to turn to brush her wet eyes against his coat.

"Never mind—be still," he murmured; but getting an arm loose she raised it about his neck and drew him closer until her full, hot lips were against his cheek.

"Don't you care!" she whispered, in her sobs. "It don't mean anything, Hammy—from me! Only I'm adrift now—all adrift!"

"Never mind," he repeated, holding her closer on the couch. "Don't you mind—somehow, Nel, you're brave."

"I'm just a leaf in the storm," she whispered, with the tug and falter at her swelling throat—"but you go on—you got to go on! I keep thinking of Captain's Larry with his honor medal for saving that other fellow. You got to be as fine as he—it would be grand to think of you that way!"

CHAPTER XXI

Arnold came on Fred Weldy at the Star printing house in the closing days of the legislative session. The German greeted him with an awkward laugh, holding out a newspaper. He pointed to his picture among a row, the committee of investigation, and the members accused of accepting bribes in the racing scandal.

"Lillie says I look like a 'con,'" said the printer, "but I don't feel that way. I may be a dead one in politics, Ham, but I feel right!"

"That's a whole lot," laughed Ham. "I expect it'll hurt your business?"

"Sure," mused Fred. "My partner's scared to death, but Lillie says to buck it out. I'm the worst hated men at Sacramento. I never knew that everybody jumps a man as soon as he tries to be square. Shucks, what a row we raised, Ham, or you kicked me on to it! And I guess you're dead—you couldn't referee a dog fight in this town now!"

"I know." Arnold looked genially at him. "Fred, can you get me a job?"

Fred stared at the immaculate Ham. Never had he heard of Ham working. He hesitated; the matter was painful to his simple loyalty; he floundered and choked. "Work? I know a big printing shop that wants a hustler"—he took a card from his case—"but you? Work?—why, you funny old skate!"

Arnold rubbed his dark chin and laughed. "I'll take this, Fred—and thank you. No more velvet for me—I'm down and out, but the only thing in a race is the finish! I'm broke, and Nel's broke, and Granny's broke—even the blue pup's busted!"

There was indeed sore need at the old house on the hill, for since the closing of the family liquor store and Sedaini's most of Granberry's pitiful revenues from lodgers had gone. No more came the shawled wives and bareheaded girls to the grocery nor the clerklings and mechanics to sit at Unc' Pop's back bar. He had gone across the bay to live with Fred Weldy and Sedaini had been swallowed up in the Latin quarter. The corner came to be a house like Always Sunday, the mean little windows curtained, the padlock on the grocer's door, the sedate cleanness of the stairs leading above to Granberry's lodgings and the silence in Happy alley where once all the kids had played. The block below was deluged in the rising tide of oriental life; Japanese students, shoe makers, employment agencies swarmed, and the renting agent told Miss Granberry that the corner could not long resist the invasion.

As the days passed Arnold's idea of leaving town grew vague. At the end of the first week he had six dollars and fifty cents from his soliciting, and sitting on the balcony rail with Nella in the cool, shifty summer evening, they had laughed. Nella's eyes were heavy, she was dulled by the close rooms; she had lost her alluring luxuriousness, bespeaking now the lodging house woman.

"Who sewed my sleeve?" Arnold asked, holding his smoking jacket to the light. It was a bad job, indeed; the stitches long and slovenly.

"Pretty fierce, isn't it?" the girl muttered, and then defiantly: "I get wild with nothing to do. I wonder why I stick around here! I just have to sweep or do something, Ham."

He looked at the lamentable stitch—caught one, and unraveled the seam. Nella snatched at the sleeve. "Of course, it wouldn't stay—I never sewed anything before. But you're away all day, and you look awful tired, Ham, in that ragged coat when you get home. Take it off—I'll try again!"

"It is rather bad," said he. "But I'm no captain of industry myself. In fact, I'm a good deal of a shine when it comes to business, Nel. I can talk the money out of men's pockets at the track, but I can't go into their offices and face them, trying to sell them something they don't want. I never felt so cheap in my life, and that's queer, seeing that I'm giving them a straight deal."

"Well, you keep on," she retorted, "keep on!"

He went forth to another week of hopeful but dispiriting effort. Arnold was indeed a failure at business; there was no place for him in the keen thrift of traffic. By Saturday his commissions amounted to $5.75. He showed the money to Nella and they both forced a laugh.

"I wore out a pair of $8 shoes getting $5 worth of business," he told the girl with a humor of dismal exaggeration. "It's bad."

"Never mind," she retorted. "You tried—it's just grand!"

But the next night she met him with a curious diffidence in her careless eyes.

"I sold the little ring—I got $40—the landlord's agent was here today. Now, what'll we tell the old lady?—that we won it at the races?"

"Tell her the truth — that we're broke," he replied; but the girl demurred, and lied indolently to Miss Granberry when she paid the rent on the first of the month.

Nella had settled down to a strange content at Granberry's, restless and idle as she was. She seemed waiting for the turn of fortune, careless, vacant of mind in her droll humors. The old lady was perplexed and doubting—but who was to judge and who condemn? She puzzled her weary old brain and then passed it by. She had done her part; she had cared for the fatherless, she had been patient with the drunken men, and given refuge to erring women. Surely her God would know. At any rate, her path was easier for the doing.

Arnold quit the printing firm for a clerkship in the water company's office which paid him $15 a week, and came home in high feather one night, his arms filled with groceries.

"What's the use of being rich when you can have everything you want?" he cried cheerfully, and the sharp eyed old women and the heavy lidded girl smiled. Hammy was hard to understand these days of his labor. His nights were spent with the captain, and they discussed the wars in Samar. The four of them would gather about the table, when the cloth was cleared, and over the ragged map of the islands the dissembler built up the story of Bamboang. The captain listened sagely, his fingers trembling with palsy, his soul aflame with brave artifices and phrases. At times, with easy mendacity, Arnold brought what purported to be telegrams and clippings, and the blinded veteran listened with many oracular throat clearings and wise corrections.

But one night after he had gone to bed, his temples throbbing with a charge of the troop, which the liar had evolved in the great campaign, the three looked after him in a sort of fear.

"He's not so well," muttered Granny. "Suppose the troopship didn't come?"

"If it did," retorted Arnold, "things would be worse."

Nella stared at him. "What do you mean? Won't we all be glad to see his boy—a lieutenant with yellow stripes and a medal of honor?"

Arnold looked back at her, startled; he had not dreamed that the deceit had grown so big. "Why, Nel," he muttered, "you—you—"

She laughed. "Seems like I know this Larry! I dream of him. Wouldn't it be fine to love a man like that? I've listened to you and this crazy old soldier talk, and I can just imagine him. Hammy, when's he really coming home?"

The young man looked again at her—what splendid vision was he building also, in his careless soul, with his great campaign, his triumphs and heroic deeds of the troopers over sea? "Nel, don't you mind," he said. "Next month, I suppose, he'll come."

Meantime he was trying lamentably to be a clerk in the water office, though his penmanship was abominable, his arithmetic a farce. The second week the secretary looked over his glasses and said:

"Arnold, are you the chap who was before the grand jury last fall?"

"Yes," answered the clerk.

"Indeed?" the other smiled.

The new employe worked long hours, sometimes collecting about the city in the dusty afternoons of the cool summer. He met old familiars of the town with enigmatic smiles or jesting indifference, but avoided them where he could. And the harlequin street forgot the renegade for other diversions. He was not one given to conscience; to himself he said he was tired—no more. Of Grace Wayne, as of Sylvia, he thought with curious weighings of impersonal sentiment. "No matter now," he would muse. "The card's wiped clean—everything's got to be new!"

Nella came one evening to find Miss Granberry in the hall barricaded with ancient hat boxes, lavender smelling cases and clothes flung from closet and attic, agog with excited energy, washing orders and protests. A miracle had come—indeed!

A wandering brother, sojourner of north sheep camps, unheard of for 15 years, had broken his leg. He wrote from Victoria and sent Granny $50, and would she come succor the luckless limb? Doubt, pleasure, dismay seized the old lady. For 40 years she had not crossed San Francisco bay. She was aghast at the adventure, then her kind heart rebounded to the lamentable brother. Yes, she would go—but the house? Mr. Hammy's laundry, the Captain's breakfast, the Cookhouse Kid? She looked askance at Nella's assurance—a girl whose idea of keeping house was to wash a handkerchief and stick it to dry on the window! But her telegram—she must get to the brother at once.

The neighborhood women—chiefly Mis' Wilson, who kept the delicatessen—sniffed at Granny's confiding the lodgings to Nella. They retired with headshakings, and this decided Granny at once. All her fervent loyalty to her own flashed out. Nella it would be!

But she had a prodigality of cares to leave behind. "Now, dearie, will you remember this?" she would cackle over her packing—the milk bottle must be on the stairs, the scavenger man paid Wednesdays only, and the side rooms beyond the portieres were to rent for $2.50 the week—in the rear, for two—an infinity of directions. She paused once to bring forth the Japanese student's stunted hyacinth which should have bloomed months ago.

"It's coming, dearie," said the old woman, "slow, but see here, and there, pushing bravely through the mold! I'm going to leave it with you, and if I'm not back by Mr. Hammy's birthday on the 26th, you must give it to him—from me. Surely it will be in bloom then!"

Arnold found them in this gabble and throwing about; the girl sitting on a trunk; the old woman, all her intense nature at once rebounding at this adventure, to her ears in clothes and stuffy accumulations. He was at once assailed with perplexities—the whole scheme of living for the four weeks Miss Granberry would be gone was dinned into him—rote and rule such as she had evolved through the adjustments of an intricate poverty of 50 years.

Even then, it was with doubts that Miss Granny departed the next day on the Victoria steamer. Arnold saw her off, seated in her stateroom, her black silk mitts folded in her lap and the place reeking lavender.

Arnold went directly to his work of collecting the water rates after Miss Granny put to sea; it was late when he came up the Washington street hill. Nella was in the tiny kitchen, which was a haze of blue smoke, her sleeves rolled up, a gay turban on her red brown hair. The young man watched her for a moment before he came to speak cheerily. She looked up flushed, pleased, but a trifle anxious.

"The old fellow upstairs isn't coming down. He don't feel well, and he's asking why the papers don't have any news about that battle. Let's go up to see him after dinner—he only wants some tea."

With the flaxen haired child the two sat at the kitchen table. The meat was overdone, the canned tomatoes thin, the macaroni soggy. A curious constraint was on the group, though Arnold praised the cooking extravagantly, causing Nella to laugh, silly over his whims. But they missed the old woman's shrewd gossip; it was as if a place were vacant on the firing line; the forlorn outposts drew closer, as though they stood in the dark, cheering one another through doubtful hazards.

The young man looked gravely at the girl across the table, at the waif by her side, at the dim gas above in Granny's kitchen.

"Nella, you must get out of doors more—you're losing your color. You must be in the air, and not have this dismal old place on your mind."

"Where'll I go?" she laughed. "I can't go around town, and I'd be frightfully lonesome at the park."

"Haven't you any friends—girl friends, somewhere?"

"No. You know how women are! I got to stay away. I'm all right—this place'll keep me busy. I feel more contented, some way or other."

"Sunday you take the kid and go across the bay to Sammy's—you need the outdoors, Nel."

"No—I don't want to. The country makes me lonely, and the old man's too sick. When'll his boy come back?"

"I don't know," muttered the dissembler, disconcerted.

"I fixed a room for him—the big east one looking over the harbor where he can see the transports off the Mission. Do you really think he'll care to live with us—an officer with a medal? The east room's pretty. I put in the best rugs and your lounging chair for him."

"Nel!" he retorted, startled—"for Larry Calhoun!"

"It's fine," she answered gayly. "I wonder what he'll think of me? Can't you hear a word from him? There's a letter come for you."

Arnold opened the envelope she gave him. It was brief. His services with the water corporation would not be required after the coming Saturday night. With a smile he handed the typewritten sheet to the girl and watched her face harden beneath its import.

"Damn them!" she muttered, her eyes bright on him.

"Don't you care," he put in slowly. "I was looking for something of the kind. You see, the record I've got around town kills me with the big business houses. There's nothing said, but it's turned me away from a dozen situations, Nel. The company just discovered that I am the same Arnold who was mixed in the grand jury business—that's all. I'm a crook with them—that's merely a reasonable view of it."

"I know! Well, no matter—what are you going to do now?"

"I'll have to find something. And I've pretty well gone through the white handed jobs. It isn't easy to find things I can do."

"I thought you were going to leave town."

He looked uneasily at her, at the child, at the window of Granberry's kitchen. "Yes. But—well, I don't know. You see—" he stopped in some confusion before the intent of her eyes—"O, we'll get along all right. They can't keep me out of everything, you know."

"You said you were going to the hills?"

"I am."

"Look here," she retorted, "you go, Hammy. Don't let us be a drag on you. We can all get on."

"The house can't run without money."

"O, money! Money is easy. Here's these diamonds and my furs—they don't mean much, somehow, any more."

"No—no. I thought I'd sell the old piano and some of that china in my rooms."

"Your mother's pretty things? No; we can get on fine."

She rose and clattered the dishes with a laugh, pushing back her reddish hair which had tumbled about her brow. "Money—I can always get money—don't ever both about that! You go to the country and be square."

"Go? Kid, did you ever think how alone we are? You and I up on this hilltop with a blind old man and a baby?"

She laughed in some confusion and hurried about the work.

After a while, in the silence, Arnold went to the attic roms above, under the ancient gable.

The old man was asleep, the moonlight, through the window, aslant on his bushy brows, the scar above his eyes. The younger watched him a while intently; a wistfulness had come to the veteran's face—this waiting was surely long, the ending vague; and slowly the light was darkening. Only one thing stood in a splendor to the Captain's soul, and that was how the young fighting fellows had held the line at Bamboang. The other man had fed the story to him piece by piece; the veteran could describe it as vividly as though he, the field marshal, had stood on the heights and directed the action. But it had become a thing that was sapping the imagination of the creator; Arnold felt at time that his soul was eaten hollow with the deceit—a mere shell of dreams.

Arnold went back to his apartments. Fred Weldy had asked him to go to the theater tonight. He came on Nella out in the kitchen, and watched her, still the restless and good humored. Yet her youth was going—the gilded halls of light and laughter, of great imaginations, had darkened; they had become a hovel that encompassed her.

The black rat drew nearer. But rarely would she see; to her had been given lightness.

The man looked down on her. The motherless child had tramped in a flooded gutter that evening; its feet were wet and the girl had only now discovered it. The dim hall of the lodgings was still; there had been for three days no roomers except themselves. Arnold looked at his watch—he was to meet Weldy at the Columbia at 8 o'clock. But he stayed irresolutely.

"Nell, I haven't touched the piano for seven months—I've hardly sung a note. You know my voice failed long ago. But suppose we get some music out of that dusty corner and just try it?"

She looked up with a laugh, always her aimless, good-humored retort to the world—but he saw the pleased gratefulness in her eyes.

He went to his room and lit the lamp, which cast it into warm shadows; the marble Marquise on the piano vivid, white in the gloom. He searched among the music and went again to the hall seeking the girl.

She was still with the child, taking off its shoes and kneeling to wring the stockings, the dirty water dripping through the diamonds on her fingers.

CHAPTER XXII

THE following week Arnold found a place on the water front, as tally clerk for a shipping firm. It would pay him $18 a week, which now, in the needs of the house on the hill, seemed munificent.

He came away under instructions to report the following day, and oversee the checking of produce as it arrived on the boats from up the Sacramento river. It was to be long night hours on the wharves, but he told Nella Free of his luck with enthusiasm—he had been about the town a week looking for work in vain.

For the first time in his life Arnold had come face to face with the hostile social aspect—the complacent impudence of rebuff—which the suppliant for bread-labor ever meets from the vestigial tyranny of men's minds, for the dignity of labor is but a snug and easy platitude. The man who possesses may glut the cruelty the dumb races learned under the whips of forgotten kings on the man who must ask—the same fat soft hand that gestured to the slaves beaten to death as they shoulder-strained at Cheops' blocks waves complacently at the bread-needy today.

Arnold, in his need and inutility, reaped to the full his idle sowing—he had no weapons for these new hazards of fortune against which he now tried to make headway. The town, it seemed, within the month had forgotten him. He was now facing its indifference and suspicion with nothing but his new simplicity of motive, and he saw how he had builded on nothing, had nothing, gained nothing. The friends of his other life could give him no aid in this; references would have damned him where they would not provoke a smile. But he kept on with the troubled seeking; at the house he had a droll cheerfulness, so that night after night they came to watch for him, the waif expectant near the head of the stairs, the Captain at the table, his hands crossed on the head of his cane, and the girl turning her face from the murk of the kitchen with her idle laugh.

The old man disconcerted him one night; a hand trembling with palsy laid a smudged newspaper by his plate. "On the 30th they will be here," said the Captain calmly. "The Sherman sails this week from Manila, the Third battalion is on board—my son's troop is coming home."

The younger man stared at the paper. Nella listened with curious absorption. It was a brief cablegram among the dispatches to the war department; the Second cavalry was returning. The veteran was quiet in his faith and surety.

"Lawrence is coming on the 30th."

The Captain had been wistful these many weeks, patient with his brief questionings, eager in his reconstructions of the campaign; but wistful for a voice out of the silence. Now it had come.

"A stranger in the park gave me the paper," he added. "I could not see it, sir—my eyes are not so well. But they're coming home—those young fellows who did so well at Bamboang."

"And he'll be a lieutenant?" queried Nella. "Do you suppose he'll be in the parade up Market street, like they always have—with a band?"

The Captain nodded, pleased, but rebuking. This was nothing—this woman's way of seeing things. Arnold went to his rooms leaving them discussing the matter, the Captain lofty, the girl in absorption, chattering, and then in fitful dreams. Alone, the graceless liar studied the matter. He had created a heroic presence in their minds—and now he faced an inexplicable dilemma.

What could he tell the Captain when the troopship was in the bay?—what evasion offer Nella when the squadron rode the street?

To Be Continued Next Sunday

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