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*Complete Book-Length Novel*

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A liberal instalment of a book-length novel which had its inception in that fascinating masterpiece, "The Rebel Soul"

*Published serially in All-Story Weekly, April 12, 1919*

*Feature*

**The Readers' Viewpoint** **139**

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# Into The Infinite

By Austin Hall

**T**O The Editors:

*Some months ago you published in your magazine a story called "The Rebel Soul." This tale I related to Mr. Hall one night years ago in a restaurant on B street. And now I am sending to you the real essential part of the story.*

*It is not a sequel. It is really the main part of the tale. It is complete in itself. The characters have been brought forward, and the strange events related by myself just as they happened. But in no way does it lean on the other. I am saying this so that those who have not read "The Rebel Soul" may read it without feeling that they are engaging in a tale that is continued.*

*And a word by the way of introduction:*

*The George Witherspoon of "The Rebel Soul" is not impossible. Those who read the first story will remember that he stole my body; that by some mysterious means our spirits had become transplanted, and that our corporeal beings each became the habitation of the other. In other words, to all outward appearance I became George Witherspoon and he became Walter Warren. It was a metamorphosis of the impossible.*

*They say that a fair exchange is no robbery. Which may be so. And had it been fair I would never, perhaps, have had occasion to relate "The Rebel Soul." It is the evil of George Witherspoon that led to the story.*

*He was evil; so evil that there was none on earth beside him. He was wickedness itself; and rampant, he was unrepentant. He ruined my body, in his dissipations, and when he was ready, returned it again to my keeping. And departed.*

*But there is one thing which it is well to remember. He had not always been wicked. In his youth and boyhood he had been good; his evil was not natural. I had always thought, even when in the depths, that there was some power, some genius that we could not understand, working with George Witherspoon. He was too much like a creation. There was ever that about him of a Faust or Frankenstein, or perhaps a Mephisto. He was too uncanny to be merely human; too much like a spirit.*

*Happily I was mistaken. He was not impossible. The whole explanation, now that it is come, gives us something to live for. No man can read of George Witherspoon without an exhilarated pride in his own manhood. He who was all evil was all good. It is a strange story. But it gives us something to strive for—and a future.*

*Very truly yours,*

*Walter Warren.*

The above interesting letter served as the prologue to this story when it was first published.  
Part one begins on the following page.

**W**HEN my father died he left me naturally, as his only heir, his fortune. I was sick of the law and of my practice, and as my instinct and interest was in finance, I took over the bank that had been my father's. I will say right now that I was a good banker. I was naturally conservative; all the traits that I had acquired from my paternal side made me so; but I had also from my mother's side that poetry and lightness and imagination which is such an incentive to seeing things ahead and for construction. The two qualities added together made for progress, which indeed, in real substance, is but a welding of sane conservatism to a far-seeing imagination. Without the welding, the one quality makes the miser; the other the poet.

I was successful. I made money and cherished my family. In my way, for I confess that I was not the head of a great institution, I was very fortunate. My ventures turned out happily, I will not say luckily, for that, you know, is a gambler's term and does not apply to bankers, who just speculate or invest. I was the financial arm of several new industries which redounded to the credit of our little city, and which instilled in it a new vigor and virility that threatened a doubled census and a classification with the towns of some importance. Naturally I was respected. Whatever stain had been upon the name of Warren had been erased. At least I felt so.

Occasionally the Master would come over from the city for the weekend. At first his visits had been far between; but as our acquaintance grew stronger and he understood the strange melancholy under which I sometimes labored they grew more frequent. To me he had become almost as one of flesh and blood. I ever looked upon him as a father, as protector, as a sort of benevolent spirit that fate had given me to guide me through the darkness. Which indeed he was, as I never knew the time, when I felt I needed him, that he did not come to cheer me.

It was in October, the month of fallen leaves, of sudden gusts of wind and frost-bitten gardens. The feathered lines of the storms of autumn were racing northward; we had had a light rain and the indications of the heavy storms that were sure to follow were growing thicker. The day was growing to a close; from the windows of the bank, looking up the vista of the open street that gave a narrow

glimpse of the hills beyond the city, I could see the shadow of the earth's rim climbing slowly up the heights. How short the days were growing!

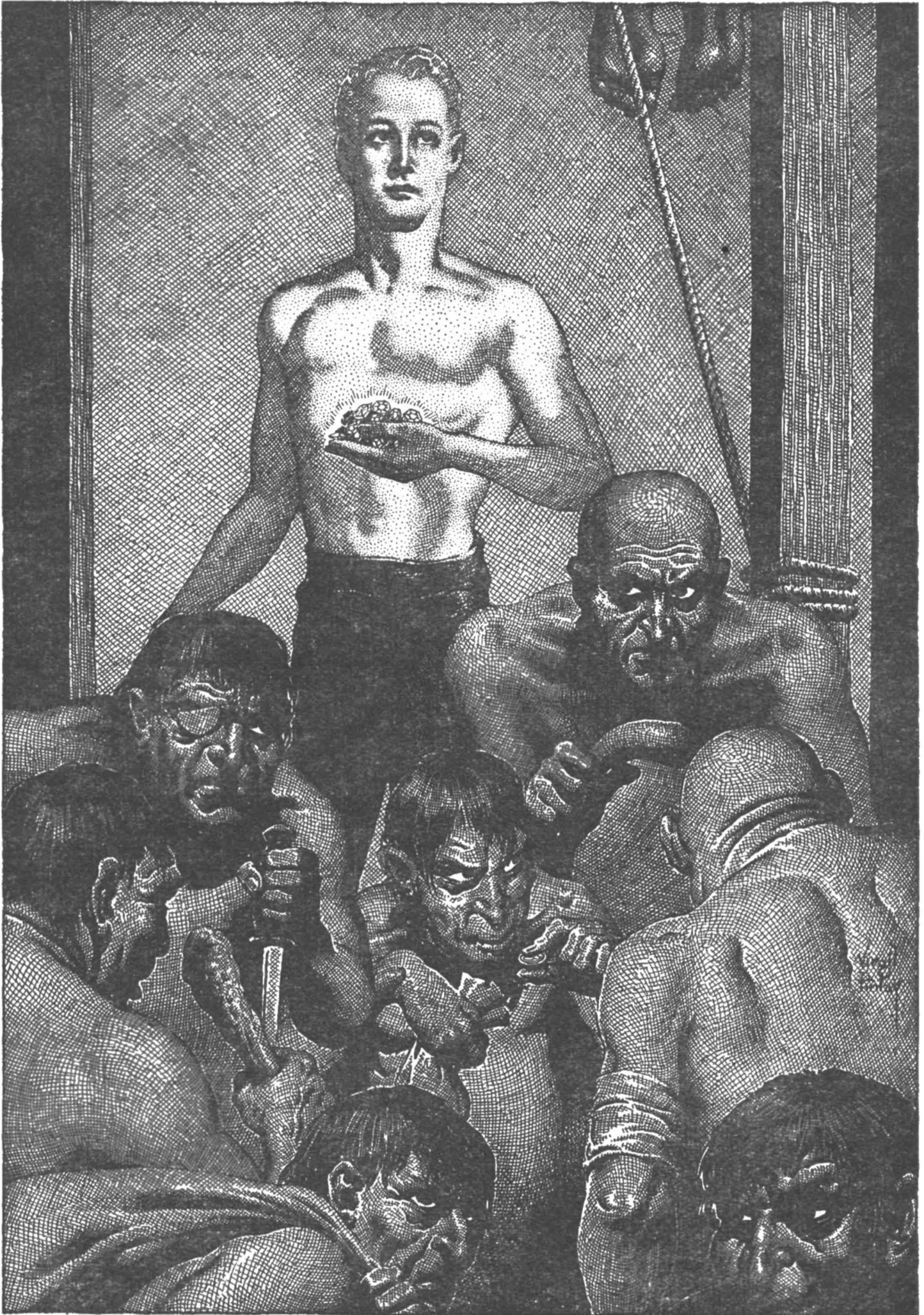
It had been one of my days of depression, so that I knew, it was almost certain, that I could expect the Master. My work was done; but I waited; I knew that he would come. My wife had telephoned a little while before; and I had told her. She loved him, even as I, and was glad to hear it. Some time before I had heard the whistle of the ferry-boat out on the water; the next car would surely bring him.

The clouds had gathered together, and an eery mooring wind was coming from the south; only to the west was there a patch of clear sky, gleaming with the pink of sunset. A fleck upon the window, another, then another, a sudden spatter growing into a trickle emphasized the storm's approaching. I looked down at my watch. As I did so I could hear the local coming into town. Knowing that it bore him, I pulled on my overcoat and hat and, after hunting up an umbrella that had not been used for months, stepped out upon the sidewalk.

The splashing of rain drops, the coming of nightfall, and the instinctive shrinking of every living thing to cover gave to the world a somberness that held one's spirit. It was just such a night as gave to brooding and to study. A wagon rattled down a by-street; an auto skidded around the corner; everything seemed slippery.

Somehow the air seemed weighted: the sound of splashing, the moisture, the souging south wind wrought upon me; I had the feeling, the old instinctive clutching that was forewarning—almost as though the wind kept saying: "Something, something, something, is about to happen!" It was fleeting, to be sure, a catching of the throat, a flutter, a sort of nervousness that caught and held me. I will not call it premonition.

By this time the crowd was coming from the local, scurrying, as all unprotected throngs do, in the first storm of the season. Among them I caught the erect form of the Master walking leisurely along, as was his custom. In his long coat, his white beard, his calm and well-poised bearing there was ever something to hold him apart from his fellows. I always had the feeling that he was different from all other mortals, or, rather, that he was something that others could



The man was spectacular in his methods. He had earned through the astounding brilliancy of his campaigns, the title, "KING OF THIEVES"

become, if they wished it; there was ever something about him of culmination, of man passed out of the gross and grown into a plane that is higher. He smiled and came over to me.

"The first storm of the season," is how he greeted me.

"Yes," I answered, "the first one, and coming in the evening a little gloomy."

"My dear Walter!" he answered, sharing my umbrella and placing his hand upon my shoulder. "You have got them again, I see. You make of yourself a barometer. Let us go home to your wife and babies; let us play about in their sunshine."

**I**T WAS the same old story. The Master never said much, but ever by his mere presence he shed his gladness. The spell wore away from me, and the old feeling of lightness and content came back. I never knew how he did it—whether it was his personality or what.

Neither of us was given much to talking, so we picked our way in silence. But just as we reached the gate he spoke:

"I have news to tell you, Walter."

"News?"

"Yes, news of Witherspoon. Of George Witherspoon, your playmate. Of him who was and is 'The Rebel Soul!'"

"Where is he?" A sensation of eagerness and fear came over me; he was a man I loved and hated.

"I do not know. That is exactly. One of us, Bray, has reported from London that he has seen him. He tells me he is still the same, only grown a little older and a little bit more sober."

The wind caught in the evergreen as he said it and a shower of drops fell upon us. The light from the windows streaming on the lawn lit up the moisture like the sheen of a million jewels.

"What—What is he doing—did he say?"

"Bray investigated. George Witherspoon is a thief!"

A thief! George Witherspoon! The playmate of my childhood! That golden head of innocence! He who in his youth would do no thing of evil! The spirit of all gladness living in the shadows! The vista of the happy days of our boyhood flashed before me. And a thief! I could only mutter with a voice that was badly shaken:

"George Witherspoon a thief!"

"Yes," returned the Master. "And you know, Walter, what that means."

"What?"

"It means that if he is a thief he is more than that; his genius will drive him on. If George Witherspoon is a thief, he is the king of thieves! The police have got their hands full!"

"And they will beat him!"

"No, never! Not in a thousand years. His is a kind that they cannot handle. And therein lies the danger. George Witherspoon can do more harm than a mighty army. His is a drunken spirit burning. We have been working on the case, and I think have reached solution. We must go to his assistance!"

"We?"

"Yes, you and I."

I shuddered. I had had experience once before. "Please count me out!" I amended.

"Ah," said the Master, "but you will come; it is your destiny; and we need you, George Witherspoon and I!"

The sound of our voices had been heard in the house; the door was opened and Clara called out:

"Is that you, Walter? What in the world are you doing out there in the rain? You will catch your death of cold. And is the Master with you? I should think that you are old enough by this time to keep out of the wet."

"I was just telling Mr. Warren a few secrets," laughed the Master; "we are coming. There—there," he laughed when we had entered the house; it does look a little foolish: two grown men standing in the rain and talking."

In the other room we could hear the children talking and the tinkled musical intonation of a young feminine voice just bursting into laughter. I would have known it among a thousand: it was silvery and distinct, rich with mellowness, and flooding the air with sweetness.

"Roselle is here?" I asked simply.

"Yes, Walter, and the children are just bursting over with joy. I don't know how she does it, but she can make sunshine out of midnight. She is ever so happy. I just now told her that she is a bird of paradise."

"She will interest you," I said to the Master. "She is Witherspoon again—only woman. She is of the same happy fascinating sunshine."

"Walter, what are you saying?"

"But she is."

"Please—please," pleaded my wife, "don't compare our Roselle to—that."

Just here a door was opened and one

of the children came rushing in upon us, shouting with laughter. Behind him came another child, a little girl. She was bedecked with ribbons, and Roselle was holding two long streamers, clucking out: "Git ap!" coming after. They were coming so swiftly and were so interested that before they knew it they had almost upset the Master.

"Roselle!"

For the first time she noticed there was a stranger; and, like the girl she was, instinctively touched her fingers to her wealth of hair.

"Roselle, will you always be roisterous? This is the Master."

She laughed and bowed. "You sober, old, young people. We were just having so much fun." Then to the Master: "I really have to come down here once in a while and gladden them into life. If I didn't those little tots would be old before they got in school."

The old man laughed in answer, and his eyes were a little brighter. I could see that she interested him deeply. And what wonder? Every grace that George Witherspoon had of physical manhood this girl had as a woman. Her form, her face, her symmetry, her personality, all magnetic. The wonderful chiseled perfection of flawless beauty, the shining black, wavy hair, eyes that were jet and Spanish, that glowed and danced with color, and in which one could fancy as he looked were gleaming the scintillations of a thousand dreams.

I ever fancied when I watched her that there had been thrown upon her the fairy gossamer of illusive fascinations. There was poetry and passion and enticement. She was of the type of beauty that women can but admire, but which drives men to madness. One realized instinctively the subtleness that was hers and the power, if she would but use it. A type of the superwoman in her girlhood. It took no stretch of the imagination to picture her as a Fata Morgana or a Helen. To play with wounded hearts and to stack them—that was her destiny.

I think that the Master saw it at once and understood her intuitively. His was a way of understanding, of looking through all natures and reading into the soul. He could do what others could not: he could penetrate past the maze of external fascinations into the inner spirit, and he could understand it.

Nevertheless, he was human and a man, and I could see that even upon him

her beauty had done its working. His eyes were brighter, his laughter was younger, and there seemed all about him an interest as in something that he had but just discovered.

When we were alone, just before dinner, he turned to me.

"You are right, Walter—certainly right. Another Witherspoon, only here a woman. God knows what would happen if they should meet!"

"And may He grant that they never shall!"

The Master ignored my interruption. "On the day they do meet," he continued, "that day you lose Roselle. They were born for the mating, their spirits will call each other. Out of the deep, out of the infinite the twin-souls will twine together. I fear, Walter, that your wish is destined to be futile. There are some things that will be."

## CHAPTER II

### THE PORTRAIT

THE thought gave me a sudden gripping pain. I had never, in thinking of Roselle, thought of anything but a flower in the blooming and her splendid, fascinating beauty as a woman. True, I had recognized the qualities, the hidden subtle alluring that raised her to a plane above her companions, and had felt that her enticing body was alive with magnetic potentiality. Her happy winsomness I had compared to the sunshine that had once been George's. But never with such a thought as this. To be a mate—to be as one with George Witherspoon! Ah, never!

Again, and in spite of the Master, the old feeling of quivering foreboding flushed upon me like a flood, blotting out all else in the wave of apprehension. But, I thought, instinctively, blindly, pleadingly, almost forcing the future with the intenseness of my wishing: "If it must come, let it be I and not Roselle." I could hear her laughing in the other room, and hear the children; and even as I thought they came bursting into the room, drowning out my forebodings with the music of their voices.

"Things of joy!" spoke out the Master. "Would that they could always be just so!" With that he reached out for little George and placed him on his knee, and with the others cuddled about him proceeded to tell a story.

The child he picked up had ever been

to the kind, old man the favorite of the three. He had been sick and puny almost from the day of birth, and for some reason, which neither I nor the doctor, nor anyone else could quite understand, seemed never destined to grow into the full vigor of his childhood. He had life, to be sure; but not exuberance: he played, but only in imitation of the others. I had insisted on naming him George, and had ever after been under a mild censure from my wife who held that as a name accursed! And indeed it seemed now that perhaps she might be right. What right had I to fasten a weight upon his childhood?

But to the Master the child had ever been a favorite. Perhaps he could see deeper than I, or even deeper than my wife, or it may have been the name itself that attracted. I had ever thought that he had a great love for the one that the little one had been named for; there was ever something about George Witherspoon, in the days that had been, that called for the greatest of affection. He had been a ray of sunshine.

What he was to the others he was even more so to the Master. He could look behind the gladness and distinguish the soul that was hidden, the incomprehensible spirit, and he could recognize the problem therein unfolded, and could see in him certain clues, which are so very rare, but which do occasionally fall among us to demonstrate that man is not all mud and clay. A problem, a solution, a spirit to admire but one unfortunately gone all wrong. I have ever noticed that a mother loves an errant son better than the others. So with the Master.

They sat there, the children, the Master, and Roselle. I could plainly see that the girl was greatly taken with my old friend of wisdom. He had a way about him, of greatness, kindness, and gentleness that won all hearts of whatever age and condition. With the children it was the same as with the others. He entered into their playing with an understanding, an appreciation that held them equal; he had a wonderful fund of stories and a way of getting down to their level; he could become a child as easily as he could be a man of wisdom.

I could see that he was getting into Roselle's heart as he did into all others. There was laughter and interest and wonder in his stories. The little ones sat and listened, clapped their hands and

wondered. Then dinner, and afterward the children all abed, and we, the grown-ups, sitting by the fire and listening to the storm that had fallen.

I do not know just how the thing came about—but in one of those shifts which conversation has a way of taking, the name of Witherspoon became the subject. Roselle had heard of him, and before this, without our knowing of it, had been picking up odds and ends about him.

At the very mention of his name she was all attention. It seemed appropriate that the name of one who had gone to the shadows, and who was all flash and fury, should be the subject with the storms descending.

"Do tell me all about him!" she exclaimed. "I have heard of him; what I have been told has sounded more like the tale of a fairy prince than a thing of fact and reason."

My wife laid down her sewing. Outside the wind fighting through the storm descending lashed the trees into a whirring roar.

"Roselle," she cautioned, "you are always looking into something that is connected with the devil. Of all the persons that you should not learn about that one is George Witherspoon. You have heard that he was the handsomest of men, vivacious and dazzling, and it has suited your silly ears. But you will learn more as you grow older: you will understand that handsome is as handsome does, to use the old, old saying. And George Witherspoon has not done handsome."

"Gracious me!" laughed the girl. "Why—why, Clara, poor dear sobersocks, must we only love the poor and ugly!" She tossed her black head prettily; the light from the fire gleamed in her hair. "Only the poor and ugly! If we are interested in one that is handsome a dozen chaperons are calling: 'Don't—don't, he'll bite you!' And, anyway"—a little spitefully—"I've heard that at one time or another half the girls in this town have been head over heels in love with him. What harm can there be in my merely talking?"

Clara bit her lip. What the girl had said was so: what could be the harm in simply talking? The man was now only a recollection and was gone forever.

**T**HE girl was cuddled on the floor before the fire, her hands in her lap, her beauty wonderfully effective in the soft

glow of the light. She was one of those rare creatures who are alluring in abandonment. Somehow of late she had grown even more enticing; there was that about her—a call, a beckon, and suggestion. When she tossed her pretty head, none of us could deny her. She had a way of getting what she wanted.

Now that she was on the trail of Witherspoon and his story, I knew that she would get it, she would wheedle it out, coax or argue, but in the end she would have it.

Therefore, when she turned to me, I must, even against the protests of my wife, tell to her the narrative of our life from the beginning, and with the love that I had for the period of our boyhood, for the sunshine, happiness, and openness that had been George Witherspoon, I have no doubt of the picture that I painted. When I talked of him I could always throw my love into my words.

I told her of his beauty, of his brightness, how he was the first in all his studies, how, with no apparent effort, he was ever the leader of his classes; his wonderful achievements as an athlete, of his generosity. I explained how the change came on him, how, from the personification of all gladness, he went to the shadows and became the embodiment of solid hatred. There was now nothing of evil that he would not do—no morals that would bind him, laws or customs.

And the Master! When I had finished he picked up the thread of discourse. With his splendid command of language he drew a vivid picture of George Witherspoon, great, true, wonderful and weird, a flash of sunshine streaking through the darkness—obeying no law nor order, loving no man whatever, a being to himself, godlike, dazzling, and unfathomable.

My wife had dropped her work and was

watching Roselle. As indeed was I, for with the recitation her eyes sparkled and a look we had never seen before was in them. Dreaming, admiring, flooding in the depths as though a storm hitherto unguessed was opened. Her lips, red as the reddest lips that ever called a lover, were slightly parted: her hands clasped in her lap and her whole form tense and listening, rigid, vivid and impressive, a living statue.

Such beauty is only given once in a lifetime. Hers was the kind of love that once aroused not all in the world could hinder, which would consume, destroy, sacrifice everything for attainment. The passion in those eyes, the depths and shadows told of the fires a-smolder. Somehow I had the feeling, intuitive, perhaps, but clutching, that she, that they, she and the Rebel Soul would come together.

And if they did, would she go with him? I closed my eyes to shut out the dreaded picture.

The Master ceased his talking. For a moment all was silent. And then Roselle, with her face to me—a face that was flushed and eager:

“Cousin Walter, I want you to bring me his picture!” The way in which she said it, and the manner, stood for no contradiction—it was settled. I went and got it.

For a long while she studied it. Then she stood erect.

“That,” she said, “is a man! What a man should be. That is the kind of man I am going to love. A man of life and action; beautiful and strong. Who is afraid of nothing, whose every breath of living is a moment of adventure; who is alone against the world, who goes along, as the Master says, ‘like a thing of light flashing through the darkness!’”



"Or a thing of evil!" amended my wife. "George Witherspoon is a thing of light only in his person; his deeds are darkness!"

"What of it!" exclaimed Roselle. "He is alone; he is splendid; he is beautiful, and the world is against him. What if he doesn't come up to your standards: the man who fights against all society is a hero!"

"Silly child!" corrected my wife. "Foolish and romantic!"

But the other tossed her head and stood there, a goddess just born into being, her eyes flecked with emotion, her whole form vibrant, her beauty scintillating with the fire just entered, vitalized, glowing, unquenchable.

"I do not care. He is alone; he is immense; he is against the world; he is a man." She held the picture up. "I am going to keep it. You will allow me to, won't you, Walter? I shall keep it always—always."

With that, without another word or gesture, she opened wide the door and was racing up the stairway.

### CHAPTER III

#### GEORGE WITHERSPOON

**F**OR some moments not a one of us said a word. My wife, her face slightly clouded and her fingers shaking perceptibly, resumed her work; the Master watched, with those large unknowable eyes of his, the fantastic ember imagery in the fireplace.

Outside the storm was focused to a roar, and the fierce, defiant splatter against the window, the incessant sound of the falling water, the pouring from the eave-spouts wrought upon me and sharpened to poignant piercing the anxiety that held me.

It was Clara who broke the silence.

"I am afraid, Walter, that you should not have told her. She is only a girl and too romantic. There was ever something about George Witherspoon wonderfully magnetic. Even now he's gone there is that about him that will set a young girl's blood a-tingle. You know what he was at college. His spirit was too radiating.

"All girls are prone to handsome heroes; and when they are adventurous, brave, daring, and have the glamour of the unknown thrown about them, they are doubly so. That is the only side of

George Witherspoon that Roselle can see. She cannot discern the fiend and sin that lurks in the splendid body. You have merely aroused feelings in her heart that it is wicked to awaken. She is a child, defenseless. You have made a grave mistake."

Perhaps so. I said nothing; my heart was disturbed by vague misgivings. I loved Roselle—and I had loved the other. Was it possible that they would come together? Why was it that out of my life I should give my two loved ones? What was this wonderful beauty and the mystery that lurked behind it? Two, those two, the most radiating beings on earth, were enigmatic. Why was it?

We look into the eyes of our dearest friends and imagine that we see them. What we look at are mere externals, movements of living muscle; we see nothing. For all that we know the other might be a million miles away; we never see him. The soul, the real soul, is always hidden; all we see is muscle, actions and reactions.

But the Master, always ready, took up the situation. He had a soft way of being cheery, of mellowing the flow of thought, of bringing, as it were, the light out of the darkness.

"You are mistaken, Mrs. Warren. George Witherspoon is not what you think him. There is nothing wrong in telling Roselle—she is a woman. She has passed out of her childhood. Perhaps she and the other are to come together. So be it! It is their destiny. But if they do, only good can come of it. If Witherspoon needs Roselle, and the fates decree it, it is not for us to hinder.

"I am sure," he continued, "that there are wonderful things awaiting. He whom you have classed as sin eternal, the embodiment of all hatred, is really all light and goodness. A great unsolved mystery is before us, deep beyond all human ken or imagination. George Witherspoon is fighting alone against all the evils of all eternity. We must go to his assistance. And we may need Roselle."

My wife had resumed her sewing; her sad lips were compressed in a thin, straight line of decision. She admired the Master and loved him; but it is hard to excuse sin to a really good woman; she sees things as they are; sin is sin and nothing else; there is no extenuation.

"Yes," she answered, "he is to be pitied! And so is the devil. And the devil is George Witherspoon. Wait and see!"

Just then a noise in the other room—a child wailing and coughing and calling “mama.” The Master and I were left alone to our meditations.

The words of the Master had caught me. Could it be that, after all, the George of my childhood, the old George, my George, was innocent? Could he be brought back to me unscathed and spotless? Could it be that he was calling, that there was something that I could do, that he was even now with his back to the wall fighting back forces that I could not dream of? Could it be that he who was against all society was fighting despairingly against a greater power as well?

My old love welled up in me; I would go anywhere, to the end of the earth, to help him. A sudden rush of spirit caught me, rolling me in an exultant wave. There was hope—hope; we could do it.

The Master saw it. He had a way of understanding, even before I had spoken. A quiet, satisfied smile was on his features; the kindly light that was ever in his eyes grew kinder. He moved his chair closer to the grate and poked the living coals till the room was alight with flickering brightness. Even as he had stirred the embers of my mind into glowing.

“And so, Walter,” he said quietly, “you are decided. You are going with me after Witherspoon.”

I nodded. “Yes; I have decided. But what shall we do? How can we do it—and where must we go to seek him?”

“Into the Infinite!”

He dazed me. “Into—” I asked. “Where did you say? Into where?”

“Into the Infinite!”

“That is rather a large place; I am afraid that I do not understand you.”

“Perhaps not, Walter. It really is rather enigmatical. Nevertheless, it is so. I shall try to explain it. The infinite, as you say, is rather a large place—so large in fact that there is no other. It is all-embracing. But it is not so far away. It is really right beside us, we are part of its very being. The trouble is in our conception. We are accustomed to think in limits.

“ASK any man what he thinks of infinity, and he answers in space or numbers; he tries instinctively to think of the ultimate that he knows is missing—never of himself as part. He himself is sure and settled; he is a man. Infinity is something else entirely, the end that is missing. He is like you and me and every-

one: for he is conceited with himself.

“Walter, infinity is ourselves. It is here with us all the time; we are infinitesimal, a million times divided infinitesimally. The laws that we have evolved are nothing; we are shadows, but, nevertheless, we are something. It is our good fortune that we misconceive it; it is the law of nature; we are ourselves.

“But there are times when it falls upon us. George Witherspoon is outside of all our laws and reasons. To explain him we must go away from ourselves, go beyond all our known conceptions. We must go into infinity for the law that holds him.

“For he is not impossible—the mere fact of his being proves it. Just so sure as there is a positive, there is a reason. Nothing can exist without it. This is one of the cases that make us conscious of our insignificance. When we are through you will realize what I am saying.”

Then I asked eagerly: “You have a clue to work on. You have learned something?”

“We think so. I will tell you one thing, and it may startle you: George Witherspoon is not a man. He is an ultimate, a forecast, or what you will; but he is not a man—not as we conceive him.”

It indeed was startling. “What is he, then? Spirit, imp, or devil!”

The old man smiled benignly. “No,” he reassured, “not that, nor anything of the sort; he is the most material thing in the world. He is neither imp nor devil, nor yet a spirit! There is nothing impossible about him, yet he is beyond all our rules and reasons. When anything like this takes place we all of us straightway jump to the supernatural.

“But he is not supernatural, even though he does not come within the precepts of mere mortals. You and I and anyone could become even such as he, if granted certain conditions. He is the one exception to the rule of mankind that I know of. And you know all rules must have exceptions.”

Neither man, imp, spirit, nor the devil? What was there left that he could be? Surely he was something. But the Master would not enlighten me.

“No,” he said when I asked him. “I shall not tell you. Besides, I may be wrong. After it is all over and I have worked the problem to the finish, and we have in our hands the solution, then you can have the facts. I am taking you along as a witness.

"After what you have experienced and in view of your love for your old companion, it is right that you should witness, step by step, the strange and remarkable events which will lead to the conclusion. And I warn you there are dangers; our way will be full of pitfalls, perils will be multiplied a hundredfold, hidden and unseen.

"But of one thing you can rest assured: George Witherspoon is not a thing of darkness; rather is he one of light. We must go to him. He is living in the Infinite. We must bring back the companion of your childhood."

"Amen, to that!" I said.

Just then a voice from the stairway. It was Clara calling: "Walter!" There was that in the voice which startled and told of a mother's worry.

"Will you call up the doctor, Walter? Georgie is very sick again. As soon as you get him come up to the room."

In a moment I had the doctor. It was the same doctor, by the way, for whom I had hurried, years before, on the night of our graduation. The child had been sickly from the cradle, and it was nothing unusual for us to have him. He promised to come very shortly. Then I excused myself to the Master and went up to the sick-room.

The little one was in his mother's arms. He was very sick, indeed, burning up with fever and coughing slightly. Like most fathers, I could only smooth his head, feel his pulse, and say: "Poor little darling!"

I could feel a world of love for the frail, little being lying there in his weakness. Clara was crooning softly. "Poor little angel," she was saying; "why, oh, why, did we name you George?" Every time that she said that it cut me like a knife-thrust.

A clatter upon the walk—Undoubtedly the doctor. The bell rang. I went to the door to meet him. A gust of wind came with the opening: the rain driven in lateral sheets sprayed in our faces.

"A night for the devil!" exclaimed the doctor, stepping inside. He was wet, and the rain sogging in his hat and garments sparkled with crystalline effulgence in the lamplight. "How is the little one?" He removed his rubbers deftly, and, picking up his case, went with me up to the sick-room.

In a little while he was gone; but he left us with the dreaded knowledge that the little one was very ill, indeed. He

would call again in the morning. When I opened the door for his departure, and we stood, both of us, looking out into the dreadful night, he whistled.

"Do you know, Warren," he said, "I never go out in a night like this that I don't think of George Witherspoon."

Even he! It startled me. Why should everybody, everyone suddenly get to thinking of George Witherspoon?

"Why?"

"I don't know. He must have been born for storm and conflict. There must be an affinity between his spirit and the tempest. To ride the lightning, to lash the storm's wild whirlwind. He seems symbolic. I, who am not a mystic, whose whole life is prosaic, cannot help but think so. It haunts me! Don't you think that there was always something about that man that seemed potential? By the way, what became of him?"

"You know as much as I do."

"Not a word?"

"Just rumors. Last time from London."

"Strange, strange, a wonderful character—why should he haunt me? Well, I must be going."

A moment later I heard his car sluing along on the flooded pavement. I shivered. Outside was all darkness and a roar. The tempest and George Witherspoon; even the doctor!

At last I shut the door carefully, and with a foreboding, heavy heart ascended the stairs to my loved ones. Clara was sitting by the bed of the little one, her beautiful face drawn with worry, her hand lightly on the snow-white coverlet, and her eyes watching with a tenderness that was pathetic the suffering of little George.

To be near her and to cheer her, and to do what little I could, I drew a chair alongside. For some time we sat together. Neither of us spoke a word; but our thoughts were full of sorrow. And I could not resist my fleeting transitory self-condemnations.

My mind was shifting between sorrow and rebuke. In spite of my reason and common sense I had an intuitive sensing that the trouble of the little one was in great part my own. And yet—a mere name—what could it amount to?

I do not know how long we sat there. It may have been a few minutes, and it may have been an hour. I was so engrossed that I only heard, as in the distance, the fury of the tempest sweeping. Once I recall faintly in the lull the *tick!*

*tick! tick!* of the clock upon the stairs. I remember thinking of the Master, of the doctor, and then finally and abruptly stopping at Witherspoon.

I don't know why, but the very thought of his name now became suddenly oppressive. A lump came in my throat, a sense of impotent dread and predestination. Instinctively I took my wife's hand for human companionship and consolation. At the same moment, reaching its culmination, the storm focused into fire and lightning, a great clap of thunder, as if the earth were broken, slammed down upon us. The house seemed to quake and shiver.

My wife hovered over the baby, and I, out of my very nature, stood close to reassure her. At the instant someone laughed, a haunting, taunting laugh, cadent, and bringing a world of memory. Astonished and dumbfounded, I glanced across my shoulder. Standing in the doorway was George Witherspoon!

#### CHAPTER IV

"I AM HIS—ALL HIS!"

"GEORGE!"

That was all I could say. Just that. It was more of a gasp than an utterance. My wife clutched me by the arm, but sat down calmly. He was the same old George—beautiful beyond expression, with the atmosphere about him of a god just stepped from Olympus: the same poise and bearing, the same winsome smile, the same blue eyes of laughter.

His form was enrobed in a great, dark overcoat, into which, on either side, his hands were thrust into the pockets. For a while he was silent—not moving a single muscle, calmly regarding with critical judgment the circle of our little family. In the moment I had time to observe him, to study carefully that indefinable something which ever characterized and made him so different from his fellows. It was the old George of my school days; the old George come back from the sin and shadow.

"Walter!"

A surge of tenderness swept over me, sweeping me to my feet in a wild joy of welcome.

"George!" I exclaimed. "Oh, George, my George!"

But he held up his hand to stop me. "Not a step nearer!" he commanded. And I obeyed him.

"What—what is it?" I asked in wonder. I could see that his eyes were moistened, that he was shedding tears. It was indeed my George. The other never shed them.

"Poor little Walter. If you could only understand. And you love me. After what is past you love. You are the most wonderful little man living! Do you remember, Walter, the last words that I spoke to you?"

Would I ever forget them! I quoted them just as he had said them:

"Remember, Walter, that I always loved you."

"Just so. And you have always believed them?"

"Always."

I made another movement to approach him, but again he stopped me.

"Forgive me, Walter," he said. "But don't come nearer. I am dangerous. Though I have come to you as myself out of the land of shadow, I am potential. Almost anything might happen."

"Then, George," I asked, "what is it? Is it I? Is there something that I can do? Do you need me? Tell me!" It seemed so impossible that I should help him—that he should ask it.

He glanced down at his watch, and as he did so I noticed it was aflame with jewels—a work that was almost priceless.

"Listen, Walter!" he said. "I have only a moment—a few moments at the most. And then for your safety and Clara's, I must be going. I have come to you out of the darkness. You are my only friend. I am neither man nor spirit. I want you to help me, follow me to the end of the earth and save me. See the Master; he's the one to do it, and bring him with you. But be careful!

"I am the old George for but a moment. After this I may kill you on sight—there is no telling. Again, I may love you. I shall know no law nor reason. I am outside all man-made orders; I have no morals. But I want to be human; I want to be a man. I want to live and love and suffer."

Here he glanced at Clara, who was tenderly, solicitously, lovingly watching over our little one, and, though listening, was endeavoring in every way to shield him from the other. But George saw, stepped closer, and looked at his namesake.

"Ah!" he said. "Poor—poor little fellow!" Then in wonderment: "Why, he is ill! What is his name?"

"George."

"Ah!"

He stepped over to the bedside and, with a swift, certain movement, started to take him up.

"No, no, no!" screamed Clara. "He's mine, mine! You shall not have him!"

"Listen, Clara!" he said calmly, and there was certitude, conviction, and kindness past all understanding in the words. "I can save him. I have only a moment, but I must do it for you and Walter. Just one good, little deed."

Then, before we could stop him, he had plucked up the little one and passed out the doorway. We could hear him rushing, almost leaping, down the stairway; a gust of cold air told of the front door open. Then silence. My wife was wide-eyed with terror; and a hysteria that I thought would come upon her.

But just then we heard a baby's laughter. Coming up the stairs was George with the child upon his shoulder. At every lurch of his body the little one was laughing.

"There!" he said, placing him in the lap of his mother. "That's the only good deed I have ever done. He will never be sick again. For you and Walter."

Then he straightened; a look came in his face that made me wonder, the old, wild look of the devil playing! But he controlled it. He stepped over to the door.

The storm had now grown silent. Out in hall I thought I heard the soft tread of a woman's footsteps. How wonderful he was as he stood there! There was that about him of a soul in mighty conflict, fighting and triumphant.

"It has come, Walter," he said calmly. "I must leave you. Seek me! For the love of your old playmate, seek me! Hunt, toil, and trouble, tribulation and privation; the world where it is upside down. But, beware; be careful! I may kill you! I am the Rebel Soul and have no morals! God bless you!"

With that he was gone; I heard his footsteps down the hallway, and I heard, too, the sound I had noticed a moment before of a woman walking. Who was it? I stepped over to the door.

At the head of the stairs was Roselle. She and the other had come together. They did not parley. I saw him open his arms and her spring in toward him. I saw their faces, his the most beautiful of mankind, and hers glowing, lifted to his with untold passion. It did not seem strange; but simply as it should be.

Then he kissed her. There was that in their kiss which seemed to concentrate

all the ineffable essences of the world in a single contact.

Had it been any other person in the world but he, it might have appeared improper. We have certain codes and morals, standards, and etiquettes that bind us; we are slaves to custom. But such things meant nothing to this one whatever; his radiating spirit went straight to its object; he stood for no refusal; but got what he was after. Just now it was Roselle.

It was no courtship—just seizure and surrender; he put his arms about her and held her close—oh, so close that their forms seemed to grow together. It was a picture I shall ever remember; she, her whole body vibrant, her face held up to his, her lips trembling with emotion, charmed by his mighty spirit; he all grace and beauty, his arms about her and whispering words which made her his own and only. The old, wild spirit, the old, wild laughter in the eyes, the boyishness, the glamour!

**T**HERE never was a woman could look at him but what her heart was moved; with Roselle it was conquest. She had surrendered—happily, everlastingly surrendered to the Rebel Soul! What I had feared had happened; and now that it was done I was strangely happy. It was as it should be. The two most beautiful things had come together; the anguish of the early part of the evening was flushed out by a happy consciousness that these loved ones were for each other. Back of my consciousness an intuition kept saying: It is best, something will come of it, destiny divine; it is as it should be.

In another instant he was gone. In the light, standing by the stairway, was Roselle, silent, scarcely moving, her whole form charged with the new-born passion; her eyes deep with longing, peering after. The hand upon the post was tense with gripping, her breast heaving.

"Roselle."

She turned and saw me in the doorway. Then she came over to me. She was another one entirely. The little girl I had known so long was gone forever. Without saying a single word, she passed me and sat down by my wife, who was playing with little George. She picked up her hand and pressed it. With a woman's intuition—Clara understood it.

"Walter," she said—just that. "Walter."

I nodded. "God's will be done," I answered. "God's will be done."

But nothing is done for a woman unless she wills it; she turned to her cousin. Roselle shook her head emphatically to impress my answer.

"I am his, Clara; all his. I met him in the hallway; I met George Witherspoon! George Witherspoon is an angel!"

With that she broke into sobbing.

By this time, it was getting along into the night. It struck me suddenly that everything, the whole course of events, had been unnatural. I remembered all at once the Master. Why had I, who was always so punctilious, abandoned him so completely while these events had been happening? I had excused myself for but a moment, and had left him alone for hours.

And Roselle? What was the matter? At any other time, with a sick child, she would have been all solicitation. With the storm raging, the wild roaring of the tempest, she had locked herself away from all others. I questioned her. She had been sleeping. She had not awakened until she thought she heard someone calling. Then she stepped out into the hallway where—

**D**OWNSTAIRS I found the Master. He was seated before the fire, which had dwindled to gray ash embers, his arms folded, his head drooped on his breast, and sleeping. I touched him. In an instant his eyes were open, peering at me out of the limpid blue and the full of understanding.

"George Witherspoon has been here," he said calmly.

"You saw him?" I asked.

"I saw nothing. I have been asleep. But George Witherspoon has been here. He came with the breath of the lightning; he has cured your child, which the doctor could not do. He has met Roselle. And he has left a pledge to caution you of the future."

"A pledge?"

"Yes. Have you not examined it?"

The Master had been dreaming; and, by some incomprehensible accident, of circumstances that had really happened. But there was no pledge. Not that I knew of. This I told him.

"Let us see."

Together we ascended the stairs to the room where Clara and Roselle, quite happy now, were watching over little George. The youngster was smiling happily in his sleep, with his two chubby little fists held tight upon his breast. The



"There! This is the only good deed I have ever done. Little George will never be ill again!"

Master said nothing, but quietly, carefully, bent over. The left hand of the little one he opened gently. As he did so, a green sparkle dropped upon the coverlet; a dreaming, fascinating celestial color, like all the coolness and freshness of the universe trickled into a single raindrop. It was an emerald—the largest, most perfect, and the purest one that I had ever seen.

"I thought so." The Master picked it up, examined it carefully, and passed it to me.

"Keep it," he said, "as a pledge of the future. You may need it."

## CHAPTER V

### THE KING OF THIEVES

**T**HAT concluded the eventful evening, the strangest, the most wonderful and potential of all my lifetime—and, in truth, of any other—which was destined to lead to strange adventures, and to lay bare weird and unknown mysteries that have scarce been dreamed of. Henceforth I was to be minutely conscious of what an infinitesimal atom man is in eternity's unending cosmos; that he is not even that; but far on down the scale descending, so far down that an ion were a magnitude beside.

The words of the doctor came back to me, pulsing my consciousness with potent memory. "He seemed born for the storm and conflict. There was an affinity between him and the wild, wild roaring. He was symbolic." Yet the Master had said that he was neither man nor spirit. What, then, could he be?

Just before retiring I opened the door and gazed out at the heavens.

The leaves of the trees were still dripping with the moisture. The full moon had risen over the line of mountains to the eastward, and the few clouds, broken, scattered, and peaceful, were tinted with the wonderful mellow colors of the moonbeams which we all of us know so well, but which no artist can ever reflect on canvas. There was a quietness in the air that permeated and soothed one's spirit: the softness and freshness that follows, in all countries of dry seasons, the first rain of the early autumn.

I took a deep, full breath of the delicious freshness. To me the scene had a double meaning, the coming of the first rain of the season, the tender sproutings by the roadside, the mantle of green upon

the landscape; and the passing of a being that I could not fathom. He had come with the roar of the thunder, and he had passed away; but now that he was gone there was a quietness, peacefulness, and mellowness that thrilled one with the joy of being.

It would last forever—a storm there never was—it would be unending. So deep is the love of contentment embedded in us. There was not the slightest rustle. All was peace.

In the morning I went about my business. I was a man of steady habits, and could not, barring death or bereavement, allow anything to interfere with my daily routine. Roselle came down to breakfast early; and though she said little, I could see that what had happened the night before had wrought upon her. One could notice it in her eyes, and in the illusive enhancing of her beauty, which had now a purpose and an object. The pollen of the other's spirit had ripened the rose to its fullest blooming.

And I think that she was happy. Such things people shed about them—the luster of the eyes, the smiles, the infinitesimal unknowable waves of magnetic personality that warm us and make us thrill with responsive contact. Little George was sleeping quietly with the pink bloom of childhood upon his features. All of us—the Master, Clara, Roselle, the children—were as freshened as the glorious morning that had broken upon the landscape.

At the Master's suggestion, I wrapped up the emerald carefully and placed it in my pocket. I smiled when I did so, for I could not but think of the enormous value the little spot of space in my pocket represented. If there is one thing that a banker prizes, it is gold and values; and I was a banker, pure and simple. Not that I was covetous, for I never thought of possession; I did not even regard it as my own. But that I was like the rest of my ilk and profession, and could esteem that which through its beauty and worth represented the energy and comforts of a fair size fortune. I was just that certain of its value. And though I would not have neglected my routine duties for the world, I was in a feverish hurry to get them over so that I could see an expert.

Once I laid it down upon the desk and called for my assistant. The effect was even more convincing: his eyes popped out in amazement, in unconstrained as-

tonishment and admiration. One would not wish for a better attestation of its genuineness; mere glass could never ad-duce such emotion. There was a subtle allure-ment about its greenness, about its coolness, its color, its witchery, that was suggestive of all the freshness, mellow-ness, and sweetness of the earth con-densed and centered.

As soon as I could get away, I was on the train bound for the city. I took it to one of the largest jewelers, where I was acquainted, and asked for an expert. He was a little man with heavy gold-bound glasses, bald, and very precise and dainty. I was led into his sanctum, and in a very casual way, as if handling a mere trifle, I undid my little package and laid the stone before him. You see, I was only human, and desired to increase the sur-prise which I thought I had in store for him. Perhaps I was a little bit dramatic. But he did not notice.

"What is this?" I asked very simply.

He turned the stone, with its green and wondrous luster, over with his finger like one awed and startled, like a devotee sud-denly come into contact with a jeweled talisman of Mohammed. There was the reverence of the connoisseur, the splen-did, fine, distinctive attitude of one who sees and breathes in beauty before he even thinks of values. I was a banker and a man of money; this man was an artist.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed, and almost in reverence, I thought, he clasped his hands behind him, and gazed with rap-ture at the green and glowing luster.

"What is it?" I asked.

He looked at me in wonder, absently, as if all his thoughts were glued upon the table.

"Is it? Is it? Why, man, it is Solomon's own jewel! No other! It can't be! Be-yond all price and value! Priceless! Wait a minute!"

He pressed a button. A boy appeared.

"Tell Mr. Devins to come here im-me-diate-ly." Then to me: "I would take it to him, but it is priceless. I would not dese-crate it with my fingers. And you pack-ing it about in your pocket!"

**A** GAIN he backed off before it and stood in reverence. I noticed absently the soft, quiet coolness of the place, the great clock ticking, things of value here and there, and the table in the center. And the man before it: he was like one at the shrine of beauty reverencing something

that is not meant for man nor human.

All this in a glimmer. For I was think-ing. Not of the value nor of beauty, but of George Witherspoon, who could carry such a thing about in his pocket as a mere bauble; who could afford to give a child a plaything such as this. Who was he, what was he, and where did he obtain it? I remembered the sheen of jewels that flashed from his timepiece, as Mr. Devins came in.

The expert said nothing—merely point-ed; then there were two. For some mo-ments they stood there drinking in its beauty. Then the jeweler turned it over with his finger.

"Mr. Devins," he said, "do you know this stone? Can you classify it?"

"I would call it Solomon's own jewel."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know. But there was never another like it. Solomon had the greatest jewels. This stone is as much above all others as a diamond is above a lodestone. It is in a class by itself. It is—it is—" But he lost expression. "Magnificent!" was all that he could say.

Mr. Devins turned to me.

"It is for sale?" he asked.

I had not thought of that.

"Well, I don't know. Hardly. I don't know whether it is or not. Fact is, I don't know whether I own it. I came into its possession in a strange manner."

"How?"

But I had no idea of telling him. So I turned the subject.

"You do not recognize it? There is no stone like it? It has no history?"

The expert shook his head.

"Neither I nor any other man living. It is in a class by itself. It has a history, of course. But it is not of the stones that one knows. The only thing I can think of is the crown of Solomon. Compared to it, all other emeralds are bits of broken glass."

Mr. Devins turned it over again with his finger; he was a man of business, not a connoisseur like his assistant.

"You say it is not for sale. Would you or the party you represent consider, say—well, seventy-five thousand?"

"Seventy-five thousand!"

"Most assuredly."

"All that money for a little stone like that!"

"On the spot."

It was an enormous amount of money. I had thought of a few thousand, but never of such an amount as this. He had



not tested it. I had expected a careful examination and some hums and hawing.

"The stone speaks for itself," communed the expert in an ecstasy of rapture. "No need of any test. Though I shall test it just for routine."

In a short time he was back; his eyes sparkling.

"Absolutely perfect!" he exclaimed.

But in a short space my mind was settled. I recalled the words of the Master: "Keep it; you may need it." Anyway George had given it to his namesake. Who could tell?

Besides, the enormous value of the thing had moved me. I had that feeling of all hoarders; of mere pride of possession. I picked it up from the table.

"You do not care to dispose of it?" asked Mr. Devins.

"I think not."

"Well," he smiled, "any time, Mr. Warren. Any time. My offer is always open. For such as that there is always a market."

"Thank you."

A FEW days later I saw the Master. He expressed no surprise whatever, merely smiled and nodded as if it was one of the things we could expect when we were dealing with Witherspoon.

"It will give you an idea of what a personality he is," was his comment. "A mere trifle; to him such things are nothing. If they only were! Wealth, position, honor! All negative, every one!"

"There is not a thing I know of that can hold him. In every other case that I have known you could use a man's weapons: here all such are useless, we have no leverage and we have no ground to stand on if we had one. The human mind, Walter, is a great and unknown sea; because we pull over it the fragile bark of our thinking, dipping the oars of our shallow wit into its surface we conceit ourselves that we understand it.

"We know nothing. The mind is the greatest mystery there is; as great as the deeps themselves. And like them it is only in its storms that we are conscious of insignificance. Witherspoon is the storm: we are the ships drifting here and there upon the seething conflict.

"You have seen a few things only. There are others coming that will be even more startling. Wealth to him is nothing: I am certain that if he wished it he could have all the wealth of the world for a plaything.

"Power? The mere fact that he has not seized it is the proof that he does not wish it. He could topple over all the kingdoms of the earth if he did but will it. He is as much ahead of mere mortals as the lightning is ahead of the whirlwind.

"What is he? That is for us to discover: for there is a solution to that, you can rest assured. Causation is the first law of the universe. We must await developments."

"But," I exclaimed, "I thought you knew. You said—"

"I said we were working: that we thought we had reached a solution. And I have told you just now that we have no ground to stand on. Both are true. What we have done is empirical.

"At first, we put two and two together and reached the definite earthly conclusion, which is four. We tried our rules and precepts and they got us nowhere. He was impossible. That is, to our known conceptions.

"Therefore we went where necessity forced us—out into the great unknown. It is as if we suddenly accepted two plus two as making five. Which we know it is not. At least on earth. Perhaps on the dog star it might be seven. Not even the greatest mathematician can tell us.

"But we have one clue. He has come back. Through some lapse, through some convulsing of the infinity that he is breathing; he has come to us for a moment. He has appealed for help.

"We know that he is what he is without volition. Therefore we shall wait; other developments are sure to follow: when the time comes and the psychological moment is at hand we shall seek him."

The Master spoke in enigmas. It was his studious life and peculiar profession that made him do so perhaps. To me with my sober habit and slower thinking and my routine affairs, he seemed almost as mysterious as the Rebel Soul himself.

But he was good, and his ultimate ends were certain and he was ever on the pathway of knowledge. Therefore I implicitly accepted now, as at every other time, what he told me. Developments were sure to follow. He was right.

It was not long after this that a little thing occurred which forewarned me that I was to have another visitation: though this one from the nature of the warning I had reasons for fearing, not for welcome. I was just returning from the

bank one evening when I noticed the postman passing out of our gate.

It was getting along toward winter and the days were short so that the shadows set in early. My wife was standing on the porch holding in her hand a letter. As I came up the steps she passed it to me. In the blur of the half light the handwriting seemed familiar. I had a peculiar feeling as though a well-known hand were reaching from the darkness; the instinctive certainty that one feels with a sudden premonition.

I carried it into the house and held it to the light to see what I already half suspected. I was right; my half apprehension had not deceived me; it was the writing of George Witherspoon. Perhaps my hand trembled a bit as I tore open the envelope. Clara clutched my arm.

"What is it, Walter?"

As if for answer, a card dropped out of the envelope: slipped through my nervous fingers and fell upon the carpet; a small card and very simple. I picked it up and read it. Across the center in plain black letters were the words:

#### THE KING OF THIEVES

#### CHAPTER VI

#### THE ORDER OF THE SEVENS

**J**UST then a door was opened and Roselle came in. My wife took the card out of my hand and read it: the girl in mischief peeked over her shoulder.

"Why," she laughed, "how funny: what can it mean? Isn't it odd?"

Clara looked the question. I have an idea she guessed the truth, which I determined right then and there that I would not tell her.

"What does it mean? What is it, Walter?"

"Nothing," I lied, "nothing: some advertising novelty perhaps: or most likely the advance notice of some moving picture."

I was not accustomed to prevarication, I always held to truth at all times as the safest, bravest and the only way: but this was one of the cases where a white lie was the only way of honor. I would have been a coward to fill my wife with apprehension. Though I was not noted for my bravery my shoulders were for all that broad enough to shed worry from my family.

And after all what was it? Merely a little card. Therefore I passed it off lightly; slipped it into my pocket and laughed the incident away.

But next day was different. In the secrecy of my office I drew it from my pocket. What did it amount to? What was it? Why was it? What new development was portending? I recalled the words of the Master:

"George Witherspoon is the King of Thieves. He is dangerous."

Ought I not to take it to the police? And if I did so what good would it do? It was too theatrical, too flavored of the melodramatic. It was not within reason that a King of Thieves would be sending a card about for identification. I had no knowledge of the underworld whatever: but I did know enough to realize that this was highly impossible to any but the Master and myself. The police would merely laugh, and if there was anything in the world that I could not bear up under, it was ridicule.

However, that night when I arrived home I saw things differently. I was a little later than usual and missed the postman. But upon the table, awaiting

me, was another letter; the same thing, the same handwriting, card, everything. But the postmark on the envelope was of a different city.

I noted that the place was nearer and that the distance between the two was about that of a good day's travel. What could he be up to now? Something was afoot, of that I had not a thread of doubt. Perhaps after all I had better see the police.

In the morning I called up the Master and informed him what had happened and of my apprehension; also I told him of my hesitation in taking it before the authorities.

He laughed.

"For a man who was once a prosecuting attorney you do not appear to have much faith in the puissance of our police force."

"No," I answered, "I have not. Not in a case of this kind. They are hide-bound. They are a good deal like the law, tied up with rules and precedents. They have filtered crime down to system: they are trained to act in ruts and channels.

"Anything outside of their training is likely to shock them: this thing is melodramatic and absurd and I do not wish to be laughed at."

"Nevertheless," came his answer, "you had better see them. The police are not all fools. I shall see to it that there is an officer there who may surprise you."

Accordingly, as soon as I could get away, I carried my problem to headquarters. A trim man whom I had known for years was sitting at the desk. As I expected he smiled when I told him what I was afraid of.

"H-m!" he said. "Mr. Warren, I am afraid you have allowed your nerves to run away with your reason. Affairs of this kind do not happen in this manner. I have a good knowledge of criminal legerdemain, and history, and I can assure you that such a thing as the King of Thieves is only idle fancy.

"Some hoax most likely. Someone is working to make a fool of you. Better go a little slow. Hold your balance. Don't get excited. And anyway, even granting that there is such a being, he would hardly warn you."

Just here someone coughed and I turned to see that we were not alone. Seated in the corner in the shadow of the room was a heavy, gray-sprinkled individual reading the morning paper, or to be precise, holding one, for he was

really looking at us with the expression of one who has just found something that he knew was missing.

At my glance he nodded kindly. I could see that his face was strong, his eyes a gray protean, his mustache heavy but close-cropped and of the gray that seemed to be his predominating color. One could perceive that he was a man who knew no fear and was honor from the very bottom. A rough man, truly, but a good one. He stepped over to us and held his fist upon the desk.

"Pardon me, Mr. Simpson," he said firmly, "but Mr. Warren is right. There is a King of Thieves and this is a case for action."

Simpson eyed him keenly.

"You mean to tell me, Wilkins, as good and as experienced an officer as you are, that you believe that there is such a thing as a King of Thieves?"

"I don't believe it," came the answer, "I know. Though who he is I cannot tell you. But he has acquired his crown in the way every king should get it; through his achievements."

Simpson threw back his head and laughed heartily. Right there I made a mental indictment of our whole police system. We choose out and select some druggist, merchant, blacksmith, or whatever the case may be, and place him at the head of one of the most difficult professions in the world. In a short time he acquires the rules of the routine, to which is added a little experience and after this he becomes cocksure and certain.

This man, with his little training, we pit against the nimble wits of those who all their lives have been waging a war against society. They get the small offenders, the simple and the clumsy; but the big ones, the really dangerous, are likely to slip through their fingers. They say it takes a rogue to catch a rogue. However that may be, it most certainly demands a wonderful proficiency.

A blacksmith does not stand much chance. And Simpson was a blacksmith.

Involuntarily I compared him to George Witherspoon and drew my own conclusions.

But the raillery did not perturb a whit the gray-haired Wilkins.

"Listen, Mr. Simpson," he said. "Two years ago the president of the bank of Dublin received just such a card. Plain and simple 'King of Thieves'; just like this one. He was a good man, the presi-

dent; but like yourself he did not believe in the melodrama. His bank had never lost a cent through robbery. He prided himself that he had an institution so guarded and protected that he was proof against all thievery.

"But he took precautions. He handed the card, as he should have done, over to the police. The place was watched and guarded. And two nights later the vaults were looted for around one hundred thousand. That was not all; the fellow had sent his warning; had almost, you might say, set the time and the minute. But he got away; and he left not a clue behind him.

"It was unparalleled. The police were baffled; and they have remained so to this day. The only tangible evidence they had of his passing was the gold that was missing.

"The man is spectacular in his methods. Right there he earned his title. He is the King of Thieves.

"Then in Sydney. Exactly the same routine. Sixty thousand. In Capetown, one hundred and fifty. Wherever he operates, no matter what the time or place, he gets away with it. His methods are uncanny; he gets what he is after;

he delights in opposition. He is a sport and, believe me, he is the King of Thieves. If you can catch him and can hold him you will be twenty thousand richer."

AT THE sound of money and a price like that, Simpson's eyes went to pin-points. The covetousness of his nature welled up and focused in his vision. I really believe that right there in his mind he spent that twenty thousand; it would take a long time to accumulate that much nailing horse-shoes, or as police chief of our little city. Of course a reward of such proportions made a difference.

The man Wilkins was one trained in the profession: he understood his business, and he had that peculiar wide range of perception which enabled him to grasp the larger problems. The little things with him were left to others: it was the big cases that he tackled.

He was one of those who chose to handle the baffling: and recognized that in crime as in everything else there is such a thing as genius. "Anyone can catch a chicken thief," is the way he put it, "but it requires brains to outwit the Master of his calling."

"Well," said Mr. Simpson reassuringly, "we shall do our best. Don't worry. We can use that twenty thousand. If your King of Thieves should come and see you we shall be just that much richer."

He had the egotism that is ever peculiar to one who only half knows his business. He was a good man, this Simpson, but he was far and away out of his calling; he was too practical, too short-sighted and not dreamer enough to grasp and comprehend the possibility of such a character as the one of whom we now were talking.

But Wilkins was different. I could see his eyes narrow shrewdly as he sized the other. I know what he was thinking: and that he was a man of action, who could and would do something.

"Yes, Mr. Warren," he said. "We shall do all and to our utmost. Sit tight. I shall take steps immediately. Whether we accomplish our purpose is another matter. We can only do everything that we can do.

"But it will be no child's play, I can assure you. We can use human weapons, and, to be candid, the individual against whom we are pitted is hardly human."

I returned to the bank. Perhaps you have noticed that I was hardly fair with our police chief. In this case, or in any other, for that matter, it was obviously my duty to lay before him all the particulars, of whatsoever nature, that pertained to the case in question. I went to him with this little cardboard of melodrama, with this impossible legend of the King of Thieves. Yet, though I knew that George Witherspoon was the man that we were after; that he and the other were synonymous, I had not told him.

There were two reasons. In the first place, as soon as I talked with Simpson I understood that the case was hopeless. In the second I wished protection more than capture. I considered George Witherspoon not as a criminal, but as a problem; and that he came more in the Master's jurisdiction than in police courts. But I did not wish to be robbed. Hence my visit.

I had not been long in my office before I received a visitor. None other than Mr. Wilkins. Undoubtedly he had something to tell me, which he did not wish to say before the other. I motioned him to a chair and carefully shut the door.

"Now," I smiled, "you have something to tell me: you at least have some faith in this case of the one with the evil title."

"I have."

He did not say more, but quietly—as if it could convince me more than words—placed a little card upon the table.

Wonderingly I picked it up. It was all blocked with sevens.

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7

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "Then you came from the Master?"

"Exactly."

"Then you know?"

"Certainly."

"The King of Thieves?"

"Is George Witherspoon?"

My conscience was allayed. I had now no reason to flay myself for having withheld vital information. This man had come from the House of the Sevens and was undoubtedly in possession of the necessary information. He was a detective; but what was more, he was a member also, of the Order of the Sevens.

## CHAPTER VII

### ON THE TRAIL OF A SHADOW

I HAD always known that the ramifications of the Master's organization were far reaching; but I had never thought of it as taking in the police. Rather I had considered it as a semioccult cult, with professors, scientists, doctors, *et cetera*, as active members. But perhaps this man was a psychologist as well as a detective. I asked him. A smile is what I received in reply.

"Do I look like a psychologist? All I know about psychology is that it is a word that looks a great deal like a sneeze. No, I am a detective pure and simple. But because I am a detective is no reason why I must believe that man is merely bone and sinew.

"I have always been an optimist when it came to mankind. Years ago I came into contact with the Master. I am not an educated man, in the psychical sense of the term; but when I was told that I could be of some little assistance in the great work I was one of the happiest men on earth. Since that day I have served two masters, human society, as

represented in our institutions, which I protect against malefactors; and the great source of knowledge, the hope and soul of mankind as embodied in the Master and his fellows.

"For I too would know what I am. For years my work has been a cloud of notes and detail: no character is met, no incident is so trivial, but that I report it to the Master. I understand that he has studied human nature, or the human mind if you will, from every conceivable angle. My work has brought me to far places. I have seen many things; I have encountered many strange adventures."

"And just now?"

"I am on the trail of a shadow, he whom the Master calls the Rebel Soul; who is George Witherspoon, the King of Thieves, and I know not what else. For a shadow he surely is. He is the only man on earth whom I could not baffle. This one treats me like a plaything.

"I have followed him to the ends of the earth and backward. Never once have I seen him. He laughs at me. Time and again has he left me a note, where he knew I was sure to call, and informed me of his and my destination. He appears to know my mind just as he does his own.

"For example, in London: 'I am on my way to Boston,' he wrote me. 'Have a little collection that I wish to make. When you read this you will be on your way to Paris. Don't go. Come to Boston. When you arrive you will receive a token of my friendship.'"

"Did you get the token?" I asked.

"Yes. I followed him to Boston. I did not go to Paris as I had intended, though how he knew it was my destination is something I can't make out. I had told nobody, it was only in my mind; no place else.

"As soon as I landed I hastened to my hotel. The clerk there knew me. 'Mr. Wilkins?' he said, 'That's me,' I answered. 'Well,' he said, 'I have a package for you. Man left it; said for me to give it to Mr. Wilkins.'"

"What was it?"

The detective took out his watch and laid it on the table. "This," he said.

I picked it up. It was a splendid, heavy, solid-gold affair. The works were of the most expensive sort. On the front of the case was the letter W.

"Turn it over," said the other, "and read." I did so. On the back of the case was an engraved sentence:

*In appreciation of a good, long chase. Keep it up.—K. T.*

"And that," announced Wilkins, "is the man I'm after. And that is the man that his nibs"—pointing toward police headquarters contemptuously with his thumb—"imagines he can take by simply going out and placing his hand upon his shoulder and saying, 'You're mine.'"

"And the collection?" I asked.

"Rathbone—Cornelius Rathbone. Do you know him?"

Know him! What man had not heard of Cornelius Rathbone, the most unscrupulous, the most successful, the most merciless man in modern finance. I had understood that he had encountered enormous losses, was enmeshed in a maze of scandal, and had committed suicide. His career I had often cited as an example that no fortune that is not based on honor can be permanent. That Witherspoon had had any connection with his downfall I had not dreamed.

"Is it possible?"

"Possible! Not only possible, but a fact. He ruined him; drove him to the wall; played ducks and drakes with him; wound him in a mesh that he could not unravel; showed him up; disgraced him; cleaned him. When he was through with Rathbone the old thief did not have a thing on earth to make life worth living. His wife had left him; his son was expelled from college in disgrace; his daughter had eloped. When I arrived in Boston, the old rogue had gone the gas route. Witherspoon had collected."

**R**EALLY, as far as I was concerned, I had very little sympathy for the financier. He had always been the savage in the ranks of finance. When the report came of his death, I am afraid that I, like many others, had breathed a little easier.

What startled me was that Witherspoon had been the one to free us. He appeared to be getting closer to us, nearer to the earth, more tangible and solid. He had done with Rathbone what all the serried ranks of honest finance had failed to do; and he had done it quickly. I strummed on the table with my fingers.

"How do you account for it?" I asked.

The detective spread his hands.

"I don't account for it. I've quit accounting. All I do is watch. When this man strikes it is with the speed of the lightning; he is sure and certain; he never fails.

"Rathbone he got in the market. Where, as I understood, all others had failed, he walked in, pulled the financial structure down upon his ears, and left him in the ruins."

"Well," I commented, "if he always attacks men of just such moral caliber, he may, after all, do good instead of evil. A rich man may often free himself in the law courts by retaining lawyers; he can never get away from ethics—which means, in a nutshell, plain, downright right and wrong. Ethics has brought this man to retribution. For that let us give Witherspoon just one good mark of credit."

The gray eyes of the other lit up strangely. There was a flicker in them that spoke of admiration.

"Mr. Warren," he said, "I have been after him for a good long time; he is a criminal and a thief—the most baffling man I have ever followed. But"—he slapped his hand upon the table so that the smack resounded, then continued softly—"he never cleaned up a man nor an institution that did not need the cleaning."

"I have arrived at the point where I admire him. He goes through the world, picks out the big rogues, stands them on their heads, and loots them. He beats them at any game they tackle. Never has he robbed a poor man, nor an honest one, nor a woman; it is the big, fat, crooked fish that he is after."

I smiled at this; it did me perceptible good to hear at last one good word spoken of my former playmate; and even more so from the lips of his sworn antagonist, whose pursuit was unrelenting. That the man was a thief and a criminal there was no doubt, and for that there was no pardon; but he was something more than a mortal sinner. From the words and wisdom I had seeped in from the Master, I was certain, no, positive, that here was not a mere sinner, but something far above it.

Nevertheless, I was human; and for all his powers I could not understand how any man could so completely and with such impunity evade all the vigilance of the authorities. When one understands all the powers of the police and the immense and delicate web that is spun over the earth for the protection of society, one can hardly conceive of any malefactor continuing long without touching one of the threads that sound alarm.

According to Wilkins, his work was bold

and open, and yet, by the same implication, he had continued unmolested. It was hardly credible, hardly possible, even though I knew him. And so I told the detective.

"How is it," I asked, "that a man can do all that you say without rousing all the vigilance of all the safe-guarders of our welfare? Surely the police are watching faithfully enough; they must know him; it must be impossible that he can do all this and still be open."

"You forget, Mr. Warren, that I serve two masters. In this case I take my orders from *our* Master. I received my instructions long ago. They were explicit: 'Find this man and take him; bring him to me. But do not allow the police to lay their hands upon him. If they do, a great crime will be committed. This is not a case for the law courts.'"

"I see," I answered. "And you have worked alone?"

"Exactly. That is, until lately. Recently, however, my orders were amended. To use the Master's words: 'Take him any way you can. From what I know now, it is certain that they cannot hold him. I want to see what happens.'"

"Do you know," I asked, "that George Witherspoon was once the prosecuting attorney of this city?"

Wilkins eyed me shrewdly, his eyes narrowing to little slits. He turned over a book that was on the table.

"I know all," he said impressively. "I know who was the prosecuting attorney. I know even"—still with his eyes on me—"yes, even that. From what I know, I would say that the man is the devil. But the Master says he is not; and the Master knows."

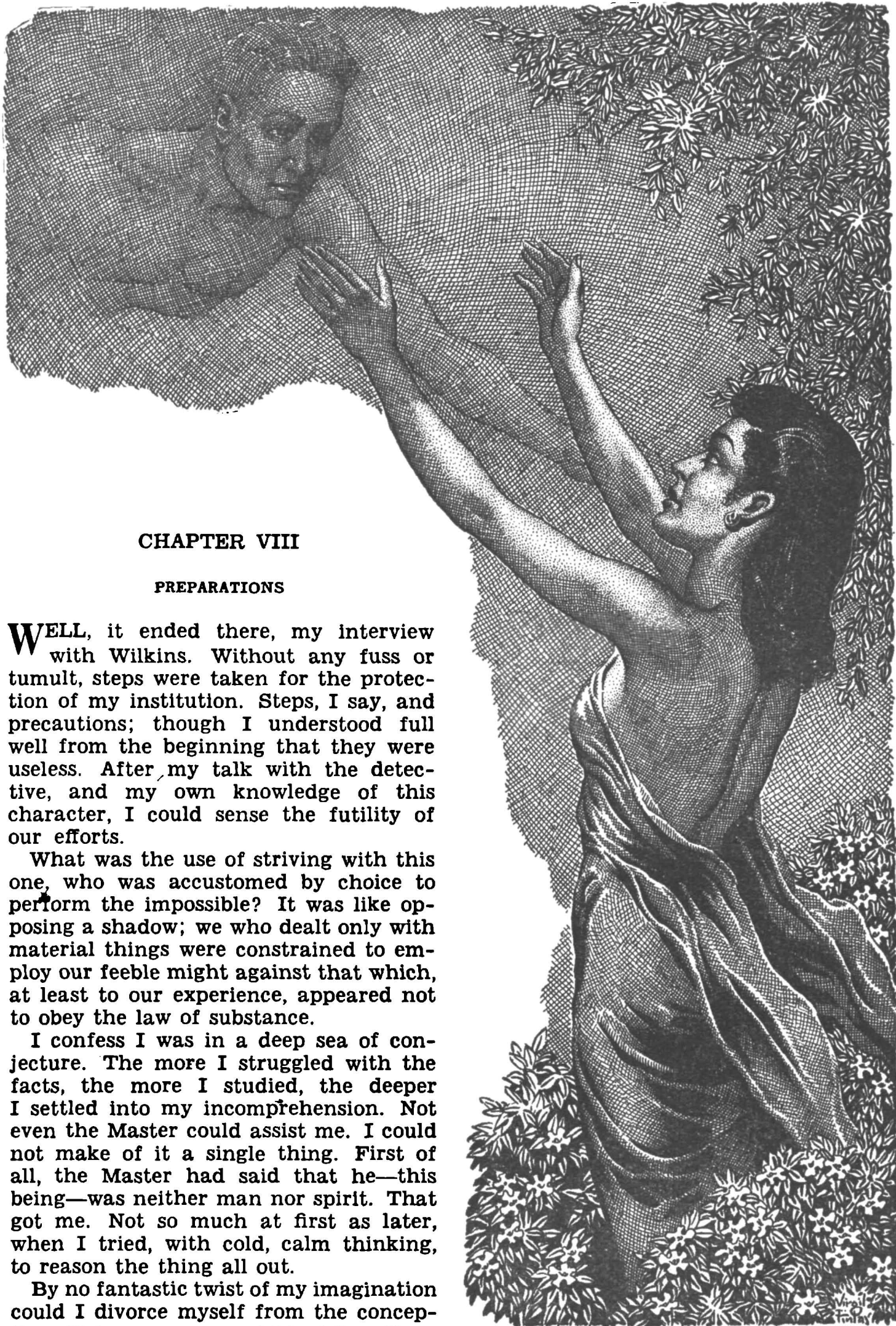
"Certainly it is no case for the law courts. Therefore I have worked alone. The police are jumbled. Each job that he has committed has been complete in itself. Outside of the spectacular bank robberies there has been no way of linking a connection. He leaves no clues whatever. I of all those connected with the legal machinery know the man that I am after."

"But," I exclaimed, "you have never seen him!"

"Bray has; in London. The Master knows him; and you."

"Does anyone suspect that this character is George Witherspoon, once prosecuting attorney of this city?"

"Not a soul on earth."



CHAPTER VIII

PREPARATIONS

WELL, it ended there, my interview with Wilkins. Without any fuss or tumult, steps were taken for the protection of my institution. Steps, I say, and precautions; though I understood full well from the beginning that they were useless. After my talk with the detective, and my own knowledge of this character, I could sense the futility of our efforts.

What was the use of striving with this one, who was accustomed by choice to perform the impossible? It was like opposing a shadow; we who dealt only with material things were constrained to employ our feeble might against that which, at least to our experience, appeared not to obey the law of substance.

I confess I was in a deep sea of conjecture. The more I struggled with the facts, the more I studied, the deeper I settled into my incomprehension. Not even the Master could assist me. I could not make of it a single thing. First of all, the Master had said that he—this being—was neither man nor spirit. That got me. Not so much at first as later, when I tried, with cold, calm thinking, to reason the thing all out.

By no fantastic twist of my imagination could I divorce myself from the conception. Take away one and I had the other; take away the other and I had the one. And there it left me. There was no

"He is coming to me! Swiftly he is coming!"



classification else that I could go to. I could not make of it a thing at all; it was all past me.

Then George Witherspoon. I recalled his visit; his coming on the trail of the storm and lightning, like the incarnation of another being riding the stars of distance. There was something spectral about his presence, something illusive, almost unearthly.

Somehow, when I recalled him, I was ready to concede almost anything. And yet the man had implored me. I remember the tenderness of his voice when he had spoken, the appeal he had made for assistance. Assistance! How was I, or anyone else so helpless, to assist him? How marvelous were his powers; how easily had he cured our little Georgie.

He had bestowed a pledge of friendship—pledge that was almost priceless. Why the pledge when he had given warning? He was on his merciless way, even now, for my destruction. He loved me. Why was his hatred so enduring? I who had done nothing but good to him all my lifetime?

I confess that it was incomprehensible. I had the feeling that I was helpless, that I was drifting supinely with the tide of the irresistible.

I communicated my feelings to the Master. As usual, of course, he cheered me; though when I came to analyze his words, I could not see much encouragement.

"Walter," he said, "do not be worried. You have a destiny to fulfill. Whatever will be, will be. A few thousand dollars one way or the other is merely nothing. If you are to be robbed, so be it; we can only take human precautions.

"It is not the robbery that concerns us so much as what may follow. He may be captured. For the first time Wilkins is ahead of him. I have instructed him to use the police. Not that I think that the police can hold him, but that I wish to learn what happens when he is taken."

I went to Wilkins.

"Sure," he shrugged; "you're going to be cleaned, just as sure as shooting. This chap is too uncanny. I'm an almighty good detective, Warren; but I'm no spirit. I can only do what's human and obey orders. For myself, I shall feel wonderfully well rewarded if I get one look at this chap, just to see what he is like."

A splendid prospect truly. I confess that I was a banker more than anything else, and that I valued money. I could phil-

osophize as well as any other when it could be done without broken bank-vaults. I was more deeply immured in this mystery than any other, and was proportionally interested in its solving; but I did not wish to have my institution—the bank that was my very being—ruined. The only individual who was at all encouraging was Simpson. When he called, he would stretch his bulk out luxuriously in my office. "Nothing to it, Mr. Warren; nothing could be nicer. The thing's all cut and dried, sir. We have received our notice, and our man is on the way and we are waiting. By the way, what would be a good investment for that twenty thousand?"

NOTHING happened. It wore along toward Christmas; our great annual affair, the one ball that outdid all others, was approaching. Like all cities of any size at all, we had a certain class who constituted, as it were, the upper ten among us. This was their special function.

Of course it was provincial; but with us it had the importance that all such affairs attain in little places. Though we could not hope to rival our larger cities, we went out of our way to make it a night of splendor.

I did not care much for dancing; the experiences through which I had endured had sapped the nimbleness from my bones and sinews. The buoyancy, the light-hearted exuberance that is the flashing light of youth-time, was entirely missing. But I could enjoy the music, and could delight in seeing others happy.

And then, too, there was Roselle, who was all aflutter. Dancing means so much to a maiden, and she was so much the butterfly in her make-up. Clara and I had always attended, and now that we had Roselle, it was not for us to stay away from the happiness of the evening.

To be sure I had my troubles, and was burdened down with the weight of a fate impending. But I did not allow that to hinder. Why should I? I had carefully, solicitously shielded them from all knowledge and worry of the developments that I have stated.

The incident of the cards had been forgotten. Surely, for the sake of my loved ones, I could spare one night to happiness and love and dancing.

I hardly need to relate to you the happenings of the week preceding. It was important visits to exclusive shops, new slippers, wraps and what not.

I had only a dress-suit to don, a linen collar, some cuff buttons, which my wife would find for me when the time came, a few other twists and capers, through which I had gone with exactly the same evolution since I was old enough to wear long trousers, and I was ready. That is all that a man must do. Half the pleasure of an affair is—with the women—in anticipation. We lose all that. We have only one night; our wives have seven—one night dancing and six nights making ready.

Of course you can see by this that we were provincial, my wife and I. We had wealth, position, education, and good breeding; but we were not snobbish. I was a millionaire, and my father had been one before me; but I lived much like my parents. We were home folks, pure and simple, myself and Clara. The servants who had served my folks were still with us; and they were not many. We preferred above all things to be alone with our little family.

Of course we could have displayed all the garish and haughty pomp that goes with sudden millions. But we were beyond that. We were accustomed from our very breeding to the feel of money, and so held to simplicity, ideality, and home-life as the things to be attained to.

And so, in such a town, and in such a family, the affair took on the importance that it did. My women folks made much ado over it, and spent the week in the suppressed excitement of making ready; while I, as usual, occupied the time with my business, my routine affairs, and the precautions which I had taken to safeguard my trust and property from depredation.

In truth, this last was just at present my principal occupation. I had the thoroughness of my father, and I left nothing

undone that would conduce in the slightest degree to safety. The bank was guarded inside and out by watchmen; the place became a veritable hive of detectives.

Secretly, unostentatiously, so as to attract no notice, the place was so watched and shielded that it seemed impossible that anyone, no matter who he might be, could gain any ingress whatever. I am afraid that to some of those whom I had retained, my zeal and caution seemed a little bit overstrained. But they did not know what I did—that I was dealing with one who, in his working and uncanniness, was the equal almost of the devil.

Two men, and two men only, understood the worthiness of our opponent—Wilkins and the Master. They assumed control and waited, quietly, eagerly, fearingly, for the onslaught that they knew was coming. On the afternoon preceding the ball, the Master called up from the city.

"Is this you, Walter?" he asked quietly, when I answered his call. "Yes? Well, is Mr. Wilkins there? Would you please call him to the phone?"

As it happened, the other was just then in my office. I called him over and handed him the receiver. "The Master," I said.

"Yes," he answered. "This is Wilkins. Is this the Master? You wish to talk to me?"

I could hear them both from where I was sitting. The Master's voice was wonderfully distinct.

"Ah, this is Wilkins. I want you this night to redouble your vigilance. Be careful. Do not let a thing escape you. Not a thing. I understand that there is to be a ball over there. All of George Witherspoon's former friends will be in attendance. We can look for something

spectacular. He is nothing if not dramatic. I think that we can fully count on this as the night on which he makes his depredation."

"Tonight," Wilkins nodded to me significantly. I could see the glint of satisfaction in his eyes at the thought of action.

"YES, tonight," the Master went on.

"It is a question whether we stop him. In fact, I am afraid that we are powerless; however, we shall have some manifestation of his weird reality. Don't be disappointed if he goes through you like a shadow. Just do your best to hold him.

"And, by the way, you might give Simpson the place of honor. Let him guard the vaults. Explain the situation to him. He is hungry for that twenty thousand, and he may put up a good fight to grasp it.

"Now, don't worry, Wilkins; just do your best, and I shall not hold it against you if your best proves failure. This is not a case of mere criminality. I realize with what tools you are working. I would like to speak to Mr. Warren."

I picked up the phone.

"Yes?"

"Walter, I am asking you tonight to forget that you ever were a banker. Go to the ball. Be as near a boy again as you can be. Under no circumstances come near your bank. Leave that to us. I am looking for developments.

"Remember that our main purpose is not to save a little money, but to save George Witherspoon. I am sure you are as much interested in that as I am. I am coming over immediately. I shall be at the bank. If anything happens I shall phone you. Watch the dancers. And above all watch Roselle! She is in greater danger a thousandfold than all your money!

"And listen"—he was speaking slowly and calmly—"remember, Walter, do not get excited; and above all things—now listen—do not keep Roselle away from the dancing. Remember what I said—that what must be, must be. We must follow things to their conclusion.

"If anything happens, phone me; I shall be at the bank. Now remember, easy, be as buoyant as you can; keep your eyes open, and watch Roselle, and be prepared for anything that may happen."

That was all. Slowly I hung up the

receiver, like one whose mentality had suddenly been deadened and flattened by the weight of the load that had been thrust upon it. Through my brain were flashing the staccatoed vista of fluttering thoughts and repetitions. Money, George Witherspoon, Roselle, and dancers, conclusions, buoyancy, developments—each thought striving with insistent clamor to make vivid its own impression, depriving me for the moment of all power of action.

Wilkins noticed it and smiled understandingly; he had heard, even as I had when he was talking, the words of the Master.

"Some problem, eh?" he commented. "Collect yourself, Mr. Warren; take it easy. One thing at a time, you know. Forget all the rest, and concentrate on having a good time. I wish I could go at my end of it that way. The more I stay with this case, the more it gets me. But we shall win out, never worry.

"The Master is the wisest old head in Christendom. Never once when I followed his advice has it failed me. Just do as he says, concentrate on his words, and leave the rest to us. Go to the ball; have a good time; whoop 'er up, and forget that you ever had any money. Tomorrow we may all be wiser."

There was a great deal in what he said. To be sure, I was a banker and a man of position, and with my nature it was hardly likely that I would portion myself out a good time by "whooping 'er up," as he called it. Nevertheless, it seemed right that I should gather myself together, and obey the Master's instructions. And if I was to do this, there was no time to begin like the present.

Accordingly I had a last cursory look into my affairs and into the precautions that had been effected for my protection, and departed. It was not an easy thing for one as set and settled as I was; but I resolved to steel myself into obeying implicitly the instructions which I had received.

The Master had once before saved me from the greatest peril of my lifetime. I could trust him. I realized that in his and Wilkins's, my case was in the ablest hands that I could hope for.

## CHAPTER IX

### "HE IS COMING"

WHAT a contrast—all this suspense and apprehension of the unknown

impending—to the atmosphere of my home. There all was animation. Roselle was just in that full-blooded bloom of her girlhood when everything was laughter, every intonation of her voice was music, and the sunshine of a happy spirit exuded all about her.

She was all anticipation, light hearted, and of that fresh, tender, feminine beauty that to the masculine is so alluring. It was impossible to be a gloom around her. She took my face in her two pretty hands and kissed me.

"Dear old sober business man," she chided. "You are going to be a boy again tonight, aren't you? Tonight we are to dance, laugh, and be merry. I shall reserve your dances on my program. And I shall hold you to every one. Now you go up to your room and get ready."

I laughed and obeyed her. She had a way of always coddling me into good humor. In true married style I made ready for the evening. When Clara had arranged my tie, straightened my sleeves, and attended to a dozen and one details that my poor unfashionable mind would not have noticed, I returned, to pass the muster of the girl's inspection.

"Just like a beau," she bantered; "just like a beau. Were it not for Clara, I am sure that I would steal you."

With her clatter and happiness and the spirit that she emitted, I found it easier to obey the Master's instructions than I had expected. I sank into the freedom of the evening with abandon, shutting my eyes, as it were, to all thoughts of my business. To be sure, I had a vague trepidation that would not be stifled; but I forced it, partly through will, and a great measure through her cheering contact, as far back into the corners of my mind as possible.

Not that I forgot for a moment Roselle or the dancers. I was acutely curious as to the events impending, and examined with exaggerated minuteness each single shade and detail. Nevertheless, I forced myself into a degree of jollity that to me was far from normal. I was, as it were, in the same state of mind as he who spends his last penny without a thought of the morrow—a wise spendthrift, who left in wiser hands than his own the developments that he knew he could not handle!

The ball itself was like all others; there is a similarity about all balls that is very much like a circus—the crowd is the thing that distinguishes and the

music. When you say a ball's a ball, you have said it. The usual December crowd was in attendance; young men just home from college; freshmen, conceited with their new status; jolly sophomores, sedate and wise young seniors; prosperous and exaggeratedly important young business men; plus a whole bevy of wonderfully pretty girls, about whom the others fluttered like bees about so much honey.

There was the sibilant fête of dancing, music, laughter, and the thrill that ever comes with the mingling of the sexes. When youth and beauty meet in pleasure, the blood is sure to tingle. We of the older set, matrons and benedicks, gave the affair just the proper balance.

There was ever about an affair such as this which brought me recollections. It bore me back to the days of my youth-time—even as you and all of us must revert to the friends and the undying joys of our spring-time. I could never forbear the vision that transcended. Of the music and the dancing, the joys of other days, of George Witherspoon, and all the others.

Many of them were with us now, grown up and settled, prosperous men and women of the older set. And I could not but wonder where he was, the brightest light among them. Where was George, the old playmate of my childhood?

The Master had instructed me to watch the dancers. I scrutinized them carefully one by one for a single sign or message. But in all that assemblage there was not a single one that was like him.

Not that handsome men were missing, or athletes; of splendid, clean young men there were many, but that there was lacking in every one that combination of the superb and splendid that was so dazzling.

He was so unlike all others that there was no mistaking. George Witherspoon was not among us.

But there was one who did attract attention—the young man with whom Roselle was dancing, a strong lad of handsome features, clean cut, and with the poise and carriage that told of athletics. I learned shortly that he was an All-American football player of the season just preceding, and the man who had won the amateur championship of boxing in our colleges.

Certainly his physique was splendid. He was taller than George Witherspoon

by probably half a head, broader and more powerful, and of easy poise and carriage. A type of young man whose body is not only a heritage of birth, but the product of long years of careful training as well. But he was not the other; as he passed me I glanced into his eyes and understood it; they were blue, good-natured, simple, the eyes of a soul that is placid. He might have been an athlete and all that, and a boxer as well; but his was not that consuming flame of energy that would welcome the death-grip of the devil. Evidently a great, good-hearted young man, and kindly. From the attention that he was bestowing upon Roselle it was manifest that his feelings were passing through mere friendship, and ripening into that state that passes into affection.

**T**HE first part of the evening wore away. Strange to relate, I was happier and lighter hearted than I had been in a long time. Of course I was not old, only in my thirties; but for the past few years, owing to what had happened, I was worn down, not only in body, but in spirit. Why I was so full of life during this interval is a little beyond comprehension.

Still, I did not mind it; I could have shut out the world and gone on thus forever, I was so contented. Perhaps it was Roselle; it may have been the injunction of the Master, or again it may have been one of those indefinable ways that Fate has when she leads us to delusion. Disaster has a way of masking all her movements. My ecstasy was to have a sudden breaking.

I was dancing with Roselle when the first tinkling premonition came; and it was not myself that first received it. We were gliding over the floor in time to the swelling music, weaving ourselves about to the rhythmic melody, and thrilling to the ecstatic poetry of feeling that the mellow flow of the waltz was flooding through the ballroom.

It came just like that; it was just that sudden. One minute she was laughing, the next she had stopped weakly, and her rosy cheeks were pallid; for a moment I thought that she had fainted, she grew so heavy in my arms.

"What is it?" I asked, bewildered.

"Oh," she answered weakly; "please take me to a seat. I feel so queerly. There. Some water."

In a moment I had fetched it, and she

drank it. Others, noticing, flocked about her, solicitously anxious for her comfort. But it passed just as suddenly as it had come.

"No," she said. "I feel better. I am all right now. I—it was the strangest feeling. I— Where is Cousin Walter? Ah—Walter, please escort me outside." Then to the others: "Oh, I am all right now."

"What is it, Roselle?" I asked, when we were outside the ballroom.

She put her hand upon my arm and clutched it tightly, so tightly that I am sure the imprint of her pretty fingers were embedded.

"Walter," she questioned softly, "did you see it? Did you see nothing? Tell me!"

"Really, Roselle," I answered. "I do not understand you. What is it? Tell me! What? Who was it?"

For a moment she gazed up at me, her great, dark eyes full of wonder, as if unable to understand that I, too, had not seen this thing that had flashed across her fancy.

"Who was it?" I repeated. "Who was it?"

She nodded her head emphatically, and her lips moved mechanically, as if she revered the words she uttered.

"George Witherspoon!"

"George Witherspoon?"

"Yes. He is coming. I saw him. He is coming swiftly. Oh, Walter, I cannot understand it."

We were quite alone.

I have a faint recollection of the furnishings, of palm-leaves, of flowers in profusion, and the music mellowing from the ballroom. And most of all I remember this girl of Spanish beauty who looked up to me almost as a father.

Not for all the world would I have a single harm come to her. How superbly beautiful was her face in the half-light, her eyes glowing, mysterious, deep, appealing to mine in question. Fearfully, in full rush, I recalled the words of the Master: "Watch Roselle."

## CHAPTER X

### THE LOOTING OF THE BANK

**I** HELD her in my arms.

"Tell me, Roselle, tell me truly. Is it—do you love him?"

She settled closer, nestled to me as if

she were giving up her very spirit. The words she spoke were scarcely more than a whisper; but they were the most golden words a woman ever uttered, the talisman of a soul's surrender.

"Oh," she breathed, "Walter. More than my life. More than my life."

What could I do? No more than you or any other. I petted and reassured her.

"There, there," I told her. "It will all come right. Don't worry. It was only a fancy. And even if it were not it should not interfere with your pleasure of the evening. You are feeling better, are you not? The music has stopped; our dance is over."

So it was. And the girl, taking my arm, went with me back to the ballroom.

"Walter," she said, "you good old dear, forgive me. I am better now. It did seem imperative I should tell you. It was such a strange, strange feeling. I know that you understand me. It was like a wave; but now I feel just as gay as ever."

Just the same, as I left her an icy chill descended; my spirit sogged with the dampness of premonition. My heart was overworking under the stress of apprehension.

I recalled that I had heard no word from the Master; he had promised that he would call me if anything should happen. I had obeyed orders implicitly. Until now, not a call had I received from the watchers. I endeavored to reassure myself; to loosen the clutch of my worry. Just then a hand upon my shoulder.

"Mr. Warren. Telephone."

Mechanically I followed; and like a wooden man picked up the receiver.

"Hello."

I could hear voices at the other end, several, talking together excitedly; incoherent, indistinct; then a voice rasping over the wire:

"Hello! Hello! I want Mr. Warren. Are you going to be forever!"

"This is Mr. Warren."

"Oh. This is Mr. Warren? Hold the wire. Hold it. Just a minute." Then I could hear him shouting: "Hey, Wilkins, all right, here's Mr. Warren." Then Wilkins's voice. "In a moment."

"Hello, Mr. Warren." His voice was cold and steady, like that of a survivor of preordained disaster. No more words were necessary to convey his message. Nevertheless, I answered:

"Well, Mr. Wilkins?" I was ready.

Somehow, now that it was over, I did not care; I merely wanted to hear the confirmation. His voice came.

"Well, it's done. The bank's been looted from top to bottom. He went through us like a spirit. It was the weirdest thing that ever happened. Put us all to sleep. Every man jack of us at his leisure. Went through the place as though he owned it.

"He gets me. And say, you ought to see what he did to Simpson. You know the chief had the place of honor. Well, after this King of Thieves, Rebel Soul, or whatever you wish to call him, had gone through the vaults, he made a sign and pinned it on Simpson. For that alone I can almost forgive him. It read: 'Some detective!' Simpson is crazy mad!"

"You say you were all asleep?" I asked. "Where was the Master? Was *he* asleep?"

"I don't know. He was in your office. Really, to be honest with you, I have an idea that the old fox was wide awake and watching. Here he comes now. Hold the wire—he wishes to speak to you."

"Walter?"

"Yes."

"It is over. This is one part. Now comes your part. Watch Roselle. Watch the dancers. Be calm and easy. And, Walter, do not, as you value your life, enter into any struggle. Keep yourself to one side; notice everything; take notes."

With that he hung up. I returned to the ballroom. I had a dance with Clara, and I knew that she was waiting. I must confess that my nerves were shaken, and no doubt I was pallid with the fear that was upon me.

I could hardly swallow; my mouth seemed sticky. I was no coward, but I had a wholesome dread of the George Witherspoon, who was the Rebel Soul. I knew that he had no pity; and I knew that he would do whatever work he had to do in that ballroom just as sure as there will be the crack of doomsday.

My wife noticed my emotion at once.

"What—what is it, Walter? What in the world has happened? Tell me."

I HAVE a vague recollection of the room, of the decorations of clumps of mistletoe, of holly, of dancers gliding all about, of entrancing, subtle music flooding through the air, and of bright lights gleaming. When I look back now I can ever see the scene; it is one of the vivid

spots of life's creation. And I remember my apprehensive glance over the room to find Roselle and my reassurance when I saw her dancing.

But just then my wife touched my arm; a telephonic touch of fear and warning; there was something about it that startled my heart into leaping, like the clanging of a bell; but her words startled even more so.

"Look, Walter, who is here!"

Standing at the lower end of the hall was George Witherspoon!

I shall never forget that moment—the fear, the wonder, the admiration. He was in evening dress, his blond, wavy hair combed neatly; as young-looking as if he were twenty; erect, graceful, and at ease. There was no mistaking; he it was and no other.

Though I feared him, though I dreaded, though I knew that he had no mercy, I could not for all that suppress an exclamation of admiration. Surely such beauty was never before given to a mortal; it was a thing past all defining, radiating, magnetic, alluring beyond human understanding. He was the perfection of human physique, plus beauty, plus all embellishments of the unknown that held him. But he was not my playmate; a glance sent a quiver through my heart like a poisoned arrow.

He was the Rebel Soul!

Calmly he stood there, not moving a single muscle, a smile upon his features, the same old cheeriness that had ever been his birthright, the same disposition that had given him always the van in every pleasure. I could not but wonder at the paradox of his seeming, he who was all sin and shadow should be such a one of brightness. Surely he was the last one in the world one would suspect as a criminal. And yet he was but just now freshly come from the looting.

He was an outcast, the King of Thieves, hunted by the police of all the world. A flood of emotion surged through me; thoughts, remembrances, repetitions, recollections, and sensations; love, hatred, scorn; everything he had been since the happy days of our childhood; the words of the Master. "Neither man nor spirit." And the warning. "I may kill you. I love you. Fear me, and watch yourself. Save me."

Was there ever anything so impossible, so tangled, so paradoxical, as my position? Even now he was here bent, per-

haps, on murder. What was I to do?

His presence was creating comment. There were many in the hall who knew him, and I am sure there was many a feminine heart that fluttered; choked at the recollections that he was recalling; sweethearts of bygone days. I could perceive it in their faces, in their eyes, and in the buzz of comment. It was his nature to be forever in the whirlpool.

And there were other things. The affair, as I have stated, was exclusive. Though we were not, perhaps, on the plane of the select of larger cities, we were nevertheless proud and punctilious as to the formalities of our occasions. Every one in the room knew the cloud that was upon him; not as much as I, to be sure, but enough that for years he had been sought by the police of our city. Until he had cleared his reputation he had no standing.

One of those in authority came over to where I was standing.

"Mr. Warren, is that not George Witherspoon?"

I sensed his meaning, and I sensed the implication; also his intention. In the heart of me I knew just what would happen; that Witherspoon, no matter what this man's authority, would remain where he was if he wished it.

"It is."

He did not reply to me, but turned and started for the other, and I could hear the words that he was speaking—"gall, nerve, assurance," and others to the same purport.

"Look," said Clara, "he is going to put him out."

I smiled, knowing the man's impotence, but said nothing. To one who understood so well, who had had experience, who was, as it were, initiated into the mystery of George's being, such a thing was impossible.

Nevertheless I watched him with a heart of interest as he threaded among the dancers. At last he came up to him. I saw George Witherspoon turn suddenly, look at the man and say something. What that was I never knew; but it set him laughing, then I could see them shaking hands. In a moment more they were talking.

It was done deftly, softly, easily; it was the old trick from his boyhood—speak, laugh, and have his way. There was no opposing.

My wife was frankly disappointed. She

feared him; dreaded him as she did no other; he was the pet bugaboo of her dreams; she was under the unending apprehension that he would be my destruction. She had declared that he was the devil. And knowing what she did, it was difficult, indeed, to bring forth arguments to disprove it.

Not even the healing of little George could accomplish it. It had only deepened her conviction. The whole affair had been so unearthly, so removed from all experience; the setting, the apparition, and the cure itself, that it could not have been anything but the supernatural.

Is it any wonder that she dreaded the present moment; that she clung to me, and with a face that was white and stricken begged me to leave the ball-room before it was too late?

But at that very moment he perceived us. Even from the distance I could discern his triumph and satisfaction. In spite of the music I was certain that I could distinguish his old laugh of mockery. He spoke to his companion and nodded in our direction. The other moved his head in affirmation.

And Clara saw it also. In her terror she clutched me, and in a frightened voice endeavored to persuade me.

"They are coming over to us! You are in danger! Do not remain here! You know what he is. Go, go, at once!"

## CHAPTER XI

### THE REBEL SOUL APPEARS AGAIN

**S**HE was so insistent that she would have thrust me forcibly out of the building had she been able. But not for all the world would I have obeyed her. Had it been her safety it would have been different. I am one of those who, although not demonstrative, will do anything for the protection of their loved ones.

In this case, however, I had not my own peril to think of. And I did not think. Rather I remembered the injunctions of the Master. They flashed across my consciousness clear and crackling, holding me to my purpose in defiance of all danger. "Stay. Keep out of conflict, watch Roselle, I am coming."

After all I did have a loved one who demanded my protection. It was clearly my duty to remain. Nevertheless I will

confess that I was breathing a cowardly, beseeching prayer for the Master.

If we had visions that he would devour us we were mistaken. He came straight to us and thrust out his hand.

"Well, well, Walter," is how he greeted.

And for the life of me I could not but grasp the extended hand. "How is Walter?" One would have thought from the effusion that he was the best friend I had on earth, instead of the one who had been my ruin.

"And Clara," bowing.

But leave it to a woman! She clutched her gown and drew back as if addressed by a serpent. But he did not notice. Instead he laughed. There was that in his laughter that was always winning. His eyes danced with amusement; there was the same old mirth and jollity that made them so distinctive, every wrinkle and dimple of his handsome face was allurement.

"Well, Walter, are you not tickled to death to see me?"

I was, and yet I wasn't. At the moment I would have given all the world had he been another; had he been himself, the playmate of my boyhood. For I had confidence that the old George Witherspoon was not evil. As he stood before me he was sin incarnate, no matter how alluring. The words of the Master came back to me: "Neither man nor spirit." I could not but study. What was he? Nevertheless I answered:

"George, I am glad to see you."

And then I knew that he was mocking; that he had come to throw his evil deeds in my face and taunt me. For his manner altered.

"Walter," he said, "I could not resist this little visit. I love you; don't you remember our old affection? You were becoming too prosperous; you were growing wealthy. Therefore I have given you a little manifestation of my esteem. I have robbed you."

Was there ever such effrontery? To rob a man and then come and tell him! And to mock him!

I eyed him coldly.

"George," I answered, "please don't go farther. I know it all."

He laughed. "Really. I did not know that you were so far-sighted. Perhaps you can enlighten me as to my present objective."

I don't know why, but until that instant the terrible truth did not dawn



upon me. It was almost as if the flashing currents of his mind had told me. My heart sickened.

"No, no," I exclaimed; "not that! Not—"

"Certainly," he laughed back, "just that. I have come for Roselle."

My mind went streaming back. When I had seen him, the old George Witherspoon, with her in the hallway, I was happy. Now he was the Rebel Soul; he should not have her. The antagonism of my nature welled up in me. I focused my answer with decision.

"You cannot have her. The police will be here in a moment. You are lost!"

Never shall I forget the look he gave me; the wonder, the scorn, the derision. His shoulders shook with the mirth that was upon him.

"Poor, poor Walter, I pity your simplicity."

Now all this, though it takes time in telling, happened in a few short moments. Though he had excited comment at his first appearance, he was now, owing to the retired spot in which we were standing, in some seclusion. This I regarded as fortunate. If I could detain him there for a few moments, and Roselle would remain away, the police would have a chance to arrive.

Clara had slipped away. A covert glance through the doorway revealed her whereabouts. She was telephoning. Help would arrive in a moment.

Another dance was in progress—a waltz—and through the bower of evergreen decorations behind which we were standing we could watch the softly gowned young women gliding by in a flow of colors. There were pinks and azures, blues and purples, and all the many delicate and mothlike blendings.

Among them I watched eagerly for the rose-gowned figure of Roselle. I recalled that I had not noticed her on the floor since the startling appearance of this one I dreaded. Perhaps she was not there. Perhaps fate might be kind enough to keep them apart until the coming of the Master. In a few short moments at the most would come assistance. The police were surely on the way.

He had not said a thing about her absence. He apparently was certain of the ground he stood on. The old assurance, the old confidence, the old certainty of purpose was evidently as strong

as ever. I sensed it. I realized the wonderful way he had of willing, of twisting, as it were, the volitions of the future to his desire and purpose. I had the feeling that even now he had foreordained just what would happen. The fact that Roselle was missing perturbed him not a whit.

So we stood there. I with a beating heart, praying for the seconds, and he with the nonchalant smile of certainty, watching the passing dancers.

The vast gulf between our natures could not have been defined more clearly than it was in that single moment. I, all trepidation, hoping, fearing, breathless, praying in a frenzy of heart-choking anxiety for any turn of luck or providence that would assist me. He all assurance, confidence, certainty, waiting on the future which he had commanded. I was weak, puny, nervous; he strong, healthy, confident. Was there ever a greater contrast? And we had once been as brothers.

**S**UDDENLY his face lighted, his eyes grew bright. I followed his glance to the end of the ballroom. Roselle was just coming through the doorway. With her was the young athlete I have already mentioned. They hesitated a second, said something, and then were gliding out among the dancers. George Witherspoon turned toward me.

"Well, Walter, I don't suppose you will grudge me a little dance with Roselle?"

He laughed, and I noticed that mockery, perhaps owing to anticipation, was entirely missing. Just the same it was with a twinge of satisfaction that I gave my answer.

"I think, George, that her program is full."

"Oh," he said, "I see." And his eyes twinkled in their mischief; he was manifestly amused at one so simple as to regard the rights of others.

I did not answer; in a blur of excitement I watched the doorway; Roselle and her partner were sweeping toward us. His manner, and my knowledge of what he was, was such that I could expect most anything. Had he been like other men it would have been different. But he was not. I realized and dreaded my impotence.

I understood full well what a little being I really was, and how, when the time came, he would whiff me aside as

a piece of insignificance. I could not fight him; I could not oppose; I dreaded him. Oh, for the presence of the Master!

Had I any doubt as to the power of his personality the incident that followed would have quashed it. When Roselle and her partner were abreast of us, he stepped out on the floor and touched them. The girl was surprised and wide-eyed at the suddenness of his presence; her partner looked up questioningly for the meaning of the interruption. It was all done quietly; George Witherspoon merely touched him.

"Better go sit it out, Bub. You seem to be getting tired."

Was there ever such effrontery? Such assurance, impoliteness, lack of manners?

For some reason that I do not know the young man released Roselle. His face reddened, and I thought I could hear him begging the other's pardon. He appeared dazed, and altogether off his standing. And yet he was the larger, stronger, and more powerful; and he surely was not afraid.

It was something past understanding. I had long known of George's magnetism and his certainty of action; but had never beheld it put to a proof like this. What was it? He had merely to speak and his will was a thing accomplished.

The next instant he and Roselle were swinging among the dancers. She had not hesitated nor faltered. There was a look in her eyes that I had not seen since their meeting in the hallway; a look of ineffable happiness and resignation. The rudeness, ill-manners, and the effrontery of the act she did not notice. Her lips, red as poppies, were slightly parted; her bosom heaving, not in shame and humiliation, but from the ecstasy of the contact. There was that in her look of absolute and unconditional surrender. With her, as with everybody, he would have his way, his love there was no resisting; he was ever so with a woman.

And the young man; he came over to where I was standing; there was that about him of one who had come into an unknown contact, the dazed expression of one who has been touched by something charged with mighty forces; he was silent, wondering, and unable to understand it. But at the same time he was submissive.

Hypnotized, you say. But I am sure he was not that. Though I realized there

was something about George Witherspoon wonderfully magnetic, I was positive, even then, that it was not hypnotism. What it was I knew not, but it was not that.

He had baffled even the Master. Certainly one so well versed in the mystic, as well as the material, could not be misled by anything so common and prosaic. He was something far above us, he was all out of the common; some unknown law had found here a manifestation and a personification.

I spoke to the young man beside me; who, in incoherent wonder, was watching the two dancers. The fact that I was talking seemed to draw him back to his senses.

"Did you see it?" he asked; "did you see that; what has just happened?"

"Yes," I answered. "It was very rude."

"Rude? Did you say rude? Really, I had not thought of it. And yet, come to think of it, it was rude, wasn't it? Funny! I never had such an experience in all my life. When he touched me it was just like fire passing through my body. My mind felt as though some one else was using it; as though I had suddenly presented it to another.

"What was it that he told me? Ah, yes, he called me Bub. Bub, mind you." I could see that he was regaining himself. "Bub! As if I were insignificant! Told me to go way back and sit down. Me! Jack Wallers! Mind you!

"Funny part is, I believed him. I just wonder if he could do it again. I say, hello, what is this? Look over in the doorway. The police. Now what's happened? Wonder what they want? Look at that. Wowie!"

## CHAPTER XII

### BATTLE IN THE BALLROOM

**I**T ALL came just that suddenly. Even while the youth was speaking I saw the door open, and through the doorway the blue uniforms of a dozen policemen. Simpson was at their head, with Wilkins. Behind them the Master.

They fled in quickly, and stood grouped about the entrance; the old man said something to Wilkins and then took a seat over by the orchestra. It was all done suddenly; the setting took but an instant. The Master sitting aloof and apart where he could be a studious spec-

tator of what was about to happen. In his long, black robe, his white, silvery beard, there against the palm leaves, he had all the imposing presence of a Druid at an incantation.

The dance was still in progress. Neither Wilkins nor Simpson knew what man they were after. Though it was not difficult, by any means, to make the selection. By far the most graceful couple, the most attractive and distinguished, was Roselle and her partner.

I could see Simpson peering studiously about the ballroom. The couple was coming toward them; Wilkins looked over toward the palm bower; the Master nodded. The detective turned to Simpson. And then it started.

I shall never remember just what happened; it was one of those kaleidoscopic moments that are a blur of action. The chief stepped out to the dancers and held up an official, detaining hand. That was all. The next instant the room was full of shrieking women; the orchestra had ceased, pandemonium was swirling, and George Witherspoon was the vortex.

I don't know just how he did it; his actions were too dazzling for the eye to follow; the only impression left upon my memory was a blur of movement, and then a sudden stop, with his calm figure contemplating with acute interest the inert body that he had knocked skidding across the slippery floor of the ballroom. I saw no blow, but I heard its impact, even above the music. I remember the body of the police chief cutting a lane through the dancers, upsetting men and women, and the fugitive thought that for no reason at all, tattooed itself upon my brain. "Twenty thousand!"

In the next instant all the officers were upon him; cries, shrieks, and pandemonium. The guests instinctively ranged in an arc to watch the conflict. Above them, on the platform of the orchestra, was the Master, imperturbable, noting every detail. His presence vivified in me the last injunction, "Keep out of conflict."

But I could watch. Never have I seen such a struggle, never such a man, such a master over mortals. In that blurred recollection I can see George Witherspoon battling with the throngs of his opponents; they were larger, stronger, more powerful and outnumbering; but he was their master.

They could not reach him, his move-

ments were so swift, so certain, and so bewildering that he was never where they sought him. At every second, like tongues of flame, his blows were leaping outward. And he never missed; at each impact a policeman went down and under.

In a moment he was stepping over the bodies of his assailants. They swirled up and down the hall, trying vainly to surround him. But they could not. He never made one false move or action; the correlation of his brain and body was perfection. He worked the attackers against each other, maneuvering them into endless collision, driving them one against the other.

The adeptness and precision of his movements was past the human; he was never where they sought him, but always at the unexpected. He wove in and out of them like a shadow, cutting them down like puppets, a veritable whirlwind of strife and action. In a moment he would have been the master.

But just then something happened. A woman screamed, a rose-colored streak shot out from the arc of spectators. It was Roselle! Not twenty feet away, bleared and unsteady, was Simpson. Clutched in his hand was an automatic.

It was one of those tense moments into which is strained a lifetime. A shot into that throng was certain murder. Staggering and bleeding, crazed with passion, Simpson was waving the gun about him. A dozen men sprang forward. At the instant the girl, driven by all the emotions of her nature, sprang upon him, her hand clutched the gun and thrust it upward. Bullets splattered against the ceiling.

But Simpson had lost all reason; the terrific blow he had received had splashed his soul with the red blood of murder; his wild eyes were those of one who has been plunged suddenly into the abyss of madness. He did not see the girl, nor recognize that she was a woman; all he saw was opposition.

He wrenched the pistol free. I can see it yet. The maiden, tender, pale, delicate, full of sacrifice; the great giant, frenzied police chief towering above her, his heavy fingers digging into her throat and his automatic descending with trip-hammer force upon his victim. But the blow never landed!

I was springing forward, the Master, Wilkins, every man that was in the room.

But we were not as quick as George Witherspoon. He had seen it all. With a rapidity that made his former marvelous movements seem slow and turgid, he avoided his own assailant; he leaped upon the police chief. Before the blow had a third descended he whipped out his fist and the body of Simpson was rolling like a broken barrel against the side wall.

For a moment he stood there, his eyes blazing, a thing of vengeance, triumphant. It seemed all over. One and all, every one in the room had halted. No one dared approach him.

He was peering at Roselle. Not a look nor a gesture did he give to his opponents. He was indeed a picture.

But in that moment, somehow, I sensed that a thing had happened!

Witherspoon did not move; just stood there. There was something in his attitude, in his defiance, of a lion that is wounded, of a monarch holding off in the last fatal moment the jackals that surround him. Whether any one else perceived it I do not know; but I was positive, at the instant, that the man was wounded—yes, dying!

His eyes grew glassy. He staggered. In all that assemblage was not the sound of a whisper. All was wonder; he commanded awe and admiration. Even in dying he was distinctive.

He reached his hand out for Roselle. Just as he touched her, just as she nestled to him, he crumpled, his knees sagged forward, and he fell face downward on the dance floor.

The crowd surged forward; in a moment, like all crowds, it had wreathed a circle. Women were sobbing, men exclaiming, cackles of hysterical laughter cutting into the sudden babble. Roselle was kneeling beside George, futilely endeavoring to call him back to the living.

A physician stepped forward. In an instant he had turned him over and had opened his shirt. While he was making his professional examination the crowd was waiting, expectant, the impending verdict driving it again to silence. Finally the doctor straightened; his face was white and settled; his words decisive.

"Dead," he said; "dead. The man is stone-dead!"

**A**LL this, though it takes time in relating, occurred in a few short moments. Across the film of my memory

it has left a picture. I can see it all, I have seen it, many times and often. One moment the hall was alive with Christmas mirth and jollity, in another pandemonium had broken like a maelstrom; and in the next grim tragedy itself had stalked across the dance floor.

The humor of dancing had flown out of the windows; the ball was broken up. In its stead were excitement, hysterical women, and white-faced men. Policemen wounded and bleeding, stricken as if they had been at death grips with a whirlwind; and the body of the police chief slowly coming back to life, and receiving as it were, drip by drip, the trickling drops of consciousness; in the center George Witherspoon, his eyes glazed, his hair scarcely ruffled, fair and beautiful even as he had been in life. To me it seemed scarcely possible that he could lie there stricken. It had been so sudden.

The guests thronged about him; old playmates, sweethearts of other days, looking, remembering, wondering, none of them understanding. The rumors they had heard of him had been mysterious, incoherent, and enigmatic; now here they had had a manifestation. His actions had been rude, unmannerly, impossible; but they were accepted.

It had ever been so; whatever he did, he had always been able, by some means to be justified in the minds of others. His beauty, personality—something—had enforced it.

And so it was even now. I am sure there was none in that room whose heart did not go out to him. Even in death he called for admiration. A policeman standing by me stroked tenderly a great lump over his eye.

"I knew him when he was a boy, Mr. Warren, when you and he were shavers; but I never knew he could fight like that. He almost knocked my head off. What killed him?"

The last words shook me out of a dream, into sudden grim reality. George Witherspoon, my playmate, was dead; Roselle was kneeling there beside him, her beautiful face sad and deadened, her hand lovingly, tenderly stroking the hair away from his forehead. Some one touched me. I turned. It was the Master, and behind him Wilkins.

"Dead!" I exclaimed, scarcely knowing what I was saying. "George Witherspoon, my playmate."

But the Master shook his head; back of him I could see the querulous eyes of Wilkins shifting uncertainly from the old man to myself, as if it were all a puzzle.

"We don't know," said the Master. "I observed it all. This is what I was afraid of. He would cheat the devil. He is dead certainly, Walter, but be assured that this is not the end of the Rebel Soul. On this night he is a being rampant. We must be cautious."

He placed his hand upon my shoulder and spoke softly; at the same time reassuringly.

"Be careful, Walter. Don't get excited. Take things easy. The evening is only beginning, and almost anything may happen. Remember that we are not solving a common problem. Yonder is Roselle. See that she is escorted home immediately. Don't under any circumstances leave her for an instant.

"Watch everything. See everything—take in every move and detail. And whatever happens, under no stress nor condition allow yourself to become involved in any struggle. Let matters take their course. If you don't, it will be fatal; I cannot help you.

"To-night you are a witness—nothing else; we both are helpless. The best we can do is to gather evidence that will help us in the future. We must know exactly what we are fighting; what we have to do and how we are going to do it."

As usual he spoke in riddles. He had a way of knowing things that were beyond my slow ken and thinking. Yet, though he was enigmatic I had every reason to repose in him a confidence implicit. Every time that he had warned me events had come to the prediction that he had made.

I had been robbed and ruined; the disasters of the last few moments he had foreseen. And the evening was but beginning! What more could there be in store?

Nevertheless I kept up my courage. I had confidence in his wisdom and realized that he understood better than any other how to handle the situation. He would make no blunders and whatever he did, good would emanate.

Accordingly I hurried to Roselle and with the help of Clara, who, I confess, was not at all tragic with grief, persuaded her that we must be leaving right away.

IT WAS not easy, of course. She had a strange infatuation for the dead man. She had loved him, I knew; and he had fastened upon her spirit. Love is a consuming factor.

She had never loved another—of that I was certain.

Nevertheless, we convinced her. Everything had been done that could be done; what had happened had been far and away above our powers of prevention. It was better to leave the rest in the hands of others. She was badly in need of repose and quietness.

Besides, Simpson, the police chief, had recovered consciousness and had assumed direction. He was totally unaware, apparently, of his sudden lapse into madness, and with his usual officiousness was giving his orders.

The very sight of him was repulsive to the girl. It was manifest that she feared him. Therefore she consented; and without any outward show of emotion, and with splendid calmness and repression, prepared for leaving.

In a moment I had conducted them out of the babbling crowd to the car. Outside was darkness: the lights about the entrance had gone out and we could distinguish objects about us only with difficulty. On the curb was the Master, waiting.

He was without his hat, and in the blackness what with his dark coat blending into the night and his silvery white beard, he had all the spectral illusory impression of the spray of a waterfall dropping out of the darkness. It was a strange impression he made and a weird one.

I am afraid that I, calm and reserved as I always proclaimed myself, was a little wrought into the abnormal. Though it was the natural phenomena of the simplest incidents—the transition from the lighted ballroom into the thick blackness—it caught me. At the moment it was symbolic. So would the old man guide us through the shadows; his was the light of wisdom that would be salvation.

With the completion of the thought came brightness: the lights suddenly flared up, flashing on the sidewalk. The Master was smiling kindly, the same old reassurance, the mellow light in his eyes, soothing and convincing. He touched me gently on the shoulder.

"Just a word, Walter. Remember!"

"Yes, sir."

"No violence: no opposition."

"Yes, sir."

I said it not because I really understood him, but because I had grown accustomed to obeying. With what I knew and what I had undergone, I was ready enough to obey him. And undoubtedly he realized it, for he turned immediately to the others.

The girl was lost in her wraps, gazing straight ahead, saying nothing, engrossed in her thoughts and feelings. He spoke to her.

"Roselle. Do you know me? You know the Master?"

She looked at him absently.

"Yes, yes," she answered, as if striving vainly to drive her thoughts back into the present. "Yes, yes, the Master. What is it?"

"Good-by."

"Oh, is that all?" There was relief in the expression, relief from interruption. "Good night, Master."

"He took her by the arm.

"My child," he said, "you do not understand me. I said good-by. One of us, you or I, is about to pass into another life entirely. We may not see each other for a long time. I have come to say good-bye. And I wish also to encourage you.

"Circumstance may bring up necessity. Things may happen. If, in the future, at some time, you have occasion for my assistance, think of the Master. He will be ever ready: he will come."

As he spoke his voice grew kinder, full of solicitude and tender concern for this frail, beautiful girl who might be even then poised on an abyss of peril.

"Do not be afraid," he continued. "Stay by the one you love. Be devoted, Fear no evil. Whatever happens, do not for a single moment doubt nor waver. You are right; love will be triumphant. You can save him."

With that he saw us into the machine, gave us good cheer, said, "good night," and left us. I could see by the expression of the girl and her abstraction that his words had as yet made no impression upon her.

But I understood the Master. I was certain from my own experience that he had written, as it were, with invisible ink the words into her memory. At the proper time circumstances would bring them into color.

But what were they? What was awaiting? What?

CHAPTER XIII

ROSELLE

AS WE sped homeward on the crisp December night my mind was full of wonder. Realities, uncertainties, and conjectures! Everything seemed shuffled, woven into a world of weirdness and unreality.

The events of the evening had been sudden. I could not understand them nor the Master and his almost certain foresight. Why had he allowed this man whose every movement he appeared to know to be crushed to death there in the ballroom? What had killed him? And now that he was dead, what was there to fear? Why this warning? Why this solicitude for the safety of Roselle? Was it Witherspoon that he was fearing, some impending aftermath of his sudden ending? Or was there yet another? Surely he did not fear a dead man!

And above all, why did not the Master come out plainly and make a statement, so that I could at least know in what direction danger was approaching?

The death I had but just now witnessed had disturbed me deeply. It was like pulling the fibers out of part of my existence. George Witherspoon had been part of my being, part of the essence of my life, a segment of that consciousness and interpretation which alone constitutes the individuality of a mortal. Hitherto my life had been woven, shaped, warped, and directed by the genius that was Witherspoon.

I loved him, I hated him—and I felt, somehow I knew, that I could not do without him. He had been a great spirit, obeying some unknown law, and perhaps a slave to some unknown power. He was the Rebel Soul, and as such he was almost as much to be feared as was the devil.

What was he? Was this mystery that had corrugated my whole life with unreality to go unraveled? I refused to think so.

At home the lights were gleaming. When we were out the house was never darkened: but I knew that the servants were asleep. We alighted, quickly; it was cold and a warm fire was waiting. Before the chauffeur had driven up the graveled driveway toward the garage we were half-way across the veranda.

Inside, in the living-room, the fitful

gleam of the fire in the old-fashioned fireplace was throwing shadows intermittently. I turned the log over and added a few extra fagots; a cheerful blaze and a glow of warmth succeeded.

The girls were both dead tired and so almost on the instant they reposed themselves in the easy chairs and toasted their toes before the cheerful embers. I was hungry; the excitement had sharpened my appetite almost to the ravenous.

"Better call Bertha," said my wife when I started for the kitchen. "Don't go puttering about her pantry."

But I did not heed her. I had a benedick's love for prowling around and dipping into the good things. In no time I had some tongue, several sandwiches, some cake, and several pieces of pie for our supper; besides some salad. A good pitcher of milk completed it. Then I carried it all into the other room by the fire-glow.

Clara was hungry and ate eagerly and with a relish, so did I; but Roselle would not touch it. Instead she gazed steadfastly, intently at the glowing embers: Her form shook slightly. I realized what good a bit of food might do her, and tried persuasion. Clara joined me.

"Come, come, Roselle, don't be foolish. It's all in a lifetime. There are plenty of others."

I knew that the girl was full of spirit: but I was not prepared for the life and defiance that lighted into flashing.

"Others —" she exclaimed → "others, Clara? How you speak! You know that I loved him!"

My wife smiled negatively.

"You think you did. There are hundreds of others who have loved him, in the same manner, and to the same purpose. It may seem cruel but I am going to say it. I am glad it happened. He can harm no others."

"Oh," she cried, "shame on you! Shame on you! You are cowardly! You are worse than the others! Why do you say it! Why did they do it! All those great strong policemen fighting one poor boy! It was disgraceful. And that great lubbering brute of a police chief. Oh, I wish —" She clenched her little fist and her eyes snapped with scorn and contempt.

"But he fought them! He was their master. He was splendid. He was a hero. They were cowards, ruffians, one and all."

I realized then that I must enlighten

her. She was ignorant of the preceding events of the evening. She had witnessed only the culmination, the battle in the ballroom, the wonderful exhibition that George Witherspoon had given of his prowess.

She was romantic. His dazzling coruscating personality had flooded her mind with its luster. It was right that I should tell her, by a plain statement of the facts persuade her that it was best to acquiesce in the acceptance of the things that must be.

"ROSELLE," I said, "you do not understand. Those policemen had a perfect right to be there; they came only in the sworn pursuit of their duty. George Witherspoon is an outcast.

"You remember the peculiar little card that I received some time back bearing the inscription 'The King of Thieves'? It struck you as odd at the time: you interpreted it as an ad for a coming scenario. Which in truth it was, only this time it was a film of life and blood and action.

"That little card was a prophecy of peril. The King of Thieves was George Witherspoon.

"With an effrontery which was always his characteristic he had warned me. He was going to rob me, to loot our bank, and he defied me to stop him. He scorned every obligation, every love and tie that should bind him.

"His every action was a bitter repudiation of the love that has been ours in our childhood. Since the change came on him he has hated me with every fiber, every ounce, every vibration of his life and being. He was sworn to my destruction.

"Naturally I took precautions. Without allowing either you or Clara to be aware of the disaster that was impending, I quietly, with the help of the Master and the police, arranged a system of defense, which I thought impregnable. With any other man on the whole wide earth it would have been so. With George Witherspoon it was only an inducement.

"I was warned in the afternoon that to-night would bring the finish. The Master warned me. Everything happened just to the prediction. In some manner, I know not how, he went through every guard and watcher. He looted the bank of thousands; the institution which stood for the name of Warren has been

practically wrecked and ruined now.

"That accounts for the policemen and the battle in the ballroom. They were under orders; they were to take him, no matter what the cost. Had they found him in the open there would undoubtedly have been shooting: in the crowded ballroom that was impossible, and the affair devolved into a contest of brawn and muscle."

I had hoped to persuade her; but I was disappointed. She was simple and had no appreciation of the complexities of our legal ethics. She was romantic and in love, and George Witherspoon was her hero. In her woman's nature, in her defiance, that alone was the thing that counted.

You can't argue with a woman: I have tried it. When she loves, everything is settled; all things else are mere externals. She is ever perverse in the intensity of her devotion.

Roselle's beautiful black eyes were ablaze with her anger: she had no sense or reason, only an unquenchable, undying ardor in defense of her consecration.

"Oh," she cried, "you, too, Walter! You, too; you who loved him! I had thought that love is holy and undying. And you forsake him! For the love of a few miserly dollars you throw down all the remembrances of your childhood, forswear all the goodness and nobleness of your nature!

"How I hate your money! It is good for only the warping of souls and for corruption. George Witherspoon was greater than you all. The Master says so. I have his words. He says that I am right, and I know it. Love, love, always and forever!"

Just then a slight sound; rumbling, indistinct, and foreboding. With the events of the evening I could expect most anything. A step sounded on the veranda: undoubtedly a messenger: some further news of sudden import.

"Some one coming," spoke my wife. "You had better see— Why, they are coming in without the formality of ringing. Better see—"

A breath of cold air coming up the hallway proclaimed the front door open. I stepped across the room. As I did so the living-room door was opened. I stood face to face with—

George Witherspoon!

It was like a blast from the supernatural. I threw up my arm before my

face, and drew back like one who has suddenly come in contact with the lightning. I remember Clara screaming, and her face growing white as marble. Roselle never blanched nor faltered; she was triumphant, she swayed slightly; but it was only with the intensity of her joy and spirit.

For an instant he stood there; so natural, so beautiful, so certain that he could not be else than the living. A smile was on his lips, and as he looked over at Clara and me an infinity of scorn and untold derision was in his expression. The contempt of that look would have filled a volume. But to the girl his attitude was all sunshine. He turned to her and held out his arms.

"Come," he said, "Roselle."

She did not hesitate nor falter. With a low cry she sprang forward and was gathered up as if she had been a baby. With a quick movement he stepped over, plucked her coat and hat from the chair.

That was all. Not a word or sound did he utter. In another moment he was bearing her in his arms through the door and across the veranda.

Dazed and uncertain, shaken to the roots of my being, I followed. At the curb a great, powerful machine was waiting. I saw him place her in the car and gather the robes about her. I heard him speak to the chauffeur; words which I shall ever remember, clear, distinct, vibrant, ringing with the musical dramatic intonation which was ever characteristic of the George Witherspoon who was the Rebel Soul.

"On, on!" he was saying. "On, on, Alonzo! With the speed of the night winds, on! Into the Land of Nowhere!"

The great car shot forward, swerved and curved and turned into the highway. For a few short moments I watched the uncertain, baleful tail-light filtering into the distance—then nothing; nothing but the silence and the extreme desolation of my existence.

Such was the passing of Roselle.

#### CHAPTER XIV

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH HIM?"

FOR a long time I stood there, bare-headed in the cold December midnight, confounded, overwhelmed, unable to overcome the withering somberness that shrouded upon me. My mind was a



waste of unstirred and calamitous desolation.

I could not think or utter. I could only peer vainly into the darkened distance whence had gone our loved one. I realized that it was useless: that she was engulfed and swallowed up in the personality that was Witherspoon. She was gone forever.

Somehow I never knew until that moment just how great a part in our lives had been Roselle's. She had been the light that had gladdened our household; the flicker of golden sunshine that warmed us; the link that bound us, with laughter and with song, to youth and beauty. Even as George Witherspoon, she had abandoned us for the land of the mysterious shadow.

What was it? Why was it? This thing that brooked like a black, unending incubus over my destiny? All my loved ones: every one that I loved or cherished must be crushed in the maw of the unrelenting.

What was it? This mysterious unknown that stood out all-powerful, isolated, and alone in this world of prosaic reality. It had caught Witherspoon, changed him, elevated him to a height above all mortals, and given him the morals of the devil. It was inexorable; it was sublime: it was hellish.

It was something that I could not conceive of, before which, at the mere attempt at visualization, my mind seemed to shrink and shrivel. It was beyond me.

And now it had claimed Roselle. Would it do unto her as it had done unto the other? Would it warp the lightness of her spirit into the pure vindictive? Would she, too, become as the other—superhuman, splendid, wicked?

I could not think so. Something in my inner being told me: her softness, her gentleness, her beauty, her purity would be triumphant.

The thought gave me sudden calmness. A wave from the opposite pole of emotion suffused itself upon me. I loved them both, they were part of my existence, they would tame each other, the goodness of Roselle would bring back to me the playmate of my childhood.

I do not know why it was, whether it was Fate, or one of those unaccountable twistings that Destiny takes when she is playing; but at that moment I received a message; or at least I so construed it. Certainly it was unusual that such a thing should happen at an hour that was so late and so unseemly.

Over in a back street, in one of the smaller buildings, a light flickered suddenly through the blackness. Abstractedly I watched it; more for the reason that it was solitary, I suppose, than for any other.

A moment later came the notes of an old-fashioned graphophone. Rasping, to be sure, and cheap, but playing a tune that has lighted up the ages. I was not deeply religious, but at that moment I understood the wonderful potency of that message, that has blazed a dazzling pathway through the ages and has brought man to his greatest endeavor, and has given him always determination and courage in his weakness. It was playing: "Jesus, the Light of the World."

It was like a blaze of sunshine in the darkness, a balm of ineffable contentment and consolation; a truth mellowed through the blackness on the wings of music; truth unending and forever. I gripped its meaning, saw its purport, and the interpretation.

Jesus was love undying, virtue, purity, and sacrifice. And Roselle was His angel. She was to venture into the land of shadow and by the light of her sacrifice, devotion, and purity free George Witherspoon from the grip of this thing that held him. Her spirit would pervade him. Between the two contrary lights hers would be the one that would lead him. I remember the words of the Master and the potency of their meaning:

"Be devoted; never waver; love will be triumphant."

Just then I realized that I had a companion; I felt and could hear her animated breathing. I turned. Clara was there beside me.

"You here?" I asked. "I thought that I was alone; how long have you been here?"

"Since the beginning, Walter. I watched them go. And—and I heard that song. It has set me to thinking. Surely such a coincidence must have some meaning. It does seem like a voice that is straight from Heaven. The Lord has use for our Roselle, and has chosen this simple means of telling us of His purpose.

"You loved George Witherspoon, and I remember the time when he was all that a young man should be. Forgive me, Walter, for my hatred that was so unseemly. I am sure of Roselle, I love and have confidence in her: she would not have run away with a monster.



The Russian gave a scream of terror. The sword he had drawn in his rage seemed to have become white hot, to have seared the hand that held it . . .

"When a woman loves she has an unfathomed intuition. Roselle is right; and you.

"I alone was wrong. There is something holding George Witherspoon. You must save him. And at the same time you must bring us back Roselle."

**I** DON'T believe that anything at the moment could have given me greater pleasure.

Hitherto I had been quite alone in my devotion to my old schoolmate. I had stood for him inexorably, believing always in his goodness. Holding out against all the fear and dread of my wife, for his vindication.

I had never hoped nor dreamed that she could be won over. Only a miracle could have accomplished it. And that is what had happened. At an impossible moment, and old squawky graphophone singing an immortal song had done what all my persuasion and insistence could not even attempt to accomplish in our behalf.

But there was work to be done, for all that.

I now called up police headquarters, and asked for Simpson. I hardly expected to locate him at such a time of the night, but there was nothing like trying. Luckily he was there.

"This is Mr. Warren," I told him. "I

did not hope to get you, but I thought I would call up anyway."

He laughed.

"Yes, it is late, Mr. Warren. But I am not sleepy. A bit too excited, in fact, to think of slumber. When a man has just made twenty thousand and has engineered the biggest haul of his lifetime, he is likely to feel too frisky to think of such common things as sheets and pillows."

"Yes, I suppose so," I answered. "May I ask you, Mr. Simpson, what you have done with George Witherspoon?"

"Done?" came the answer. "Done? Why, we left him lying in state, of course. Time enough for the rest in the morning. You don't suppose that I am going to pack him around in my pocket, do you?"

"Did you leave any guard or watcher?"

"Over a dead man? Hardly. Why? You don't think he will walk away, do you?"

"I don't know," I replied. "It seems so. He was here not a half hour ago, alive and healthy."

"What!"

I repeated what I had just told him.

"Say," came the answer, "are you talking in your sleep? Pinch yourself, Mr. Warren."

I laughed.

"I was never so much awake in my life. George Witherspoon is alive and healthy. He was here not a half an hour ago. He left in an automobile bound southward. He has abducted Roselle Rohilla.

"Better get busy with the telephone and telegraph: and you better send a car after him. Or, if you doubt my words, send up a man to make a verification. You will have to move in a hurry."

"You're crazy!"

He hung up with insistence and finality. I could not again get the connection.

"What did he say?" asked my wife.

I told her. In my heart I pitied the poor fellow's disillusion. So did she.

"I wonder if I could get the Master," I said. "He is the one to speak to. This would interest him. He would know just what to do. I don't think—"

"No, hardly," answered Clara. "At the present time he is undoubtedly on the train bound for the city. I think we may regard the day as ended. If only it had not been Roselle."

Like a woman she must have her spell

of sobbing. Up to now she had restrained herself to a wonderful degree; I think it was in great measure to lighten the grief that was my own which is ever a way that a true wife has. I, too, could have wept, but, being a man, the tears could not come that freely. Just the same I suffered: my whole body was racked with grief and emotion.

It was best that we retire and leave the rest for morning. Which indeed was exactly the thing we were about to do. But just then the telephone rang. I picked it up. It was Simpson calling.

"This Mr. Warren?" His voice was hard and deadened. Harsh with anger.

"Yes."

"I want to know, Mr. Warren, what kind of foolishness this is. What have you done with that body?"

"Then there was no body?" I answered. "You despatched a man to find out? Of course there wasn't. Have you sent those telegrams? I would not lose a moment, Mr. Simpson. The law is far-reaching. The police are powerful. You know your man. In twenty minutes you can have all the police of the State warned and watching out for him."

I thought he swore. "Telegrams my hat!" he exclaimed. "Police fiddlesticks! Rouse all the State to look for a dead man! I'd look pretty! Look here, Mr. Warren, cut out all this foolishness and get down to business. I want that body; and I want that twenty thousand. It was my brains that earned it!"

"Mr. Simpson," I said, "you must be laboring under a delusion. The man was here only a short time ago. He was not dead at all—he couldn't have been."

From the sounds that came over the phone the man was almost choking.

"Delusions!" he shouted. "I'll show you who has the delusion. I'll teach you to put your fingers into the legal machinery again. You'll be glad enough to restore that body before I am through with you. Next time you will remember."

With that he hung up.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MASTER SPEAKS

**W**AS there ever anything more exasperating, so threatening, so insolent? I could not help thinking that this was what came of making a blacksmith a police chief. Was there ever such in-

capacity? The man had moved just so far and would move no farther. The thought of that twenty thousand had both paralyzed and intoxicated his mind.

Well, I was sorry, but there was no reason for my being unduly worried. I had done all that I could do. In reporting to police headquarters I had done my duty: even though it was effort wasted.

Now we would retire. In the morning I would hurry to the bank and ascertain the extent of my losses. I would have done so now were it not for the injunction of the Master. Besides, the place was guarded. And after what had happened it was fitting that I remain with Clara. We had best get to bed.

But again we were interrupted. This time the door bell. The night had been so packed with calamity and events that I did not see how anything else could happen. I switched on the lights and went to the door. It was the Master.

I was overjoyed to see him. I led him into the living-room and excitedly, eagerly, detailed just what had happened. Then I added the conversation that I had just had with headquarters. He smiled at this.

"Simpson," he said, "is not much of a police chief. But he is not to be blamed. It is not his fault that he is holding a position that calls for excessive training. It is our splendid politics." He mused a minute. "Poor Simpson!" he added. "Twenty thousand! He's a poor man; that is a fortune."

"But," I exclaimed, "the rest—George Witherspoon, Roselle? How do you account for it?"

"Walter," he said, "I don't account of it; I have quit accounting. I can only conjecture. In a case like this where everything is impossible it is well not to be too certain. A great deal of it has been foreseen and I am foreseeing farther.

"But as yet it is a whole lot guess-work. I have hopes, however, of shading my hypothesis into theory and that again into proof and explanation."

"Then," I exclaimed, "you foresaw it. You knew all the while that Roselle was in danger. Why, why did you not stop it?"

He held up his hand. "Don't become excited. I knew that George Witherspoon was coming; that he would as surely take Roselle; I cautioned you that she was in danger.

"But it was not of George Witherspoon I warned you; her peril lay in herself,

in the impetuous eagerness with which she would defend him and the unknown thing that might have happened in the moment of excitement.

"In fact, I am here to encourage you, Walter, both you and Clara. What has occurred this night is of the greatest moment and most conducive to good. You need not fear for your loved one. George Witherspoon would not harm her for all the power and all the wealth that has accumulated through the ages.

"He loves her. And she is his master. This is the first time that love has really entered into his being. If, as we can suppose, he is controlled by something evil, we have given that thing an antagonist that it cannot master.

"The Rebel Soul a cynic and the Rebel Soul in love are two altogether different beings. The fact that he can love at all is of the greatest purport. It tells us that lurking somewhere is the real George Witherspoon; that this being is unnatural, that he is not as he should be.

"In giving him Roselle we have found a lever; love, virtue, purity will be triumphant. She will hold him, prepare the way for our coming, and when we arrive assist in the great and final struggle."

No doubt it was all very plain to the Master; he had worked it out and could form, as he said, some sort of a conjecture as to what was coming. But to me it was a limitless sea of enigma; I could only flounder about, and get nowhere.

"I don't understand it!" I exclaimed. "It was unnatural; it was puerile and foolish."

"What?"

"This playing at death. The scene there in the ballroom. Why did he sham at dying when he knew that he was their master?"

The Master smiled.

"That," he said, "is the one place where he especially displayed his wisdom. Outside were armed men, waiting. They had orders to shoot. If there is one thing positive about the Rebel Soul it is his materiality. He cannot stop a bullet.

"Outside was certain death and he knew it. His only reason for coming to the ball was to see Roselle and the dramatic touch it would give him. He is spectacular. When he saw himself surrounded he conveniently played at death and disarmed suspicion. Afterward he walked away at his leisure. It was as I expected."

"Then," I exclaimed, "if you knew it why did you call in the police at all?"

"Because I was foolish. I am only mortal and so sometimes make mistakes. I hoped to take him, or at least learn more about him. Wilkins had grown weary and superstitious, he wished to use the police. I consented.

"Wilkins swore that the Rebel Soul was the devil. He was just a bit afraid of him, and had for him not a little admiration. You will recall that in the struggle he stayed aloof and spent his time in waiting."

"Was he frightened?"

"Not in the physical sense. No. The moment that he saw Witherspoon he realized that they could not overpower him."

"Where is he? What is Wilkins doing now?"

"At the present time he is breaking all the speed laws southward."

Thank the Lord, there was some one awake and doing!

"When you telephoned to Simpson," continued the Master, "he was at headquarters awaiting developments. You know what he thinks of your police force. As he said: 'There must be some one alive to get some action.' He was waiting. When your message came he did not delay or parley. The police of the State are watching. In two moments he had started; plunging southward."

"Good for Wilkins!"

"Do you think he will catch him?"

"No. All we are hoping for is his direction. I wish to know where he is going. Once we learn his destination we can begin the real adventure!"

**F**OR a while we sat in silence. My mind was seething. Riddles! Riddles! Riddles! Everything seemed to be going on and we were getting nowhere. He had gone through us like a shadow. He had done just as he pleased. And we could not stop him.

Was there really, after all, such a person as my old George Witherspoon, or was I dreaming? Was this strange being human? What was he, a flame, a vengeance, a back rush from eternity? What? In spite of the old gentleman's assertion as to his materiality I could not, somehow, assign him any category but the supernatural.

At last the Master spoke.

"Well," he said, "this is the very last time."

"What?"

"That we shall employ the police. Henceforth we shall use our own organization. This is not a case for mere detectives.

"Witherspoon is not the man we are after. Our problem is to discover the real George Witherspoon, to distinguish the blending, to separate the effects and seek for causes.

"Something powerful, fearless, almost omnipotent, is lurking somewhere. We must find it. Should we continue our present tactics, we would finish nowhere. It would be a crime to punish George Witherspoon without discovering his secret. And it might be folly. Undoubtedly one of the greatest truths of creation is reposing in him. We must never cease to our efforts until we learn it."

"And Roselle?"

"Ah," said the Master. "Let us give thanks for Roselle. The girl is beautiful and is good. The purity of her spirit is the kind that radiates the sunshine. Sin cannot touch her.

"She loves him. Not all the strength of the world will turn her. She is that proper woman, who when she loves a man will lead him through all shadows.

"Henceforth the spirit of George Witherspoon will localize about her beauty. He will love her, he will be jealous of her, he will protect her; woe to the one that endeavors to step between them! From now on he is divided; his cynicism must cuddle alongside of a love undying. In his division will come our strength."

I could not but hope so. Really we had need enough for courage. I had a world of faith in the Master, in his wisdom, and the far-reaching resources of the secret organization of which he was the head and leader. I knew that its numbers were almost legion; that education, science, all the accumulated lore of the ages were at its disposal; that it ramified into every grade and stratum of society; that it reached to the poles of the earth and backward; that the keenest wit of the brightest men and women was contributed gladly toward the great attainment. I realized that everything, no matter how small, drove unceasingly toward the common center; that the Master was the head and hub of all this wisdom and that we were far from weaklings.

Just the same I had a healthy, wholesome dread of the thing we were oppos-

ing. It seemed that something knowing the great powers of our organization had raised up this one to oppose it. That Providence was playing humor; that this one so unearthly, whose province was destruction, was the embodiment of that very spiritual essence and life evanescent that we were bent on solving. There was something grim about it, and terrible, that called for shudders. There was need enough for courage.

My thoughts and misgivings were interrupted by the door-bell; some one rang it. Would this night never end? Once again I switched on the lights and sought the cause of the interruption.

Outside, on the porch, were two policemen. What could be the matter? Opening the door, I bade them enter; it was cold outside; and as I never for an instant considered that they came for other than making a report or the seeking of information, I chose naturally to impart it in warmth and comfort.

Both of the men were visibly embarrassed; but this I took as the effect of their position, and to my exclusiveness as a banker. I had been acquainted with them all my life; with one of them I had attended grammar school when a youngster.

Inside the living-room they looked at each other in some discomfort; spoke to my wife in a confused and affable way, and nodded to the Master. I waited for them to disclose their errand; and they each one waited on the other. Not quite understanding I asked them.

For a moment there was even more confusion. Finally one of them, weaving his hat around with his fingers in embarrassment, blurted out the truth.

"I—I am sorry, Mr. Warren. It doesn't sound reasonable, I know; but orders is orders, you know, and we are merely patrolmen. We have come to place you under arrest."

## CHAPTER XVI

### ARRESTED

"WHAT!"—too dumbfounded for more utterance.

He repeated his mission.

"What is the meaning of this insolence? What may the charge be?"

The other officer answered; after the ice was broken he was the better conversationalist of the two.

"It is Simpson," he said briefly. "It is

preposterous, I know. Nothing but downright insolence to arrest a man of your integrity and position. But you can't tell Simpson; he is the most bull-headed man I ever worked for.

"He says he don't care who you are; you have thwarted him in getting this twenty thousand. You have been tampering and interfering with the execution of the law.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Warren. This is a very unpleasant task for me, who have known you all my life, I must assure you; but orders are orders, sir. I have hated my job, sir, ever since they turned the force over to that blacksmith. Were it not for my wife and babies I would resign to-morrow."

So this was it! The twenty thousand! The reason and soul of the man had been cracked by the thought of money. I could not but wonder what such a man would do in the face of open bribery.

"Well," I said composedly, "so be it. I suppose you will allow me to remain here on my own recognizance. It will hardly be necessary for a man of my standing to go to jail; especially on a charge so foolish."

The man winced and blinked as if the pill were bitter.

"Those are our orders, sir," he said, "our orders."

"To jail?"

"To jail."

I understood what that meant. The chuckle-headed chief was making a travesty of police power, and employing the authority delegated to him for the promotion of justice as a weapon of his private malice.

It was impossible at this time of night for me to employ any legal means that would give me freedom. I must spend the night in jail, subject to his mercy.

My wife flew up to me, white with terror and with a righteous feminine rage at the insolence of the chief of police.

"Don't go, Walter," she said, "don't go. It is not necessary for you to spend the night in jail because the man is insane."

There was a good deal in what she said. With a woman's way she had touched the nail squarely on the head, and tapped it. Because the man had toppled from his mental balance was no reason why I should be incarcerated.

Still I was the last man that would have disobeyed the law; and I could not, would not, resist an officer. It was against

my code entirely. I was a good citizen. I believed in obeying the machinery of society implicitly, even when, as in a case like this, its wheels were slipping.

It is not permissible for a man to judge himself of that which he is accused. If I was innocent it was my misfortune to be arrested, but I could not help it. In spite of my wife I decided on acquiescence. The Master was also of my opinion.

"Better accompany them, Walter," he advised. "I shall go down and talk to Simpson. In the morning, which is not very far off, you will be released; it is only a few hours of discomfort."

So it was that I was led to prison, into the presence of Simpson, grim and insolent. He was clenching his fists in his rage. He turned upon me.

"Now, Mr. Warren, perhaps you will talk. I want to know the whereabouts of that body, and I want to know it quickly."

"Simpson," I said, disdaining the use of "Mr.," "I do not understand you. You are laboring under a misapprehension. There is no body. I informed you that the man is alive and walking. If you knew him as well as I do you might believe it."

"No doubt. And if I had as many twenty thousands as you possess I might still have use for another. What have you done with him?"

Plainly the man was out of reason. I could see the two patrolmen eying him with contempt; and their sympathetic concern for my comfort. Nevertheless, I constrained myself and went into a detailed explanation. It really would have been lowering to have lost my temper with him.

Through it all he sat threatening; his little covetous, black-dot eyes full of hatred. He was one of those men, who, once their mind is settled, live and die of the opinion.

For some reason he was set in the opinion that I was as greedy as he for the reward that was hanging over a man's dead body. His reply showed me the utter folly of explanation or of reason.

"Pooh! Pooh!" he scoffed. "Likely story, likely story! Likely one indeed! Dead men walking in their sleep! Dead men driving automobiles! Dead men stealing girls! I suppose that you will be telling me yet that I am dead man."

I said nothing, though I made the mental observation that for all the use he was as a police chief he might as well have been a dead one.

"Well," he snapped, "you can sleep in jail and see how you like it. Perhaps before morning you may find a tongue that can twist itself back into truth."

With that I was led to a cell.

By a strange coincidence it was to the old cell that I had occupied years before. And by a stranger one still it was by the same old turnkey that I was led along the corridor. Then, as now, it was George Witherspoon who had brought me.

**T**HOUGH my position was not this time perilous I could not refrain from wondering whether all my life, at regular intervals, I was destined to be jailed for the sake of his erring genius. It did appear that while I received all the effects of his evil, he had all the glory.

There was nothing to do but make the best of it and await the morning. I sat upon the cot and, not without a shudder, endeavored to shut myself up with the intensity of my thinking. With the coming of daybreak the Master would be able to reach some one whose mind held the salt of reason. It was merely a discomfort.

But the anxiety of my suspense was not to be so enduring. The jailer stalked down the corridor, and my cell was opened; I was led out. A night man was sitting at the desk. Simpson was gone. I asked the reason for my release. The answer confirmed suspicions.

"The old man," he said, "in the black robe. The gentleman with the silver whiskers. He persuaded him. I don't know what he told him, or how he did it; but when he was through he had Simpson fairly eating out of his hand. The chief has gone home."

I am grateful. The Master had performed what, after my useless expostulation, I had considered impossible. He had induced the other to cold, calm reason. Had he persuaded him that George Witherspoon was still in the land of the living? How had he done it?

Just then the Master himself stepped in, and together through the bitter cold early morning we walked homeward. I asked him.

"No," he answered. "I left Simpson to a great extent in his own opinion. Which is as it should be. My only concern with

him was to secure your freedom, and to calm as far as possible the wrath with which he regarded you.

"For a time he was very bitter. For some reason he had taken it into his head that you wished to thwart him. When a man like that gets to thinking it is hard indeed to turn him. But I succeeded. I make him see the light and realize what a colossal blunder he was making."

"Then," I asked, "he knew the truth, or at least something of it?"

"Not at all. He knows nothing; and even if he did he would not accept it. Which is best. We are through with Simpson and likewise with the police. Their operations would but impede us. Their province is crime and trouble and not the conflict of souls and their flashings into the realm of cosmos.

"I had desired another manifestation that he was above mere mortals, to have conclusive proof that mere man cannot hold him. I have had it. I had feared that if I used the police at all, and he escaped them, they would, from that time hence, ferret him to the ends of the earth till they found him.

"It was that contingency that boded trouble; the one thing that I dreaded. I did not wish to have them prowling around in a work they could only hinder. But it appears that fortune favors."

"In what manner?"

"Why, Walter, in everything that has occurred this morning. When Simpson had the effrontery to arrest you, you were indignant at disaster. But it was merely a lucky Providence interposing. Your hour in jail says that henceforth the police will make no interference.

"Through the stubbornness of Simpson, George Witherspoon is written with the dead men. They may not have his body, but they have a hundred witnesses. Once a man is dead even the police can forget him. We have had our manifestation, and without the sequence that I dreaded."

"Yes," I spoke, "we have had a manifestation indeed; too much of a one, I am fearing. I have been robbed of fortune and Roselle. Here's hoping that we never have such another."

"My dear boy, you do not understand. But perhaps I am growing old; if you could only see as I do."

"Yes, if."

"Your fortune, Walter, is only money.

It is common and has no secret. It is not like the other. Nevertheless, I would not worry. You remember the night George Witherspoon came to see you? That night he was for an instant his own real self? That night he was prophetic. That night he warned you. And that night he gave you a pledge of friendship!"

"The emerald?"

"Exactly. How much do you estimate that you can have lost? Compute it. I think you will reach a balance."

I added up rapidly in my mind the possible extent of my losses. It did seem reassuring; there was some chance that they might reach a balance.

"Then," I exclaimed, "George Witherspoon has saved me!"

"Yes," spoke the Master, "the one has saved you from the other. Can you not see it, Walter? He loves you. He is calling to you from the darkness. Out of the mystery he came to save you.

"He is alone, in trouble; fighting against what we know not, helpless. To you alone he has appealed and to myself. Would you forsake him?"

"But this other," I interrupted, "this one, this Rebel Soul that knows but hatred? Who—what is he? Is he just another, or is he still George Witherspoon?"

"Ah," sighed the Master, "that we know not! If we but did! Then there would be no danger. Nevertheless, Walter, I think I have a solution. I shall not tell you what at present, except that he is not negation. Neither is he evil. Rather is he positive, out of the ultimate, to lead us onward."

I could not understand him; even though an educated man, my mind was that of an infant alongside the Master's. He had a way of thinking with a sweep and distance, of penetrating the ink of darkness; his mind was a mental highway that led through the unknown shadows. He talked above me, and I failed to grasp him. My thoughts were leaping along in their own straight channel.

"And Roselle?" I asked, suddenly remembering that they both had wooed her. "Which one loves her?"

"Both!"

"You say she is in no danger."

"In none whatever. Only good can come of her abduction. Good to even the Rebel Soul."



## CHAPTER XVII

## THE START OF THE CHASE

**W**ELL, sir, the Master was right. As soon as possible I hurried to the bank to straighten out the confusion that I expected. On my way down I had a slight trepidation at the thought of the emerald. Had it, too, been stolen? The night before I had taken it for granted that it was immune.

But why? Why with this one that knew no honor? The thought gave me a sudden clutching. If it were gone!

Arrived at the bank, my first thoughts were to seek it. The hurried clerks, the ejaculations, and the condolence of the others I did not notice. I sought it with nervous fingers. And I was joyfully disappointed. My fears were groundless.

It reposed in all its luster, serene, green, peaceful, soothing, embodying in its beauty the good that is earth and heaven; emblematic; symbolic. What did it stand for? I felt that it was the good of Witherspoon and a love eternal.

Not until then could I attend to detail. But from then on I worked with a lightness of spirit. The disaster was computed; totals added up and the sum discovered. It reached up into sixty thousands.

Negotiable paper, currency; everything added, attained that figure. I had gone to the pains of placing everything, but what was indispensable, in another bank. Everything of value had been stolen. Except the emerald.

That was all the evidence that we retained of that night's lawless visit. It was as Wilkins had warned me; nothing had been broken; not a thing disturbed. He had come as silently as a ghost and disappeared as a shadow. There were no finger-prints, nor foot-marks, nor incriminating tokens; only the bewildered amazement of the officers; his wonder way of working and the missing valuables. To all appearances everything was usual. Even the cool, clear morning, with its blue sky and its serenity, belied the unusual.

I questioned the officers as to just what happened. They one and all shook their heads in a baffled bewilderment. It was beyond them. They had all fallen asleep simultaneously, and had only awakened at the calling of the Master. It was much like a tale of the Arabians. All out of

reason; more the product of a drunken imagination than the grim truth.

But I was a business man, and business called me now, before metaphysical speculation. Therefore, I proceeded with despatch and purpose. I called up Devins, the jeweler, in regard to the emerald. The price still held.

I did not desire to dispose of it, but I planned by its means to secure the wherewithal to cover up my losses. If the stone had such a value it would be easy to continue along as usual.

Which, indeed, is just what happened. In no time I had all the cash required, and without fuss or flurry, by the poise with which I outrode disaster, increased in the hearts of my townsmen their respect for the name of Warren.

But after this things rested. I had naturally expected, owing to sequence of the events just related that these tumultuous convulsions would still continue. I was accustomed, inured, hardened and bravened into seeking for the finish.

Now that Roselle was gone I desired nothing so much as to plunge immediately into the mystery and discover its solution. Though I had been lukewarm before, perhaps frightened, the added incentive of the girl made me almost reckless. I longed for action. And I did not get it.

Affairs languished. Matters stood just where they were, with no one a bit the wiser. There was, of course, the usual aftermath of the talk and comment; flashing head-lines in the paper, Simpson's effusions and what not. It was accepted absolutely that the man had been captured and that his body had been whisked away.

And there lay the mystery, for which there were many suggestions, but of course no solution. In the all, it made a splendid story. It possessed everything of the dramatic and spectacular to create sensation. The papers told the story, depicted the splendid setting, fired up their readers with excitement—and then forgot it. As a news value it was past; nobody was interested in a dead man.

It was best that it was so. I was like the Master, shunning publicity. I was certain that it was not a case for mere machinery of police organization; that there was something subtle, unseen, far-reaching, extending on before us; that this mystery, lurking in the shrouded

depths of the unknown, could only be lighted up with light of an unguessed wisdom. And I trusted that the Master had it. Indeed, I knew it.

But, as I have said, nothing happened. The Master himself, a few days later, disappeared from the ken of society. The only knowledge and assurance I had of his place and security was a note I discovered one morning lying upon my desk. It read:

My dear Walter:

Inasmuch as my sudden disappearance might alarm you, I am taking the pains of allaying your fears beforehand. When you read this I shall be on my way after Witherspoon. I hope to penetrate the envelope that shrouds him. I shall pierce the mystery. When I am ready for action, for the strokes that lead to dénouement, I shall call you. When the time comes I desire to have you with me.

How long will I be gone? I do not know. Perhaps a month, perhaps a year, two, three, maybe five; there is no telling. I shall not cease until I have what I am after. Please do not worry over my safety—I am hale and hearty and eighty, and amply able to take care of myself.

In the mean time God bless you. Keep a cool head, take care of Clara and the babies. If you become discouraged remember that the time is surely coming when you, and Clara, Roselle, George Witherspoon, and all will be one happy family.

Once again, God bless you.

The Master.

P.S.—When Wilkins returns tell him to go to the House of Sevens and await orders.

M.

That was all. When the detective returned a few days later, chagrined at his blind pursuit, I had him read it.

"Hm!" he said. "So the old boy himself has started. Well, that suits me. Somebody's going to step mighty high and lively. He's surely old, but he's mighty high on wisdom, and he's the slyest man who ever said nothing.

"It is sure going to be some contest. It will be a toss-up. Those two birds are the most uncanny men a-living; the one is for the other. If George Witherspoon eludes the old gentleman, now that he is once started, he's a dandy; and if the Master nabs the Rebel Soul, it's a case of ditto."

I laughed. "You apparently possess an impartial admiration."

"You betcha. One is as great as the

other. They and this case have got me up a tree and howling for mercy. I'm a detective, but I'm no shadow. When it comes to dead men running off with girls, driving automobiles sixty miles an hour, breaking bank vaults, cutting through society like a streak of fire-flame—why, then, I'm not in it.

"I'm Wilkins, just Wilkins, plain detective. For my part I am glad, delighted, that the Master himself has started. I was getting weary."

"Then," I asked, "you are going to step out of it?"

The man's eyes flashed; there was that in them of great excitement, anticipation, and yet withal of indignation.

"Not by a long shot! Quit the most wonderful case of my whole career? I should say not! I said I was growing weary. I am. But it is only because I know my limitation. I am man enough to realize that this case is beyond me.

"It is for the Master. He has the head. This mystery weaves too much into the dim lights and the shadows for the jurisdiction of any mere detective. He alone can unravel it.

"No, I am not out of it. All the king's horses and all the king's men could not pull me away from George Witherspoon and his secret. But I am glad—wonderfully glad—that the old man has gone into active service. Something will surely come of it. I shall do what I can and I hope some day to be in at the finish."

**B**UT in spite of this assurance the months that followed belied his confident assertion. Nothing came of it whatever. The Master sent no word nor token; and in the weary time that followed it seemed that he, too, had stepped beyond into the deep land of the shadow.

Even Wilkins, once he reported at the House of the Sevens, disappeared completely. He left no message, no word whatever. I had nothing but the cycle of my thoughts and broodings. Roselle, Witherspoon, the Master, Wilkins; all the actors in this mystery had been engulfed and had left me waiting.

Where were they? What were they doing? When would they call me? And would they? These were the questions that I kept repeating. I who had grown up in the case from the beginning knew not a point to turn to.

Through weeks and months of dreary waiting I looked out at the skies through

my office-window with vain conjectures. At night, in dead of silence, I would awaken and lie for hours a-thinking.

What of them? Where were they? Was the girl really in no danger? She might be dead. Crime, murder, arson; anything might happen.

At times I felt a clutching at my throat, as if a hand were gripping. In the dead of night, in the brooding silence I was answered with apprehension. I could see all dire disasters. Roselle: worn, torn, tattered, disgraced forever; a plaything. Oh, for some word or message! But not a token.

Two years went by. Even Clara, saddened, spoke no more of her pretty cousin. The little ones gradually forgot their Aunt "Woselle." Though we had hope and a great confidence in the Master, the balm of time settled us into resignation. We hoped, we prayed, but it appeared all useless.

The Master was an old man; he might have died. Though I made inquiries at his office, I learned nothing. They knew not, so they said, where he had gone. The orders he had given had been strict and certain—not to seek him. In the fulness of time, he had assured them, he would return. It was essential that he work in secret.

And Wilkins? He had come, had found sealed orders, and had departed, they knew not whither. That was all. Our prayers were hopeless.

But one morning in the spring-time, when the air was all full of life and sunshine, when the birds swelled out their little throats with the song of matings, when even my mind, accustomed as it was to soberness and thinking, was rippled with the breath of life awaking—we received a message.

In an idle moment I was sitting by the open window, drowsy with the day's contentment, when my phone rang. I picked up the receiver. It was Clara. She seemed excited.

"Oh, Walter!" she called. "Walter! Walter! Is this you? Oh, I have the greatest news! I can hardly tell you! Do you hear me? The greatest news! Oh, dear!"

"What is it, Clara? Why so excited? It must be news indeed. What is it?"

"Oh," she returned, "I could cry! Oh, Walter! It is from Roselle!"

From Roselle! My heart gave a sudden lurching. I caught my breath at the suddenness of the word. What—what

had happened? With the fear and dread that clutched me I could scarcely answer.

"Roselle? What is it, Clara? What has happened?"

"Oh," came the answer, "I can't tell you. You must see it."

What was it? With a bound I was out of the building, into the car and speeding over the streets of our little city. For a sober staid, strict banker and law-abiding citizen I am afraid I cut a pretty figure with my speeding.

On the driveway my wife ran out to meet me. In her hands she held a paper. As I leaped from the car, her arms about me, her tears and laughter, told me that she had glad tidings.

"Oh," she cried, "Roselle is alive and is happy! It is wonderful. Just as the Master told us; past all understanding. She has written to us about it—about him, the wonderful being who is her husband."

"He is kind to her; he loves her. She says everything; that he is an angel; that he is—he is—she doesn't know what! She says so much in her letter that I cannot tell you. She tells me to give her Walter a kiss from his Roselle."

She kissed me. It was news indeed, glad tidings that made me feel ten years younger. She kissed me for Roselle. In the eagerness of my spirit I felt that the dear girl was near me.

"There, there," I exclaimed, unclasping her arms. "Let us go into the house and read the letter."

A moment later we were in the seclusion of our library: I in the great arm-chair, and my wife with the manuscript in her lap. It was not a letter at all, but a book. There must have been a hundred pages. Here it is:

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A LETTER FROM ROSELLE

Paris, France, June, 1900.  
To Walter and Clara.

My dear ones:

This is a letter from your long-lost girly who was so foolish as to fall in love and to run away like a spirit in the night-time.

You remember? It seems so long ago. Ages, ages; millions of years away. I can scarce recall it. It is like the ending of another life that I hardly remember: a fitting, a dream, an incident of some great slumber.

You remember? Yes, so do I. But it is like a dream, so much has happened.

Your little Roselle is in another world entirely. Her ways are the ways of fairies, and her joys the pleasures of a princess.

As I write this letter, for instance, I have wealth about me, diamonds, sapphires, rubies, jewels of the ages scattered about my desk as playthings. Servants, black as ebon, stalk through my palace. My little foot might topple over a kingdom. I am gossamer and delicate and queen over more than an empire. I am beautiful, proud, rich and happy. No girl, no princess, no daughter of man since time first started has had such a life as mine is.

When I was a child you will remember how I talked of the fairies. I would marry a real Prince Charming and rule in a fairy kingdom. I would have gold and jewels and a life of sunshine; my voice would be like the music, and my love would be undying; I would be a fairy princess and rule with love forever, among the flowers and dew-drops.

It was not a childish fancy. It has all come true. I have been wafted to an enchanted kingdom. I hold scepter over the greatest of men, who, by his will, if he but would, could sway the hosts of the nations. Such is your Roselle.

This reads like the wildest fancy. I have just reread it. It sounds disordered; the writing and the boasting of a mind entangled. But it is true; all true.

You remember George Witherspoon—what you thought him? You called him the Rebel Soul. Remember?

I can see that room yet, as we sat there. Clara, Walter, and the Master, and your poor Roselle.

At the time I could not understand you. I was drawn, fascinated by your description, by his peril, by his beauty, by his isolation. It caught me like the breath of fire-flame, and consumed me. I was romantic, adventurous and girl enough to admire just such a hero. I confessed it. I begged his photograph, was dramatic and very foolish. I ran up to my room in a flood of passion. I was but a maiden.

But that night he came. Remember? I met him at the hallway.

Clara, you will never understand it. Nor will I. He had but to say one word—"Roselle"—and I was his forever. Against all reason, against all my training, against all rules and strict conventions, he had but to say a single word and he had won me.

You recalled what followed. How can you ever forget it? The night of the ball, how he robbed poor Walter and the struggle in the ballroom! Remember the words of the Master when he assisted us to the car. I can hear them yet: "Love, be faithful, be devoted."

And at home. Your elation at what had happened. Walter's statement that the man had robbed him; that George Witherspoon was the King of Thieves; my scorn and anger, my passion and flooded answer.

Ah, Clara! If you only knew what I know; and if only I knew the truth. Walter was right. My husband is the King of Thieves. Yes, but he is much more. There is something about him superior; like no man living, I might almost say uncanny.

There is so much that I must tell you.

We were married on the night I left you. He was all kindness and solicitude. I know he loved me. And he has done so ever since.

There is no detail, no little thing too trivial, no tenderness whatever that he overlooks in his affection. No man ever so loved a woman. His devotion is pure, noble, chaste and manly. I am telling you this because I know the perfectly natural fears that you have harbored. Your Roselle is safe, is in hands that love her, and there is nothing in the world that she cannot have when she wishes.

Just the same, I wish to make confession: The man I love, this being, I would that I could understand him. He is like no other man of the past or present; he is beautiful, magnificent, a genius, a mind transcendent and illusive. Whether language, art, music, science, or mechanics, he is the master. He has but to desire a thing to possess it. Did I not love him, were he not so beautiful, were he not so superior and magnetic, I might fear him. As it is I worship him; I idolize him; I would willingly be his slave if he so willed.

At first he was to me only as a lover; I was but a girl; I had eyes but for his body, his splendid features, his blue eyes, his beauty. His smile was warmer than the sunshine. I knew only his magnificent youth, his vigor and his love. The strange stories I had heard of the Rebel Soul were speedily forgotten; he was my husband.

We journeyed about on our honeymoon, much as others do.

We visited many and far places. We

circled all the States and traveled over South America. I believe that no woman was ever half so happy. He worshiped me, saw to my every pleasure, and had for me the tenderest of devotion. They were months of fun and frolic and of love.

At length we arrived at San Francisco and took ship for Asia. It was there that I had the first manifestation of what I had married.

**WE WERE** in Peking. We had journeyed up through China, visiting quaint cities full of dirty coolies, filth, mandarins, and little ladies, things that to me, accustomed to a clean, healthy western civilization, were strange and exotic. Their funny little houses, their bridges, their roads, canals, and gardens; everything was so different. I was delighted and often clapped my hands in wonder.

But by the time we had been in the big city a few things began to pall on me. There was something about the country, for all its beauty, that was depressing. After a week of sight-seeing I felt stifled. A sort of reaction came upon me. I wanted the air of another country, real human beings like myself, and a civilization that was open. I spoke to George.

"To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow we shall go. To-night I expect a visitor."

"American?" I asked.

"No, Chinese. One of the greatest men in China; or for that matter in the world; the Wise Man of the East."

"How interesting!" I exclaimed. "And I suppose he is old, very old, yellow, wrinkled and very dirty."

He laughed.

"He is old, very old, yellow and wrinkled," he repeated, "but is not dirty. He is the wisest man of the Chinese Empire; all the learning of the untold centuries he has seeped and sifted; he is the repository of unknown wisdoms. There are many things that he knows that would stagger our western scholars. To-night he will come to see me."

"Really!" I exclaimed. "I should like to see him!"

"You may."

Sure enough that night a little old man came to our hotel and was closeted for several hours with my husband. I did not get a good look at his features, when he arrived, but I had an instinctive feeling of immense age and of a certain majesty of bearing. He had his hands crossed before him and lost in his great loose

sleeves, and he was saying something in his uncouth language, which sounds much as it looks—like hen's tracks.

I remember this much: He stepped into a room and bowed solemnly; then fell on his knees on the polished floor and kowtowed to my husband. Such an obeisance he might have made before an idol. It was strange; and to a foreign devil! I looked at my husband.

There was a strange expression on his face, of power, immensity and a set intensity that I had never seen before; and at the same time it was mixed with not a little contempt. He laughed gently; an amused smile, derisive. Suddenly he reached over, touched the other and motioned him to a seat. In a moment they were talking.

The door was open, and as George made no attempt at secrecy I stepped a little closer. They were conversing in Chinese. Chinese! I had no idea that my husband understood it or could speak it, much less that he was fluent. I was astonished.

But of course that made me only the more eager. The moment I realized that they were talking a foreign tongue, I was determined to understand them. I called one of my Chinese servants, who had a good command of pidgin, and asked him to listen. But he shook his head.

"No, savvy," he said, "talkum dead man; talkum Chinese allee same dead million years. Velly smart man."

Just then he glanced in. He saw the old man sitting with my husband. He turned pale and drew away. He was terribly frightened.

"What is it?" I asked.

He pointed with his finger.

"Wise man! Chinee boy; maybe allee same now dead boy."

With that, before I could question further, he glided away from me, like a startled ghost.

It was a little spooklike. But George was in the next room, and so, of course, I had not a thing to fear. In fact, I was not a little amused at the ridiculous terror that the poor child entertained for this wizened, old, wise man. These Chinese are so exceedingly superstitious. Nevertheless, it flavored not a little the interview which I was to have a short while later.

When George had finished he conducted the old gentlemen to my apartment. I was but a girl, and accustomed to the material. I liked good looks. This man

did not have them. He was so old that the only thing that seemed to cling to his bones was a determination to be of the living. His face was diminished almost to nothing; shrunken, tied up in a knot; I have only a vague impression that he possessed features; a floating recollection, almost doubtful, that he had a mouth and nostrils.

Then I looked into his eyes. He bowed, and as his silk-gowned figure, all bespangled with flowers and dragons, bent before me, I had the feeling that here was not age and ugliness, but something that might live forever. His black eyes were intent and mellow, and of such a luster and of such an absorption that you saw not a thing else. It was like looking into the sunset, into the western sea at evening, when the gates are opened, and you peer straight into the unknown mystery of your Creator. There was wisdom all concentrated, living, vital and life filling. I had seen much wisdom both in books and person, but this is the first time that I had ever beheld it, as it were, personified. I could not restrain an exclamation.

"Ah!" He spoke in the purest English. "My lord has spoken; he has told me that his flower, his beautiful wife, would speak to the poor old wise man."

I was confused; not only at his bearing and his command of my own tongue, but at myself and what I was supposed to say. I had thought that he was a mere superstitious puppet, and that he could not understand me. I was prepared for giving him an inspection, passing him over with a laugh perhaps, and sending him on his way. But he was not mere mummery. I could only murmur:

"You have known my husband long?"

"Ah, madam, for many years. And his father before him. A wonderful, splendid being. A creature that none on the earth can understand, except we wise men. You are truly fortunate in such a husband."

I laughed. "Yes, indeed. He is the best boy living. Big, strong, handsome, loving." I cuddled myself up on my couch. "Just the bestest husband that ever was," in girlish accents.

He looked at me in wonder; it seemed to me that in those mellow depths was a startled question; George had left the room.

"Ah," he said, "she is like the maiden: she beholds only the carnal flesh and beauty, lives for the pleasure, the soul

she sees not. Do you know, madam," he asked, "do you know your husband?"

It was such a foolish question. Know my husband!

"Why," I laughed, "my dear doctor! I don't know your title; but as all smart men must be doctors, I suppose you are doctor of something. My husband is a man—"

But he interrupted here; there was a thing in his eyes that was tenderness and pity.

"Your husband is not a man. Rather is he a solution." He smiled, and spoke with the metaphore of the Flowery Kingdom. "Ah, my flower, your husband is as the sun that is arisen: he is the light that should feed with its warmth and gladness; that should set all the world aglow. He is golden; he is burning with the sunshine."

I clapped my hands; I am afraid that I was silly.

"You mean that he is handsome!"

"I mean," he said, bowing, "that he is a god, or almost so. He is what the wise men of the earth have looked for."

But just then came my husband. Just as I was being whetted to curiosity and was about to derive some real amusement from this strange old wise man, George returned.

The conversation shifted suddenly, and after a little commonplace the old man was gone. Next day we set out for Russia.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A MAN OF WONDERFUL POWER

THE words of the aged Chinese might have made some impression upon me had they not seemed so funny. For so they struck me. Though I was impressed by his wonderful personality, and the plain manifestations of his wisdom, there was that in his speech that was plainly mystic.

I was a girl, and had been reared west of Chicago, and was accustomed to the daylight. He had said that my husband was a god or something, and it tickled my fancy. Anyway, to me at least, George Witherspoon was a god. Like a true little wife I told him of it, and he listened.

"You are my god at least," I said in petting comment.

He laughed with great amusement.

"Did he tell you this? And a wise man? There is nothing on earth so foolish as wise men. Sometimes they remind me of

a lot of puppies, they are so simple."

"But, George," I exclaimed, "you yourself called him so; you appeared honored by his visit."

He patted me on the cheek.

"Little girl," he said, "you must not concern yourself with wisdom. What has beauty to do with learning? You have something that is worth more a million times than all our science. Compared to youth, beauty and pleasure all the accumulations of our wise men are not worth a false farthing. You have youth, beauty, love; you are in the paradise of lifetime. Forget their wisdom."

He kissed me and in his strong, magnificent arms I knew he was telling the truth. There is nothing but love to live for, and once that is gone life is merely canker.

But it chanced that a few days later I had plenty of food for reflection. In fact, it almost frightened me. It brought back to me, in spite of my husband's fondness, the words of the strange, old, wise man.

We were in Siberia, on the long road that leads into Russia. We had stopped at a little station. What it was that delayed us I have no way of telling. On the platform a crowd of men was passing to and fro, officers and civilians.

We had alighted for a little air, and to stretch from our limbs the weariness of travel. As we passed among the crowd I could not, as a girl, but admire the all-resplendent officers, their carriage perfect, but for all that haughty. I spoke to my husband.

"Yes," he said, "they are pretty. But that is all—mere things dressed up. They are the opera of the civilization through which we are now passing. They have souls of dogs and are sowing the seeds of the revolution that will consume them."

"But," I opposed, "they are pretty, for all that."

"Yes, beautiful," he answered with pregnant sarcasm.

Just then a little old man ran out of the station, his hands full of paper, and after looking up and down stepped up before one of the officers who judging from the decorations on his breast, must have been of great consequence. The little man spread out a paper and gesticulated. They were speaking Russian and so I, of course, could not understand them. But it was evident from the official's attitude, his scorn and anger, that the little

man did not please him. His lip curled with scorn and contempt; the civilian was imploring.

Then suddenly something happened. The officer uttered an oath, made a movement, and a flash cleaved through the air. The old man threw his arms above his head as a vain protection. But it was useless—the sword cut through the arm. The man fell senseless, a heap, broken and maimed, upon the platform.

It happened just that suddenly; it was so incredible that I could scarce believe it. I had all my life been reared on points of honor. I had always considered nobility as the very essence of the finer things in mankind. The scene cut through my heart like a cold steel twisting. It was dreadful.

But that was not all. The great man looked down at his work in calm satisfaction. He lifted up his foot and with a movement turned the old man over. Then deliberately and contemptuously he spat upon the face.

I expected the officers to spring upon him. But not so. They were loud with guffaws and congratulating laughter. It appeared to amuse them much as the killing of a dog.

But there were others: workmen, peasants, or prisoners, or whatever they were in that far-off corner of the globe. I could see their looks of furtive hatred. They said nothing; but there was that about them which was deadly. I was but a girl, but I understood it.

My husband's lip curled.

"And they call themselves human," he scorned. "Human beings. And they say they have souls! So have the rats!"

I shuddered; the sight of that old man writhing, his arm cut and the blood, turned me sick almost to fainting.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "the brute! The great inhuman coward! He should be punished. His own arm should be crushed and broken even as the other."

As I spoke I looked up at my husband. He was cold and cynical; there was that in his face that I had never seen before.

"You wish it," he said coldly. "Then so be it. He is as good as done for."

Perhaps the official heard us talking. I had no idea that he was conversant with English; I had not stopped to consider that a great many of these men, however brutal, have splendid educations. But such must have been the case, for he turned toward us, his laugh tossing forth his contempt.

Suddenly he started forward. Everybody made a lane for his greatness. All but my husband. He stood, calm, still, motionless, awaiting the giant that was stalking toward him. The Russian was aflame with anger. It was manifest that he had been drinking. I shook with terror.

"What do you mean?" he bellowed.

George never budged. I can see him yet as he stood before that bulk that towered above him. His blue eyes were cold, freezing with untold derision. Then he spoke; every word barbed with taunting.

"I mean," he said slowly, watching the words seep in, "that the price of cheese has gone up two cents in Denmark."

For an instant the other was incredulous, doubtful, astounded at my husband's audacity, his slow mind blinking the interpretation. Then he grasped it. His sword leaped from the scabbard. It was murder.

George was as cool as an iceberg; his arms were folded, his laugh even more derisive. As the weapon flashed into the air he spoke sharply; his words were like silver toning, ringing like a bell; imperative, incisive.

"Come," he exclaimed, "put up your plaything. It might burn you."

It was incredible. That Russian gave a scream of terror; his hand relaxed from the weapon, and the blade fell clanging to the platform. Then confusion, the giant holding one hand in the other and writhing about in agony. Across the palm was a mark much as though a white-hot iron had seared it.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "what did you do? What happened? What was it?"

George laughed.

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all; it was merely too hot to handle. Come, Roselle, we had better get back to our carriage."

That ended that part. A short time later the train was under way, and we were again on our way toward European Russia.

**M**OST of the officers who had stood upon the platform and who had been so hilariously delighted at the play at murder were passengers. Among them was the ruffian. By cautious investigation I discovered that he was a duke of something—there are so many dukes in Russia that I don't remember just what it was—he was of a powerful family and a

person of tremendous importance in this distant corner of the empire. Just now he and his suite were on a journey to Moscow.

When I learned this I had new fears for my husband. I dreaded the revenge that this man might take upon him. Though George was so manifestly his master in personality, there were devious and unlimited means that he could employ for vengeance. I was afraid.

But again I was mistaken. The fellow had a wholesome dread, almost a superstition, for the one who had smitten him. Whenever he encountered George he eyed him furtively and carefully avoided him.

His hand was bandaged. He appeared puzzled with timidity and fear. The most that he cared for apparently was to be let alone. And it was strange, too, for so large a man, who would easily have made two of my husband.

From then on the atmosphere of the journey was heavy with doubt and uncertainty. All the officers, all the passengers who had witnessed the performance, kept their eyes upon him. We were in a superstitious country; and I am sure there were whisperings on that train that boded us no great good fortune.

George? He never noticed it. He was cheery, calm and calculating as ever. Wherever he moved he had his way and compelled them to join in with his laughter. There was something forceful and magnetic about his every action. When he talked they hung upon his slightest syllable. He seemed to be driving them, even against their wills, into admiration.

This is one thing that I have ever noticed about my husband. Apparently not a thing on earth has any power to deny him the slightest will or action, his personality is suffusing; and he absorbs.

We drew near to the mountains; we were four days out; the air was growing colder, lighter and thinner. As we entered the foot-hills we ran into a little town that must have marked a division. For a place of its size it was full of traffic, and train upon train of freight-cars were waiting at the sidings.

A slight snow had fallen, which, mixed with the cinders fallen from the cars and slipping from the fences, gave the scene a wet and mottled aspect.

Just before we reached the station our train slowed down, stopped and waited; then, after a bit, after many jerks and joltings, we were backed into a switch.



It was undoubtedly part of the schedule that we should be side-tracked for some express that was approaching. The time wore on into minutes.

At length there was some impatience. A few of the officers, who apparently were accustomed to do just about as they pleased, stepped out upon the tracks. Some started for the depot. I was seated on the inner seat, but I could just see what was occurring.

George was by the window chewing gum, watching with contented unconcern the trivial incidents that were attendant upon our arrival. Trains were moving slowly, freight engines puffing, snorting, moving to and fro.

Just then I beheld our giant officer stepping from the train. He was calling to some companions who were a bit before him. A freight-engine was coming up the track between them. He called and the others halted, waiting.

The engine was almost up to them. The ground was slushy and covered with a treacherous, slippery snowfall. For a man who was splendidly quick and nimble it was possible to leap across ahead of the engine; apparently the Russian considered himself just the person. He cast a quick look up and down and started running across at right angles. He was alert and active; it seemed that he would make it. I had seen the thing done a thousand times before.

But this was one of the times that was over a thousand. The ground was snow-covered and very slippery. At the very center he stumbled and fell face downward. The steel monster was not twenty feet away.

The man realized his danger. With a quick, marvelous movement that proclaimed his athletic training, he somersaulted backward. Had it been entirely successful he would not have saved himself by more than a hair's breadth.

But it was not. Simultaneously with the movement one hand had become entangled in a switch, a piece of steel, or some third accessory between the tracks, and was held in a viselike gripping.

It was one of those inexorable seconds of fate; though his body was safe, his arm was neatly stretched across that band of steel as a neck extended for execution. The engine was not six feet away, moving slowly. The man fought and struggled, his face purple with retributive terror. It seemed that he would pull the arm out of the socket.

I screamed. At the same time I have a fitting recollection of my husband by the window, chewing gum, laughing softly.

The engine passed on and over; the limb was cut as a piece of paper. The man rolled senseless; the macerated stump held uppermost, as if to proclaim that the work was over.

And then, as if to emphasize a strange fate's sarcasm, the engine paused not two feet farther. In response to the engineer's frantic endeavors it stopped to deadness. The trainmen leaped out and ran to the man's assistance.

They were terror-stricken; the man's uniform and his importance proclaimed the consequence impending. With tumultuous haste and fear they tumbled him into the cab and rushed with him ahead of us into the depot.

*To Be Continued*

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# *Famous* **FANTASTIC** *Mysteries*

(Combined with Fantastic Novels Magazine)

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Vol. V

NOVEMBER, 1942

No. 1

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## *Short Story*

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## *Feature*

### **The Readers' Viewpoint** **141**

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He laughed.

"And so is the devil. Like Satan I am a prince wherever I sojourn. In Germany I shall be a baron. We are now approaching the land of madness. The greatest of all empires; the devil's chosen playground."

"You are a baron!"

"And a colonel of the Uhlans. Oh, yes, Roselle, I am a leader. Why should I not be? I shall lead them down to destruction. I shall watch the mighty falling. The mighty!"

The last word he spoke with a ringing contempt, the inflection in his voice that he ever had when he spoke of princes. This man who was my husband, whom I adored, had for all of his beauty, all of his magnetism, something about him that was fateful, yes, terrible.

"Lead them down to destruction. Yes," he continued, "we shall conquer all the world, enslave it and stamp it. Each man shall wear a mustache upturned at the corners. The earth will go *hoching* through the infinite to the drum-beat of the Kaiser!"

"Oh," I said, "you do not mean it. That is not the purpose of this splendid army. It is defensive. If it were not you would not assist them."

"Who said assist? I am the Rebel Soul. I assist nobody. I feed on folly, I grow fat upon destruction. It is like wine to my heart to sit in at their councils. It is *colossal*; that's what they call it. We shall all go down together."

There was a look in his eyes, prophetic, great pleasure, inspiration; he was delphic.

"Tell me," I asked, "will you—you will win, of course."

"Win, win? Why, to be sure we shall win. It shall be colossal. We will go down into the whirlwind. I shall lead them."

"Will you be a general or a king?"

"Neither. I shall be the great mind, the incarnation of the perverse to inspire them. I shall play with kings and princes; I shall use them as my pawns. It will be a cataclysm, a deluge of fire and carnage; the earth in travail; they shall ride into black oblivion."

"And you will be with them?"

"It is my nature," he returned. "I ride with the ones whom I would destroy. It is to be historic, stupendous; it is to be colossal. Beelzebub himself shall lead the fierce Assyrian."

Just then we drew into a depot. From the window I could distinguish a group of officers knotted together on the platform. They were straight, manly fellows, clean and noble, with something about them to inspire confidence and admiration.

It did not seem meet that they should go down to destruction; that they should grapple the world for the mere lust of blood and conquest.

And yet it had so been spoken. I knew by this time the fatality of my husband. I was positive that he could move whole nations. And if it were true that these men were drilling but for the crime on mankind it was proper that he destroy them.

Nevertheless, I could not but ponder.

What was he that he should be so powerful? Why was it that he should love destruction; why should he so court evil; and if he did, why was it that I loved him?

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A PET OF THE KAISER

AS the train threaded out of the city, I watched the children romping in the streets and alleys. They would soon be in bereavement; the slaughter that he bespoke would leave them in rags and wretched. They the little ones of the world, would suffer; they and their mothers. If my husband were so near the trouble, why could he not stop it? He was wicked.

The very thought induced a shudder; all the intense love of my spirit flashed into fierce reaction. I clenched my fists in the bitterness of my thinking. I loved him. And I had doubted!

In my heart I knew him noble. You cannot deceive a woman. Though he was this thing they called the Rebel Soul, he was great and splendid. I had my instinct.

I remember the words that has been spoken by the Master. "Be true, be faithful, do not doubt, your love will be triumphant." How often have those words cheered me. God bless the Master!

"You are a colonel of Uhlans, then?" I asked.

He laughed with a gleam of satire.

"A colonel of Uhlans. You shall see me. I play at being soldier; I am some fellow; I am the prettiest figure that ever wore brass buttons. My men adore me.

The Kaiser says he would like to have a million like myself to march through the streets of Paris."

He chuckled.

"As if one were not enough. If the poor worm only knew!"

We arrived in Berlin in the evening.

In this great and crowded city I was not such a total stranger. For the first time in months I was in surroundings where I could understand a little of what was going on about me.

I had been fortunate when at school in being able to pick up a little German; and I had had a maid of the same tongue on whom to practise.

Now the small knowledge came in handy. I was no longer a mute in the land of Babel, but a real, live girl, who could converse and understand.

It was raining; the whole city was a sloppy drizzle; a great mass of umbrellas like shiny black mushrooms were ranged about the depot.

My husband escorted me through the building. From the very first step in the land he was the soldier—a colonel of the Uhlans, his poise was perfect; the grace that comes from training; the proud carriage that so delights a girl in a soldier.

I had never beheld so many officers; the place was crowded; as we threaded along I could not but feel that we were in the land of warriors. Many of them saluted; I felt with hot cheeks that I was a sort of curiosity; that the news of our coming had been flashed before us, and that I as the colonel's wife was creating comment.

No woman likes to be scrutinized too carefully. I felt that I was being stared at.

George escorted me carefully, solicitous that I be not jostled. A blaze of lights brightened all the place. In a confused way I received an impression of the people. I thought that I might like them.

We stepped outside. The wet spray of dampness soured against our faces, though the rain itself could not reach us. At the moment a great, immense man stepped up and stopped suddenly before us. He wore a great cloak; his intensity, his square, hard mouth, his stature, all gave the impression of great importance. He gave an exclamation.

"Der baron! Well! Well! Der baron!"

George took the proffered hand; compared to which his own was like a woman's. I remember contrasting these two men; and I remember that the compari-

son was infinitely to the benefit of my husband.

Though he was smaller, he was better knit and fibered, every muscle laid on with the grace of a statue, counted; there was intelligence in every feature, vivacity; his blue eyes snapped action. The other was entirely different. He was an immensity, a great hulk trained to military acuteness, a Goliath attired in the raiment of a soldier; a mass slow of action, with tardy wit, but wonderful pertinacity of purpose. I could sense the driver.

But for all that he was genial; he had a wonderful way of smiling, and his blue, great eyes might be perilously indulgent to a woman.

"And this? Ah—" He looked mischievously at my husband.

"Pardon me, general. This is the baroness. General von Seiness, the Baroness von Stienhoch."

So that was my name. I recall that I flushed; that not until that moment had I known my name. I had been a princess; before that I had been a school-girl; what title was I next to carry? Somehow I could not rid myself of the dread and shame of being an impostor. The general's words were reassuring.

"Madam," he said, "I am delighted.

"So you are the cause of your husband's mysterious departure! He was bent on conquest. Ha, ha! With him *der tag* has come sooner than to us." Then with the air of a father: "Well, let me compliment you both. One is as wonderful as the other. You are mated. But I say, baron, is this not a little hard on our own ladies? You know the host that was waiting." He laughed.

George bit his lip. His mouth flickered with just a bit of impatience.

"Excuse me, general, but we must be going. It is damp here; our car must be waiting."

"Ah!" the other interposed. "You shall ride with us. My wife is with me. She will be delighted. You are stopping at the hotel; is it not so?"

"We have a car of our own. Thank you."

THOUGH the other was a general I noticed that my husband deferred to him not a whit. As was his custom, he had his way; there was no impoliteness whatever about it; he stated and the other accepted. In a moment we were driven through the crowded rain-soaked streets to our hotel.

"With a spring that was superhuman he leaped into the saddle and lifted me after him. It was wild, barbaric, like the stealing of a bride at a Tatar Wedding"



It is hard to adapt oneself suddenly to a country. But by this time I was fairly accustomed to quick changes. After the suddenness with which I had become a princess in the Muscovite environment I was prepared for most anything. Though I could not rid myself of an inward shame over our false position, it was my duty to stand by my husband. Just now I was a baroness.

In the dining-room I found myself much more at ease than I had expected. These people were much the same as we were, with a great many of those manners and customs and little appurtenances of civilization that bind us together. I had been so long among strangers that even this foreign similarity was encouraging.

True, they were not as we were. The women had a propensity, especially the elder ones, of being fat, and the men a strange leaning to pomposity. I noticed the great sprinkling of uniforms and the swaggering that was conceit.

As I studied the menu I noted, from the corner of my eye, the twinkling humor with which my husband watched them.

"You are a colonel," I admonished.

He nodded, laughing; his eyes twinkled as if I had just touched a spot of humor.

"Yes, indeed, I am a colonel. It is glorious. I am one of the Whirlwind. It shall be stupendous!"

It brought me back to the conversation on the train. He was vindictive. Whatever his object these men were to be his puppets. But he said no more.

After a while one of the prettiest women in the room stopped at our table. She was the wife of the general, the Countess von Seiness. She was splendidly beautiful; and I perceived at once that she had eyes for my husband.

I did not like her. If I wrote my feelings I would say that she looked like a pig; but I must be honest: she was splendid. What I had against her was her way of calling George "my dear," and her assumption of possession.

"My dear," she said, "don't you think that you are open for a little censure for going off like this and mating with a stranger? Excuse me"—to me—"but he had the choice of all our maidens; we looked upon him as our own possession."

Her eyes had a sheen and luster that were far too tender.

George laughed carelessly, as if he were accustomed to such prattle.

"So?" he said. "Well, I am sorry; just glance across the table. Roselle is my proof of judgment. The pick of the girls of Berlin is nothing. I had the pick of all the world."

The lady smiled, whether she would or no, as became her training.

"My!" she exclaimed to me. "How do you do it? Not all of our charms could make even a slight impression. The rascal! If you can hold his love you are fortunate."

I blushed; both at the compliment of my husband, my pride, and the words of the woman.—I was a bit discomfited. Just then the general came up.

"*Ach!*" he beamed. "What do you think of that now? I don't blame him. If I could find a girl just half so pretty I would swim to Greenland. Baron, you are lucky; you always were a lucky dog with the women."

He was rough, but just the same I liked the general. He was not handsome, and had the soul of a great animal, but he was frank and kindly. For just the reason that I did not care for his wife I admired him.

"Yes," he said to me, "you are fortunate. You will be a favorite. You have a future. Like your husband, you will be a pet of the Kaiser."

A pet of the Kaiser! So he was so near to the seats of the mighty! Though I was ready for almost anything, I was not prepared for this. He who leaned against thrones but to topple them was at a close right hand to the Kaiser.

I recalled the satiric wickedness of his anticipation. The Whirlwind! He was sweeping whole kingdoms toward the caldron. Is it any wonder that while I watched him my whole mind dizzied with excitement and growing wonder? What was the Rebel Soul?

We parted with new-made friendship.

There were to be maneuvers. I must attend with the countess. She was all elation over the *éclat* that my husband would display on horseback. We must go together.

As I was a stranger, and she was so amiable, I could see no way, in politeness, of refusing. Anyway, the general would brook no refusal.

"You must come, my girl," he admonished, "and witness your boy at the head of those grim devils on black horses. It is a death-troop. You must see why the Kaiser loves him."

With that they left us.

Up in our apartment I turned to my husband. I did not like this woman; I disliked her fascinations. She was shallow; and though I was become accustomed to artificiality I could not endure it in this woman. She was beautiful, and she was dangerous. What right had she to seek out my husband?

It was the first pang of jealousy that I had ever experienced. I dreaded the competition of such a creature. But George reassured me.

He took my face between his hands and laughed at me.

"You little goosy! Come, now, let me read your thoughts."

And he discovered in me, just to a dot, what I was thinking.

How did he do it? I must confess that it startled me to have him so read my thoughts and fancies.

"How do you do it?" I exclaimed. "Can you always so interpret the minds of others?"

"Always."

"And this countess?"

"I know her very soul, Roselle, as well as if I had gone through it with a search-

light. She is but a delicate foil in the hands of Folly.

"You have nothing to fear, little one. She is artificial, insincere and foolish. Her character rests on frivolity; it is her training. She is a beautiful orchid that feeds on the atmosphere of fashion. The world is full of millions just like her—I could have had any one of them for the asking. And they would be my destruction.

"That is why I traveled so far for you. But you do not understand me."

I shook my head. He took me in his great, strong arms.

"Can't you see it, Roselle?" he whispered. "You are the only one, the only girl who can hold me. Your beauty is destiny itself; you can save all mankind. Yes, little one, and you can tame the Rebel Soul."

He startled me.

"There, there," he spoke, "you must not be frightened. I wish you to motor out to the field tomorrow with the countess. You must behold the Whirlwind."

"The Whirlwind!"

"Yes, the Whirlwind. The cyclone with which our estimable friend yonder in Potsdam expects to sweep the world."

"But," I exclaimed, "they tell me you are his pet."

He laughed. "Hardly. They do not understand. He is mine. Pet ape."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE WHIRLWIND

**N**EXT day I beheld the Whirlwind.

It was wonderful—a spectacle that was inspiring. I had never beheld such a scene in all my life.

There were miles upon miles of soldiers stretching out in martial order to the maze of distance. The air throbbed with music; rifles glinted sunlight; flags were waving; officers clad in steel and brilliant colors rode and rerode, and dashed off with the speed of lightning.

There was something about it all that caught my heart-strings. I had ever been a worshiper of heroes. Here were a million. There was nothing like it; the straight rows stretched far out to the distance; not a crook nor waver. The line of rifles was so precise that it seemed solid. The whole thing might have been graven from a block of marble.

Motors, great powerful cars, of unnumbered horse-power, rolled out of the hori-

zon and before the line like thunderbolts. They were full of officers, great generals, cloaked, stern, inexpressive. It was inspiring; it stirred my girlish heart to a lust for heroics.

I had come out with the countess. Our car was parked at one end of a great field, with thousands of others. I was so interested in the new spectacle that I had no ears for the babel of my companions.

My heart was out on that field with those splendid soldiers. I longed to be a man; I would be great, strong, handsome; full of the lust of conquest. They were like the Romans. And they had their Caesar!

Never until that moment had it struck me that the world is even now as it was in the times so olden. I had read Caesar when in high school, and for months had struggled even as he with the Helvetians and Nervii.

I am sure it was harder for me to struggle through the translation of his campaigns that it was for him to fight them. I cared not to read of battles. Out of it all I derived only a conception of the Romans; that they were a great, cruel, hardy people, inured to slaughter. They bathed the earth with blood, looted and bowed down nations. They did not appeal to me.

Caesar was short on adjectives. Had he not been he would have made of me a convert. I was a girl. I loved the heroic; here was a pageant. Here were the Romans. Here was the thing and the spirit that leads out to worlds to conquer. And here was Caesar!

At that moment the countess clutched me. She pointed far, far down the field into the half-seen distance. A speck, a line was coming toward us like the whirlwind.

"Look!" she shouted. "Look! Look, the Uhlans! They ride like devils! They are the pick of the German army. Your husband leads them. He is as inspiring as Satan himself when he rides before them.

"He will swerve presently, pass in review before the emperor and his staff, and then circle."

I looked, and perceived far in front of the army a group of men whom I took for the great ones. But I saw no swerving. The black line was tearing up the field straight toward us. All about me I could see men and women standing in their machines and shouting.

My heart was bounding with excitement. I pulled out my handkerchief and waved it and joined in the clamor. It was my husband who was leading. He was a hero!

But still no swerving. The straight line drew abreast of the staff and passed it. There was not even a salutation.

Then it was that I knew that crime had been committed. I sensed it. The great throng ceased its cheering with such a suddenness that it might have been stifled. White faces were all about me: wonder, doubt and incredulity. What was it?

"Oh," I asked the countess, "what have they done?"

She, too, was white and ashen. She was grasping my arm weakly and gazing incredulously down the field.

"They did not salute the Kaiser!"

Was that all? Somehow at that moment a great surge went through me; a wave of feeling, a pride of wonderful possession. He was my husband—George Witherspoon, the Rebel Soul; he was greater than the Kaiser!

At that instant the great throng burst again into cheering. Cries of "Steinloch! The Colonel! The baron! *Hoch der Uhlans!*" filled the air. A great roar like a storm broke upon the multitude. The black line drew nearer, suddenly visualized into a great throng of plunging, frantic, magnificent, black horses.

Their riders were at ease and perfect. Each animal for all its frenzy was in exact position. The light of the sun fell on the warriors, flashing, scintillating from their trappings in a whirl of color. Magnificent, inspiring, torrential.

And at their head was my husband; he was leading the Whirlwind!

I can see him, his black, plunging stallion leaping over the ground, and his sword weaving through the air like the flame of an avenger.

He was singing. The strains of that wonderful barbaric song wafted on before him. It came to that multitude, bore it down and hushed it into silence. Though I had never heard that song, I sensed what it was. The long-lost song of Roland—the song of heroes! It was the thrill of defiance with which Charlemagne had gone to his death in the Pyrenean passes. The song of the Middle Ages. The inspiration of chivalry and heroes. The song sung by the Normans as they rode down into the plain at the battle of Hastings.

Even the horses caught its cadence, its inspiration thrilled horse and rider, and bore them on in a frenzy of wild abandon. We could see their faces, and the wild, exalted exultation of their eyes.

MY husband was directly before me. Would they never stop? They were so near that we could see the bubbles of foam on the horses; hear them breathing. It was like a gigantic, sinuous, black monster that was about to devour us.

Screams and hysteria went up from the multitude about me. They were not twenty feet away. I closed my eyes to shut out the impending débâcle. But at that instant, when he was directly upon us, George reined his stallion.

It was a miracle. The beautiful black beast dug his hoofs into the ground, then sank upon his haunches; his shapely legs apart, his nostrils distended, and his shining flanks glistening with the foam-flecks of his exertion.

On his back, riding with the ease of a centaur, was my husband. He was smiling; as fresh and beautiful as a god of morning. Behind him, rearing with exactly the same evolution as their leader, were the Uhlans. It was wonderful!

But I was not prepared for what followed. In my excitement I waved, called and held my arms out to him.

With one leap he was out of the saddle; in another he was on the running-board and reaching for me. To him I was like a baby. He picked me up in his arms and turned back to his charger. Then, with a spring that was superhuman, he leaped with me into the saddle.

Instantly the horse sprang into action. I was laughing. It was wild and barbaric, like the stealing of a bride at a Tatar wedding. I could hear great shouting; my husband was behind me, one arm held tight across my bosom, the steed racing like the west wind.

The air fanned in our faces, wildness, abandon, exhilaration. A great mass of lances flashed in the air; shouts and cries of welcome arose.

Twice he bore me up and down the line to the wildest clamor. Then we stopped in the center, facing the Uhlans. I was adopted.

But at that moment a great car raced up. A powerful, angry man descended and rushed over to us. He started to speak, but he got no farther than an ex-



clamation. What George did I have no way of knowing, as I could not see him, but the man suddenly became submissive. My husband handed him a piece of paper saying:

"His Majesty the Kaiser."

The other saluted, faced about, entered the car, and was off like a thunderbolt.

The multitude was mute with wonder. I understood in a vague way that a breach of discipline had been committed. They could not understand it; it was incredible that one should manifest such effrontery. It was a crime that was monstrous.

I had no such fears. I knew my husband, what he was; and that he was greater than any man. I was not frightened. I was laughing. A suffusion of happiness thrilled through me, giving music to my laughter.

At the instant a great car came, turned and sped down the line of cheering Uhlans. Such a clamor was unwonted, and out of all order.

I realized what it was, and also what it was bringing. But I knew my husband. The car stopped dead before us.

Whether the horse was trained or not I have no way of telling; but at that instant he stood erect upon his hind legs. My black hair had fallen in wavy ringlets over my shoulders. With his left hand George held me safe and steady; in his right was his drawn and gleaming sabre. The magnificent stallion stepped forward, still upon his hind legs, until we could see the wondering eyes staring from the auto. I could hear my husband speaking:

"Your majesty, I have the honor of presenting my wife, the daughter of the Uhlans!"

Such was my presentation to the Kaiser.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE VISITOR

**A**FTER such a spectacular incident it was inevitable that I be a favorite. My husband was indeed the pet of the Kaiser. Instead of reprimand he had complimented him with a flood of admiration. George's spirit was so inspiring and of that taint of the devil that it overcame royalty with the same ease that it did the common man.

I learned that he had ever so torn through all regulations. No discipline

could hold him. He did just as he chose. No one could understand it.

But I could. I knew, was certain from what I had seen and learned, that he, and not the Kaiser, was the master. The emperor was absolutely overcome by his genius and understanding, and by his dashing beauty.

He was even here, in this powerful kingdom, having his way as he did with all the others. He had the emperor eating out of his hand, without the least suspicion. He was using him to his purpose.

What that was I had no way of foreseeing exactly, but I knew that the end was destruction. He had told me his ultimate intention. I soon discovered that in spite of his heroic and spectacular manner, and the favors that were heaped upon him, he had an undying hatred for the Kaiser.

And I must confess that at first I could not understand it, the pageant had so won me. I loved it: the splendor, the music, the blaze of colors, the marching soldiers. I endeavored to remonstrate.

He waved his cigarette in negation. At the time he was stretched out in a great easy-chair, reading a New York paper and smoking.

"Roselle," he said, "you do not understand it. It all looks pretty. But every one of those soldiers is a murderer dressed up. His nibs"—that is what he always called the Kaiser when we were alone—"knows it. His mind is narrow; his soul is shrunken; he dreams and pants for murder. His nightmare is colossal; he will go out and hew down nations.

"He knows no law, no man whatever, only self; he is the embodied perversity culminated from a race of robbers. His ancestors were the cutthroats of the passes. In him the thieves of his race have attained the culmination; he would loot all mankind."

"Why, George," I exclaimed, "the army of Germany is for defense; I have heard them say so."

He laughed.

"And so has the world! And the pity of it is that almost every one believes him. Some day the world will wake up to find him thundering through the gates, reeking murder. Then comes the revelation! Then go I down, riding in the whirlwind. It will be colossal!"

There was ever something about him that I could not understand. In all out-

ward appearances, in all contacts, he was apparently a German. It was not my line of ethics.

"Then," I asked, "if you are opposed to the Kaiser, and hold him in such secret detestation, why do you inspire his friendship?"

He laughed again. His answer was characteristic.

"For the same reason, Roselle," he said, "that I would consort with the devil. To cut his horns off."

Such was his way of speaking. You may have noticed. He had no half-ways nor doubtings. His confidence was unending, absolute and certain. As I write it strikes me that his words might appear egotistical; but they never so impressed me.

There was ever something about him impressive. His words always carried conviction. He was not bragging. I knew it. And he was no impostor.

Indeed, he was not. It was only a few days after this that I had full occasion to wonder at this wonderful man that I had taken as my husband.

He was an inordinate reader. Every evening when we were free from social functions he would don a robe and go into the library, where, ensconced in an easy-chair, he would devour stacks of printed matter. He had a penchant for old and musty volumes, and unknown learning, for the wisdom of the ages, for the obscurity of thought that lurked in tomes and on dusty book-shelves.

He would gather them round about him and with a pile of raisins and a stack of peanuts pass the evening. When he was not munching he was smoking. The number of cigarettes he consumed alarmed me.

Sometimes I would steal in to him and in the silence, there beside him, read some work of fiction. At such times I did not annoy him with my chatter. I was content to sit close by him, and allow him, while he read, to run his fingers through my hair, and to pat my cheeks in fond abstraction.

Often I would sit and watch him, and admire, drinking in his beauty. I am sure no woman was ever prouder of possession. There is no exultation half so thrilling as the words "he's mine!"

I would study every feature; the swift, clear intelllections of his eyes, his lips and forehead, his profile, the perfection that was classic. Every detail. I would fondle with my eyes his hair, all golden,

and study out a thousand fancies in its maze of ringlets.

My mind would wander; my imagination carry me to a land of golden dreaming. Such would be an angel; such must have been Apollo, the god of manly beauty of the ancients. Who was he? What was he? Why was he above all mankind? What was this Rebel Soul?

I could not understand it. I remember once in one of my wildest fancies that the words of the Bible flashed to me: "And the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives which they chose." And it startled me.

It was shortly after our talk on the Kaiser that it happened. I was to be convinced that if my husband did not in reality attain to my wildest dreams he was something very near akin to them.

IT was getting along toward winter. It was one of those evenings when the night, foreshadowed by lowering clouds, is hastened in its arrival. The air was portent, low winds, soft but moaning, picked up the clustered leaves on the lawns and tossed them into reluctant whirling eddies. There was a snappiness to the air that told of the coming winter. It was a good night to cherish a warm fireside.

George came home early. He was ever on mysterious visits, consultations with high officials, and keeping appointments with the Kaiser. He held a leverage over affairs for which there was no accounting; he was a sort of silent potential, who worked, in way; unseen, all things to his unknown purpose. While he laughed he plotted for their destruction.

I had been reading "Faust." Sometimes, in spite of myself, I compared him to Goethe's *Mephistopheles*. He was beautiful, he was great, and he was using kings for playthings. At such times my reason would run away with my fancy; and my love would have a struggle. But it would win in the end and make triumph of my adoration. He surely was not evil.

On this particular evening he came home early. We had dinner together, quietly, as was our custom, and after our usual chat he retired to the library.

I had taken up crocheting. For the greatest reason I had become engrossed in fancy work and embroidery. Most every evening, while he read I would ply

the needle. I was enthusiastic and was happy that these things, of all others, should be fashioned by my own fingers.

But at length I began to feel lonesome, I don't know why it was. It may have been the moaning wind, or the night air and the silence.

I would step into the library and sit down beside my husband. I had an impulsive desire to have him fondle me with his fingers in my tresses. I would work and sit beside him, and watch him. When I look back now it seems strange that I should have chosen that one moment.

I arose and stepped softly across the rooms intervening. The archway that led to the library was hung with heavy portiere curtains, through which I could see the soft light streaming, shafts of mellow softness like strands of gold leading into my husband. In my fancy I had grown to love them. I would steal up, draw the curtains slightly, and gaze full minutes in upon him.

The room lives in my memory. The book-shelves reaching to the ceiling, the soft deep green of the carpet, the great table in the center, the armchairs beside it, and the statuettes of my husband's five immortals: Hugo, Shakespeare, Goethe, Descartes, and our own great Poe.

They were emblematic, embodiment of human thought; even in the cast of clay shedding the light of their peculiar genius. Hugo's ruggedness and action, Shakespeare's poetic inspiration and humanity, Goethe's imagination, and Poe's tender melancholy that was almost mystic. Upon the table beside him was the French Descartes, his favorite, symbolic, as he said, of human wisdom; the first man of the moderns to maintain that man is above mere matter.

I pulled aside the curtain and peeked in at him. He was sprawled out in his armchair, with his slippered feet crooked up before him; in his lap was an open volume; between the fingers of his right hand, hanging negligently by his chair, a burning cigarette; his left hand reached out now and then toward the table for a raisin or a peanut.

Beside him was the usual pile of books, a few others already scanned were lying open, face down, on the carpet. His back was toward me, his yellow hair rising above the chair-back. His watch was open, face down, on the table. As I looked he picked it up.

"Huh!" he muttered. "About time for his high and mighty nibs to show up for his tribute."

I started. That was the contemptuous name that he always used for the Kaiser. It could not be possible; it could not be that one who was the head of such a mighty nation, should so court even my husband. I hesitated, not knowing whether to enter or retire. Perhaps it is a good thing that I did so. What followed surprised me.

There was on the other side of the room a heavy oaken door set between two bookcases. It led into a sort of vestibule that must have been in fashion when the building was constructed. It was directly before him. He snapped his watch, laughed, and reached over for a handful of peanuts.

"Late," he muttered, "late thirty seconds! His imperial nibs of the firelands! Unusual! Let me see now, how does it go?"

He repeated something that I could not understand, a string of sounds with a sort of jerky rhythm; as far as I can distinguish from no language or reason. Then: "Come on, old fire-eater! I salute thee!"

At the same second he threw the whole handful of peanuts at the door.

I must have blinked; or it may have been that there was a blur upon my vision, or perhaps the shadow caused by the light falling slant-wise on the bookcases. I did not see the door open, and I heard no noise. At first I could not understand it. It was much like an apparition. Standing in the doorway was a man.

A man! Why do I say it? At that moment it was much more like a shadow. I had the startled, cold sensation that it had entered through the solid woodwork. It was like space suddenly molding into matter. I could scarce believe it.

But it was a man. It was human. As my perception settled and I looked closely I could so distinguish. But how human? As my reason cleared I realized that I was watching the most remarkable being I had ever beheld.

He was old. Yes, and bent and withered. His little form seemed but a wisp of shadow, almost illusive, as if some one had plucked up a bunch of darkness, dressed it and placed thereon a great growth of whiskers which was the first thing that made me think it human. That and a pair of eyes that were so

black that a night were whiteness, and a nose that was bent and vicious. The drawn lips drooping at the corners, told of cruelty and hatred. The eyes fairly blazed with anger.

It was startling. First nothing, then this creature there before me.

Then I understood the reason for its anger. The peanuts which my husband had thrown with such wantonness and abandon were clinging to its whiskers. The white, cruel lips were twitching.

How shall I ever forget it! Those eyes! And that talon finger, reaching into its beard for a clinging peanut. He was glaring. The intensity of that glare, the hatred, the wrath and anger was like fire-brands burning. It was mute with terror.

But not so George. As the form materialized, with the shells clinging like great beads in its whiskers, he went off into a peal of laughter. It was terrible, much like one laughing into the face of the devil.

He laid his fair head back on the chair in mirthful convulsion. He laughed and laughed and laughed. Every once in a while he would rise up and point out with his finger.

"Ho, ho!" and again into a peal of laughter.

Never was there a thing so angry. It was a scene out of all reason. The little demon standing there like the personification of all evil, and the other shrieking with hilarity. At last my husband subsided. Very blandly he lit a cigarette and blew out a lusty smoke wreath. The figure did not stir.

"Well," snapped my husband.

The other did not answer. Instead he condensed his glaring; his eyes going past their blackness into a red that was fairly flaming. I had never beheld such anger. It was terrible. I hung tightly to the curtains to keep from falling. I was in mortal fear for my husband.

"Well?" he asked.

Still no answer. The little form was shaking.

"I see," George reached out carelessly with his left hand and plucked up a single peanut. It was done deliberately. He rolled it in his finger, tentatively for a moment, then with a serene nonchalance snapped it into the face of the other.

"Welcome, Beelzebub, to our little household. How is the lord of flies this evening?"

### "I SHALL LOVE YOU FOREVER"

THE other straightened. He appeared startled. Though his lips apparently moved not, I heard him speaking. It was sharp and sparkling, rasping like a thing that had long lain idle.

"I am not Beelzebub."

George laughed.

"And the climate over yonder. As warm as usual?"

The other glared again.

"Why be foolish!"

"You are late!"

"It takes a long time to cross the Atlantic."

Again laughter. Very deliberately George tossed another peanut. It caught in the black whiskers standing out in their blackness with fantastic color. The old man plucked it out in anger. His eyes were blinking. A sort of hesitation; a flare of hate at the affront that the other was thrusting on him, and the laughter.

"And the devil he crossed o'er the deep blue sea, and he sailed in an open boat.

"Sit down, your highness, and we'll talk it over." George tossed him a cigarette. "Have a smoke," he bantered.

I had always heard it said of my husband that he was afraid of neither man nor the devil; but I had never expected to see such a manifestation. If this was not the devil it was something very close akin. Surely no man could be of such a visage without having a soul seeped to the utmost depths of evil.

He was not like a man, but like a gnome, hideous, deformed, ungainly, some fantastic monster aroused by an incantation from the depths and unseen shadows. I had seen such forms in pictures; I had never dreamed that they might be flesh.

He sat down. The posture that he assumed magnified his littleness. Though he was seated on the extreme edge of the chair, his feet were still a perceptible distance above the carpet. He was diminutive; much like a child in the frailness of his body.

Were it not for his great, ungainly hands and the fierce, aged demoniac features, he would have passed for a mere creature. His eyes belied all that. He was proclaimed a thing of evil; in-

# Into the Infinite

By Austin Hall

Part II

*The Rebel Soul! Under different names the world has known him . . . only too well. He was Alcibiades who crushed Athens in her pride. He was Alexander, Napoleon, Charles XII, and Kaiser Wilhelm . . . And the Rebel Soul was George Witherspoon, who, even as these others, knew self as his only law. Would he, like his prototypes, try to destroy the world and end by destroying himself? Or could his friends save him as they hoped, through the power of selfless love?*

**A**FTER his adventures with George Witherspoon, the Rebel Soul, Walter Warren became a prosperous banker, and lived happily with his wife and Roselle.

The Master, the leader of the powerful Order of the Sevens, told Walter that George had become an internationally famous criminal, and was known as the "King of Thieves." But he was sure that, unmoral and unfettered by human-made laws as he was, George had a great power for good in his nature, and unknown and unearthly powers for either good or evil, and he received Walter's promise of assistance in saving George from himself.

One night, in a storm, George came to Walter's home, told him that he had always loved him, and begged him to do what he could to save him from himself, at the same time warning him that in the future he would do him harm. One of the children was sick, and George cured him and left a valuable emerald in his hand. On the way out he met Roselle, and they loved each other at sight.

Walter received warning that Witherspoon was going to rob his bank. He reported the matter to police headquarters, and received promises of assistance from Simpson, the chief, a slow-witted ex-blacksmith, and Wilkins a detective connected with the Order of the Sevens and working under the Master's orders. Wilkins knew George's methods, and he had trailed him in many lands without being able to arrest him. On the night of the Christmas ball George robbed Walter's bank, in spite of guards and precautions. Later he appeared at his home and carried off Roselle.

Still later, the Master wrote that he had gone in search of Roselle and George. Two years passed. Then Walter's wife received a letter from Roselle saying that she and George were married and happy and telling of their travels in China and Russia, and of some of the extraordinary powers of her husband. This letter, written in the year 1900, is continued in this instalment.

## CHAPTER XX

### ROSELLE'S LETTER: CONTINUED

**T**HAT was all. The first positive intimation that I had of the uncanniness of my husband! Though the scene upon the platform had been unaccountable, this climax following so closely after, and so inexplicable, proclaimed that he was a man whose powers were far out of the common.

I recalled the words of the old Chinese, and trembled at their portent. There is something weirdly mystic about all Orientals; he had bowed down to my husband, almost in worship. I remembered the reverential salutation that he had accorded my husband's smile at the bowing.

But had the Chinese been so foolish?

What had just occurred had all come from my own imprecation. In my horror at the Russian's cruelty and cowardliness I had prayed for just this thing to happen.

How was I to know the supernatural that would spring into action at my mere volition? And if it was supernatural, was the Chinese so foolish in his submission? I must confess that it frightened me. It is one thing to be married to a splendid, handsome lover, and quite another to be wedded to a—being.

I remembered the strange tales I had heard about him, inexplicable, dazzling, puzzling; his radiation, his magnetism, his beauty. Even now as he sat beside me he was the very essence of cold nonchalance, every feature of his face was perfect, his eyes the proper shade, not a hair was ruffled. His hand stole down



"Pray, Herr Beelzebub, of whom are you speaking?" George shouted and he shook the little demon like a rat.

"Of her!" the monster shouted back. "Of her—Roselle!"

tense, consuming, striving, storming. He spurned aside the cigarette that had been tossed him.

As George turned slightly sidewise I could see the taunting flickered over his features. His blue eyes twinkled with mischievous movement.

"Don't like it, eh? Not enough brimstone?"

The little one glared still harder. His black-robed form straightened. His look was that of an imposing dignity impiously offended; of a little evil nature suddenly affronted. Hatred and impotence. The leer of the other was driving him to madness. Somehow he made me think of the dwarf demon brother of the fairy. He leaped from his chair; the heat of his anger fairly hissed.

"George Witherspoon, I command you. Obey me. You know our compact. What do you—"

But here George reached over easily, gracefully, and with mock ceremony plucked him by the collar. He sat him back on his chair.

"His majesty must be careful," he taunted. "He might stub his toe. That would be humiliating even to the devil. He might raise—"

Never had I heard such expletives. The little one's rage rendered him incoherent. He bit and fought and struggled. But George held him to the chair.

I could see who was the master. At length the old man subsided, and George sat down.

In the intervening silence I could see that the other was taking counsel with his reason. My husband lighted another cigarette, calmly, serenely contemplating, while the other cooled back into sanity.

"Well?" he asked at last.

In the eyes of the other I could see disappointment, a sort of humiliation and yet withal of a resignation that was protesting.

"You know our compact," he whimpered.

"Exactly," came the answer. "My soul. My soul for you to play with. I to have all the beauties, desires, and pleasures of the earth; you to take what I gave you and to mold it to your fancy."

The other licked his venomous lips.

"Then you admit it. Why do you then dare insult me—to laugh at me, to taunt me, to pluck me by the collar and to thrust me back into my chair like a nincompoop? Why call me the devil?"

George smiled. He blew out a wreath of smoke with great nonchalance.

"Because it is my pleasure. I am to have anything that I wish. I am still on earth. If the devil does not wish me to pull his ears, let him stay away from my planet."

The other glared again.

"I am not the devil," he snapped.

George lifted his eyebrows.

"No?" he asked incredulously. "Well, perhaps not. Possibly I am mistaken. But you are enough like him to be his brother. And really I don't know which one is flattered."

"You are not keeping the compact."

"Ah! Now I see. That explains the purport of this visit. I have fallen down in some essential of our agreement. The devil demands that we be honorable, I see. Pray proceed."

**T**HE little one became more agreeable.

He relaxed slightly in his attitude, and perceptibly ceased his glaring. His words were softer, almost honeyed.

"You know, George, exactly. I made you. You are my creation. You are more powerful than all the world together, more splendid, and more beautiful; I have given to you all the earth and its fullness. You have power and splendor; even magic. Not a whim has been denied you. You have everything."

"Exactly," came the answer. "That's the compact. I am to have everything. And I want to say it's some compact. Suits me exactly. Where have I broken it? Proceed."

The other elevated a talon finger.

"All right. So far, so good. In all agreements it is essential that there are two parties. You have had every

gratification; your wishes and desires have been scrupulously fulfilled; your aims are sensual, wordly, and self-centered. I, too, have an aim. I molded you for a purpose—for an avenger. Let me ask you how you are progressing yonder?"

He pointed with his thumb.

"You mean his nibs?" queried my husband. "His imperial princeling? Nothing could be better. I am molding all the royalty and autocracy of the earth for the grand debacle. I shall take them down into the whirlwind."

The eyes of the little one flickered with delight of madness, gloating, glimmering over coming bloodshed; he rubbed his talon hands together in chuckled anticipation.

"And then?" he asked.

George stopped.

"Ah!" The little one turned suddenly. "Ah!" he said. "I thought so. You know not what you would do. Eh? Well, allow me to enlighten you. That is the purpose of this visit. You would destroy the lords and princelings; but the others you would preserve. Have you forgotten our compact? For what, pray, were you created? Why have I labored with all my learning?"

"Full well you know it! I am an avenger. I must have revenge on mankind. I shall destroy the race entirely. You are my instrument; we must work together; it is our compact."

"Indeed! And just supposing that I refuse?"

The other snapped up quickly; the words came crackling, sizzling, intensity and dreadful warning:

"I shall destroy you!"

George eyed him coldly; his lips were drawn, and his lids narrowed to slits of study.

"I see, Herr Devil. You would destroy. Let me ask you—have you ever heard of *Frankenstein*? or *Faust*?"

"*Frankenstein!*" exclaimed the other. "*Faust!* What have they to do with it? *Faust* sold himself to the devil. I am not the devil."

My husband laughed.

"Perhaps not. But there is an analogy that just about fits in between the two cases. You have done your work too well. I am more powerful than even the devil. I defy you. There was nothing in our compact concerning good or evil. I was to do just as I chose."

The other fell into a sort of paroxysm;

for a moment he lost control. He waved his hand wildly; he was like a mad man, an incongruous figure that seemed all flame and anger, diabolic.

"You refuse it! You refuse! You admit that the compact is broken! You defy me! You—" For a moment his rage stifled him into mere gibbering. "Ah," he choked, "you defy me! This is to be the goal of all my learning! To be thwarted by my own creation! I shall destroy you. 'Out of the mountains shall come the waters.'

"Do you think that I was a fool? You are my creation: I took you out of the fold of the fools and threw you into the flood of the infinite. I had a purpose! I rendered you a thing of sunshine; I bestowed on you beauty, all the pleasures of the earth to gratify your senses.

"I would have revenge! Together you and I, a perfect pair, were to wreak evil upon all of mankind. How carefully have I labored! What pains have I not taken to elaborate you as a thing of evil! You had everything; you were to be a flame and a curse to all humanity.

"You defy me? This is to be the reward of all my genius. You would be good! Pooh! You would embrace their love, philosophy, and their fool religion. You are a fool! This is what comes of woman. I gave you millions of women to choose from. Yes, millions! Every one of them as beautiful as the morning: passion, sense, and wantonness—all that a man could ask for.

"And you play the idiot. You travel thousands of miles to choose just the one woman in all the world who would destroy you! Because you have a silly little fluttering under your breast you call it love, and proceed forthwith to do good unto mankind. Blasphemer! She will destroy you. She will make my work as nothing!"

It was terrible. Never was there such invective, such rage and clamor. In his anger he had climbed up on his chair, and from this eminence was hurling his anathemas.

**G**EORGE had risen; his features were steel-cut and rigid. With icy command he regarded the other who thus rained his wrath upon him. During it all he moved not a single eyelash; he was cool with contempt, his lips curling scorn, a picture of supremest loathing. When the other had subsided for lack of breath, he spoke.

"Sit down, Herr Devil. You are excited. I would enlighten you on a few points of your infinity that even your unfathomed learning has passed by unnoticed. You have called me a fool! And you claim me as your own creation. Perhaps I am. Certainly I am what you made me. I do not deny it.

"But you have made too well. I am not your slave; perhaps I am your master. At least I am your equal, and I do not fear you. And it may be that I am just *Frankenstein* monster enough to consume you.

"We made our compact. You know it. For a consideration I was to have all the pleasures of the earth and its fulness. I was to have beauty, wealth, and genius. Not a whit nor farthing of all the world's great bounty was to be denied me.

"There was not one thing excepted. Do you follow?—not one thing excepted. I was to have everything.

"Now, then, who is the fool? I, who made such a compact, or you, who trusted that you could drive me always into the ways of evil? I was to have everything. I tasted of the earth and all its fulness, and had no satisfaction.

"I followed the path where you directed, and I found it dreary; it was sensuous and full of action, its lights were brilliant, and I found it cloying. I, who had everything, still had nothing. The humblest peasant, in the ways of happiness, was my lord and master. I did not like it.

"What was it? I looked about me. And I soon discovered. It was the very thing that you, like all the wise men, have always scorned as folly. Your contempt betrays your ignorance, and that ignorance proves that you are the fool. With all your learning, you have overlooked the one thing that outweighs all others—love! And the love of a noble woman!

"I was to receive everything I wished. I, too, would possess this happiness that would have no cloying: I, who had had all beauty, sensuous, wanton, destroying, would know the love of a pure woman. I was to have everything. Was this one thing which outweighed all others to be denied me? Was I to be refused the one thing that makes life worth the living?

"It is the fulness of the earth and its blessing; its life is light. If it has driven me into rectitude and honor, it is my business. Our compact is specific: 'the



fulness of earth thereof.' I am taking the fulness."

But his words were wasted. I could see in those hateful black eyes that there was no relenting, no compromise nor concession; they glared with baleful perverseness. He was dreadful, unnatural, sitting there in his hatred; his talon hands clenched and re-clenched into fists that were like knots of cording. He broke again into a fury.

"You defy me. I shall destroy you. I am the master. You shall not have her!"

George straightened. I had never seen him look so perfect. How wonderful was his clear-cut beauty against the hideousness that was before him.

"Pray, Herr Beelzebub, of whom are you speaking?"

The answer came like a bombshell.

"Of her!" the demon shouted. "Of her! Her! Her! Roselle!"

A haze fell over me. Throughout it all I had been so frightened that I scarce could stand. The truth flashed to me. This thing was come between myself and my husband.

I felt cold and sickly; my knees trembled. I have a blurred recollection of a struggle there in the library; of George shaking something like a rat, of terrible oaths and blasphemous execrations.

That is all that I remember. When I came to I was in my own room, and in the arms of my husband. He was stroking gently the hair away from my forehead.

How blue his eyes were! And his smile! He was a thousand times more beautiful than I had ever seen him.

"Oh," I murmured, "George, my George! You will love me? You will not leave me? You will love me always?"

He kissed me. His strong arms pressed me to him.

"Roselle," he whispered, "I love you. Not all the fiends in hell shall ever part us. I shall love you forever."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### AWAY FROM THE LAND OF SHADOWS

**A**FTER such an incident it was inevitable that the place should be disagreeable. From that night on I had an awe and dread for life in such a country. No longer had I a taste for *Faust* or tales of German goblins. They had come too close for comfort.

The whole land, the very empire, was, to my heated mind, symbolic of unknown portents; the trim houses, the quaint rustics, the picturesque beauty of the roadways, were ever hinting, somehow, of some coherence or supplement of the Land of Shadows.

It was illusive. But it was there, permeating every cloud and shadow, the sentiency that all life was, as it were, pulsing with double import.

Even the men—the queer creatures of the street, grotesque in their costumes, with their big stomachs, their pipes, their flat woolen caps and baggy trousers—contributed to color. What before had delighted me as quaint and homelike wore now but the hue of goblins. It was all unreal, all setting, like the unsettled processional flittings that one knows in a dream.

Not even the soldiers, with all their pomp and color, their bands and tossing banners, could enthuse me. The balls, with all their music, their blaze of lights and laughter, were not natural. It was all lurking portent.

George saw it.

I had never said anything to him about his strange companion. Outside of my appeal that he should not leave me, I had never spoken of my apprehension. It had been too sudden. And I felt guilty.

I had been watching where I had not been wanted. I had been an eavesdropper who had heard what had not been pleasing.

My thoughts were shuffled and I could get no sequence. My fears cluttered my mind.

Just the same, I could think. I had this strange being for my husband; a man who was not a man, and yet, for all that was of the physique of an Apollo. He had not a single blemish; he was beautiful; he had life and pride and passion—he had a love that was consuming, and that enveloping personality that is ever so dear to a woman. And he had genius.

There was ever something about him that was like a flame in the passing. Something far-reaching; that flashed and flicked and fluttered—and consumed.

I had seen him perform magic.

His status in the world was unreal and impossible. He was a prince, and he was a baron. He was a Russian, he was a German, and I know that, first of all, he

was an American. I had heard him called the King of Thieves. What was he?

I had read "Faust" and "Frankenstein." He had classified himself as being between the two. But in what manner? Who was the goblin that was his strange companion? The legend of *Faust* has it that he sold himself to the devil. *Frankenstein's* monster was a creation who consumed his master. Wherein could come the analogy of my husband? Who was this little man all sin and hatred?

Was he the devil? At first, in my fear and horror, I had inclined to the superstition. But that was against my training. I had been taught from childhood to disbelieve in the foolish and the supernatural. But because I could not understand it was no reason for my falling down into a faith in fancies. He was horrid. He was sin and evil. And he had a compact with my husband!

I had heard it. He had used his soul as a plaything. And what human thing could have use for the soul of another? He had wrought him out of a mere man into a being. This thing of darkness had flushed into man a spirit that was all brightness. He had done his work too well. The creation, by the words and actions of my husband, was even more powerful than its maker.

George had revolted. I was glad. He had forsworn the ways of evil. The compact for the fall of mankind had been broken. The love for my own little self, so frail and insecure, had shattered all the dreams of this lurking monster.

Such a little thing as love! To be such an inspiration! To snap such a mighty spirit out of destruction; to rule and conquer, to sit enthroned in the heart of this one who knew no master! I was not worthy.

It brought me back once more the words of our good old Master. "Love, Roselle," he had told me. "You are right. Never waver. Your love will conquer."

And it made me strong. My love would be an inspiration. I would move worlds. No, no, no, I would never falter! For my loved one, this wonderful one who was mortal and yet of the gods, I would be a light and a sacrifice.

There was a struggle coming. The revolting spirit gone to the hosts of righteous would come into contact with this thing of evil. It was my little body that had done it. We would go bravely into the battle together, and we would conquer. In my soul I knew it.

But I said not a word to my husband.

Why should I? He knew, if he wished to, just what I was thinking. And if he could read my thoughts, he could know my heart as well. If love was the thing to save him, the intensity of my passion and devotion would lift him to heights of honor and aspiration. If I was to play a part in the subtle drama, it would be that of a noble woman. Love demanded; I obeyed. It was not impulse nor conceit, but the pure white love that lies in the heart of every woman.

AT TIMES the whole affair became immense and fearful. George had the beauty of an angel. He had intuition, strength, vigor, inspiration. He was dazzling. He could penetrate straight through to any depth of thinking. He attained always his way and purpose. There was no standing against his magnetism.

Often I watched him. The light that was in his eyes, the flickers of feelings that traced over his features, his attitude, his gestures. In all of them he was perfect. I have studied him as he sat beside me in the lamplight; my work lying idle and my mind wandering far in fancy. The nearest I can come to description is a painting I had seen in my girlhood. I think it was called "Genius"—of a being half god and all beauty sitting in contemplation. And I was his wife.

As I have said, the country had grown depressing. George saw it.

"Little one," he said, "you are homesick."

I nodded. I put my hands upon his shoulders. He patted my cheeks, as he had a way of doing; he pinched them playfully, and held my face up toward his own.

"Don't like this bad place?"

"Oh," I said, "George, I don't like it. It has something foreboding about it. It is depressing. I am afraid. I don't like evil, and I fear darkness. Everything here seems charged and static, almost to explosion. I have a dreadful uncanny feeling that something terrible will happen. I wish to leave it."

"Don't even like the pretty soldiers?" he bantered.

"No, I don't. When I first saw them I thought them splendid. But now I understand them. They are trained to kill. They are worse than butchers. They would kill men and dishonor women. They are unnecessary. They are nice to

look at, but, after all, they are just as you say—merely murderers dressed up.”

He kissed me.

“Right you are, little one; right you are. I was sure that you would see it. You have more wisdom than all the kings of Europe. We shall leave this country. It is the land of madness. It is the old adage coming to fulfilment—‘Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.’ They shall go down into the whirlwind.”

An impulse flushed upon me.

“George,” I asked, “is it true—is it real—are you to lead them?”

For the first time since I had known him I saw indecision. A shade passed over his features; his eyes wavered; he removed one hand from my cheek and pressed it to his forehead.

“I don’t know,” he said; “I don’t know. I do not think so.”

With a woman’s instinct, I understood. I pressed the point to advantage.

“Oh,” I said, “say it! Promise that you will not lead them. You will not ride with this awful Whirlwind. It is murder; it is man’s destruction. You must be his salvation. You must save him.”

He looked at me. He did not answer to the point.

“Woman was man’s first downfall; but even so, she shall be his regeneration,” he said.

“Roselle,” he said, “I cannot refuse you. You are pure and noble; you are unselfish. We love together. And so long as we do your whim is my injunction.”

“I am glad, George!” I exclaimed. “Oh, so glad!” And I threw my arms about him.

“Where would you go, little one?”

“Oh,” I said, “anywhere. To the land of sunshine, to the land of roses and laughing children. Where I can be happy.”

He laughed.

“Very well, it shall be as you wish. To a land of fairies, and you shall be its princess.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### “THE MASTER—OUR MASTER”

**T**HAT is how it came about. But we are here. In the land of France.

Here in this country of teeming millions we have a spot secluded. It is sunshine. A castle or château stands by a lake of crystal. The lawns stretch out to the

limpid surface. Roses bloom beside the driveways.

The air is scented with the living springtime. Swans and fowl glide upon the water. The trees throng with the birds, full-throated with the song of mating. And children! Their merry laughter outmelodies and outsilvers the happiness of the robins. It is indeed like the land of fairies. Such a place as the poet sang of:

In Xanadu did Kublai Khan

A stately pleasure dome decree;  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran,  
Through caverns measureless to man,  
Down to a sunless sea.

It was like George to select the one place in all the world where beauty and peace were so intensified as to be a positive witchery. The poet expressed the beauty in words, but George expressed it in our home. It was the intensity of his nature to heap in this one spot all the concentrated beauty of his genius. I had asked it. And he had responded to the overflowing.

While I write I can feel the magic of his inspiration. It is an exultation, a happiness that could be forever. It is he that does it. His love is like that of an angel, supersensual, irresistible, enveloping. I have the riches of the earth, its beauty, its profusion, the love-songs of the birds, the perfumed iridescence of the flowers and fruitings. I am the wife of the Rebel Soul awakened.

In Berlin I had become depressed and languid. But here in the contrast, in the sunshine, I was like the butterfly. Why should I not be, with everything at my fingers’ ends—life, love, and beauty? I speedily forgot my forebodings.

It was as George had promised—the garden of the fairies; a Xanadu in real life, an idyll.

And yet I must stop and think. Everything in our life has been abnormal; even our happiness. I am not like other girls. I am part of—I know not what. Sometimes I ponder. I have strange intuitions. I am not even myself.

The old Roselle that was in her girlhood is now no more. In spite of my happiness, I can sense that I, too, have a soul in conflict. The reason:

You know it—it is my excuse why I have not written. It has been years since I left you. Had I forgotten? Was I careless? You have waited these long, long months for a letter.

I cannot tell you.

It is the one part that I cannot account for. Though I could remember all of my former life, your faces had been somehow washed from my memory. Why was it?

What is it all about? We are different, like no one else on earth. Does George understand it; and if he does, why do I not ask him? He has never refused me a single whim, nor to answer a question. Why, then—

I answer that I cannot.

It is his secret. At times when I think of it, I have a horror and a premonition. It would be dissolution. It holds me back like an iron hand out of the shadows. It is a borderland that I dare not enter.

He is mine, godlike and splendid. And I have his love. He is kind and tender. I would not mar him. I would have him so forever.

Love? It is such a little weapon. And yet how powerful! He, the great iconoclast, the scorner of all customs, bows to my slightest whim and pleasure. It is wonderful. Such filmy strands to bind such a splendid creature! It is his confession. My love; everything.

What to mere man might be the pastimes of idle moments are to him more potent than the forces that hold the worlds together. It is as the good old Master said: "Love, love, Roselle; it is your weapon."

Which brings me back.

I had forgotten you; you had been effaced from my memory; you had been blotted out as if you had no existence. And I all the time have been in dreamland. Why have I so suddenly awakened? I will tell you: I have seen the Master!

It was on one of our periodical trips to the capital. George is essentially kinetic in his nature; there is nothing static about him; he must have action; forever he is in conflict. For the versatility of the French he holds a keen appreciation. He was ever on long trips, and undertaking I know not what adventures. He cannot be still; he is, above all things, dramatic.

Very often he has insisted that I be his companion. What tales I might tell!

Once, I remember, he sang at the opera. It just goes to show how far reaching is the versatility of his genius. He had maintained that the art of singing was in its infancy. A manager had scoffed. Out of their contention came his one night on the stage.

There was no singing that could compare; he had not only voice and technique, but the wonderful personality of a great musician. That one night would have proved to me what he was, even if I had not known him. The insistent manager would have had him sign for a thousand nights. But George laughed.

"It is nothing, Roselle. Any man might do it. Every man should control his own body; he should be his own master."

His friends were legion; of every rank and stratum of society. At times he would make long journeys. And whenever he did he was certain to return loaded with gems and treasure. The accumulations that he has heaped about me might endow a princess.

I shall not dazzle you with the description. If I had heard strange stories of George Witherspoon in my girlhood, they were only a thousandth part of the fact. The Prince of Mystery!

Now comes the inexplicable.

You remember the dear old Master. Let me ask you—what has the Master to do with my husband? He was at the house, if you recall, on the night when I first met George. And the struggle in the ballroom. You remember? It was the Master who gave me warning and imparted to me those injunctions that have been, ever since, words of gold and sunshine.

But let me tell you how it came about that I so suddenly recollected you. It is strange. As if a curtain had been lifted.

**I**T WAS only a few short days ago. We motored up to the capital. It was to be one of our outings of pleasure and excitement. It was a splendid day. George had dispensed with the chauffeur, and was doing his own driving.

When we are on a real excursion he tosses me into the machine much as if I were a doll, and climbs in beside me. There is always excitement. He is a driver; he loves to cut the wind.

He knows of splendid vistas, avenues, rows of trees, leafy tunneled archways, orchards, vineyards, highways, rivers winding down beside us, and towns cut out of the middle ages. He is ever selecting some route that is delightful.

It was evening when we drove through the suburbs. One of those evenings in the early summer when the air is as mellow and as tender as the fresh green leaves that have just tipped the trees with their verdure.

Suddenly George twisted the steering wheel.

"We will take a by-path where there is not so much traffic," he said.

We passed into a street that was long and narrow; the houses were built almost up to the curb; they were old, and, what with their grimness and proximity and their scaly, dirty paint, were sinister and forbidding.

I leaned back. I enjoyed these quick transitions; it is one of the delights of European cities. George put the car into high speed, and we shot out like a thunderbolt. But it was almost disaster.

It was like a flash! A black form emerged from the doorway. The speed of the car was magnetic; the form wavered and faltered in erratic hesitation. I caught my breath at the looming tragedy.

But George swerved, the car turned sidewise, skidded, and he averted death by a hairbreadth. As we swooped past the figure I could have touched it. And I recognized—the Master!

I must have cried aloud. I don't remember just what I did in the sudden gasp of my surprise. It was like suddenly beholding a form out of another world.

I looked back, but the figure had disappeared. When I turned again, I was gazing into the eyes of my husband. He gave me a knowing look.

"Did you recognize anybody?" he asked.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "George, it was the Master, the good, old Master. Do let us go back and find him."

He was obedient to my wishes. The car was straightway turned about, and we returned up the street, searching closely. He must have stepped hastily across the street and entered another building. We made inquiries, but the people about plainly could not understand us. They had seen no such person. I was disappointed.

Finally my husband again turned the car toward the city. But he patted my hand gently.

"Do you wish to see the Master as bad as that, little one?" he asked.

"Oh," I exclaimed again; "the Master! Just think who it is! All the way over here in France. How can we find him?"

"That is easy, Roselle. You have wished it. He shall be at the hotel to-night."

"At the hotel?"

"Yes."

"To-night?"

"To-night."

"Oh!" The car was now speeding along. "You say it, George, just as if you had willed it. How do you do it?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Rebel Soul, little one," he answered; "Rebel Soul. They must obey me."

The same old question. Just the same, I was glad to know I was to see the Master.

At the hotel I changed my costume. As it happened, I had with me, just by chance, a simple dress such as I had worn at home. I eagerly decided to wear it. I would be the same little girl to the Master.

I was all expectant.

**D**OWN in the dining-room, I watched and studied every figure. George laughed and bantered; he took a mischievous pleasure in my eagerness. I was like a little child that has been promised a new plaything—I could not wait.

I knew that he had always loved my husband. George had been his star pupil; a great genius that had burst beyond control. From the very beginning he had been stalwart in his faith; he had never faltered. His love was a magnified admiration; something higher and beyond the love of woman.

Toward the end of the meal George ceased his chatter. He suddenly became serious.

"So you are this anxious to see the Master? Really, I believe you love him."

I nodded.

"I do, George; I always did. The Master—"

He watched me with strange intent; his blue eyes filmed with understanding.

"The Master," he repeated my words.

"The Master," then, after a pause: "Our Master."

There was something pregnant in the words, and the way he spoke them. If there was anybody in the world for whom he had respect, I knew it was for our old friend of wisdom. His next words embodied my own thoughts.

"Let us go, Roselle," he said. "I, too, would see the Master. He is coming this evening; but before he comes there is something I must tell you."

### (To Be Continued Next Month)

The first installment of this story appeared in the October issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. Copies are available at 25c from The Frank A. Munsey Co., 280 Broadway, N. Y.

to mine and pressed it, the vitality that was his shot through me like a current; he had personality; he was greater, more splendid than all the world—I loved him.

For some time I was silent, then I spoke:

“George,” I said, “tell me truly, did you do it?”

He smiled and continued chewing as though not a thing in the world had occurred that was unusual.

“What?” he asked, gazing out of the window with an abstract interest. His manner was one of indifference and total non-concern. After his derisive laugh he had drifted into unconcerned content, chewing his everlasting gum and gazing out at the dripping drabness of the wet snowfall. “Did I do what?”

He did not care; he shrugged his shoulders at a thing so trivial. But I exclaimed:

“This man, this Russian, this nobleman! How could it be? It was horrible; just like murder, the man was so helpless. Was it because I asked that he be punished?”

For a moment he forgot his gum and looked at me in querulous wonder, his eyes dancing with a thousand infinitesimal lights and laughter.

“Indeed, Roselle, you are right. Horrible, murder! Yes, you are right. So it always was and will be when one of his ilk has to take the ax.

“It was an exquisite pleasure, however, two days ago! Then it was the fine art of murder! He had it coming, Roselle. It was pleasant to watch him writhing.”

Terrible! It pleased him! This man whom I loved, who was so beautiful and could be so gentle, was for all that as inexorable as a Moloch. Yes, and more so; he could derive out of cruelty all the exquisite delectations of a connoisseur.

Yet, in a way, I realized that he was right, that my remorse was to a great extent a girl's emotion. It had been my own imprecation, I had asked it and something inexplicable had wrought circumstances to my willing. I could but exclaim:

“It was supernatural, it was above all reason, how could you, how did you do it?”

For a moment he did not answer; the flintlike hardness flitted from his features and his eyes grew tender. He looked at me. Somehow, in all his moods, in all his thoughts, I can reach his better nature, he who to all others is as stone be-

comes as wax to my slightest whim and pleasure. He pressed my fingers.

“Listen, Roselle,” he said. “I did it. I make the confession. You willed it, and it had to be done.

“You call it supernatural, but it is not so. There are a great many things, little one, on this earth, that we place in the category of the supernatural. But they are mostly things that we do not understand and for which we have no explanation.

“Of such, you will see many in the future, I wish to caution you. The little affair you have just witnessed came from your willing. Once you had stated your desire not all in the world could stop it.

“It was your will, Roselle. Yes, and your will is my will. I am your lover. Your merest whim to such as I, is the superlative of injunction.

“I cannot deny you. Were I to do so I would be overcoming the only impossibility that I know of. And remember, I cannot defy one single law of nature.

“You see, little one, I converse in riddles. Which is as it must be. Were I to go into detailed explanation you could not follow. Not a one on earth might understand what I might tell him.”

Surely it was a poser. The scene with the Chinese—the terrible events of the past few days—caught me, clutched me with the smothering apprehension that some of the tales I had heard in my childhood might indeed be true.

For how else had he smitten the cowardly Russian? Without moving hand or muscle he had wrought a vengeance that was speedy and appalling.

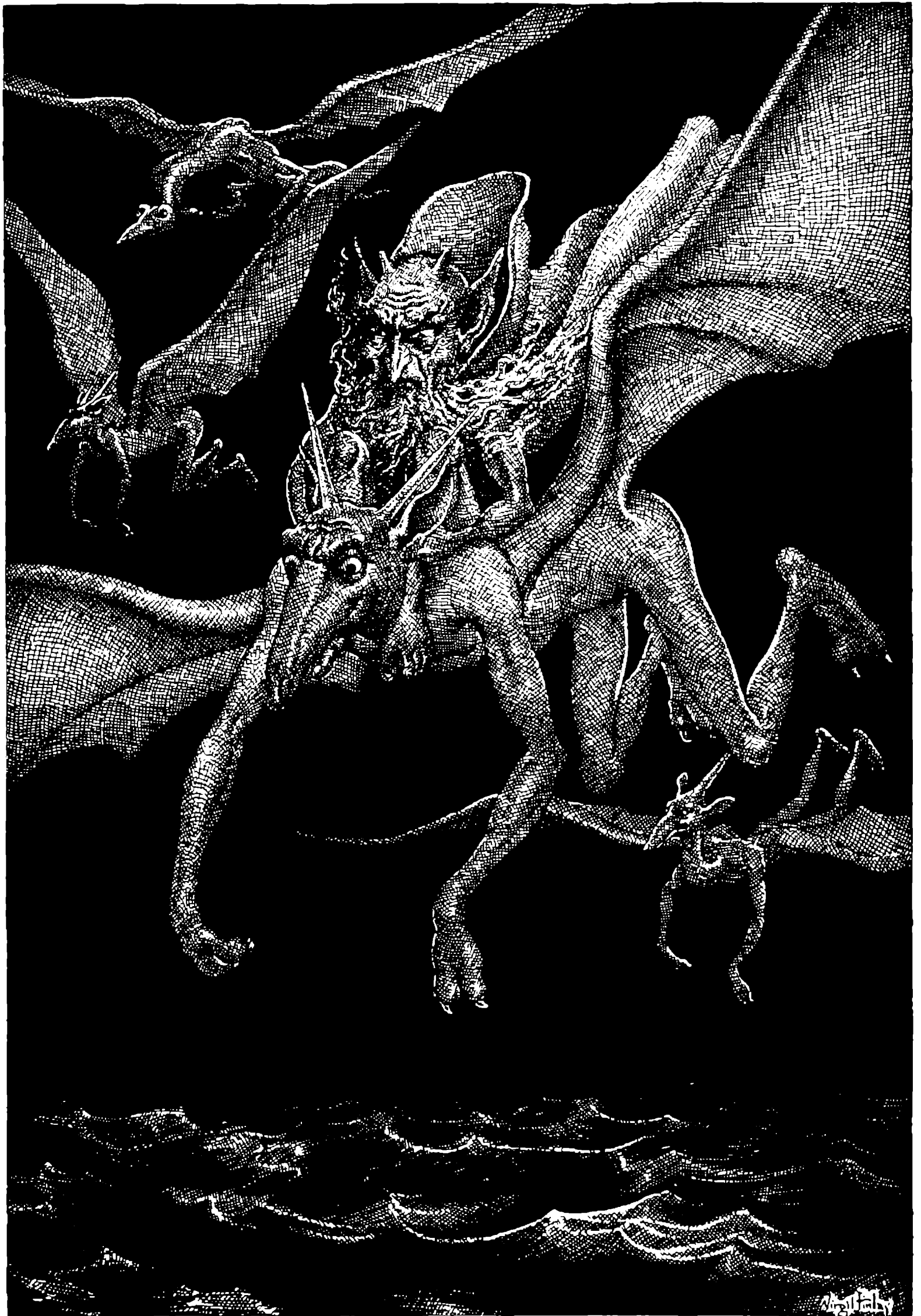
And upon the platform; the burning saber? Though he had not quivered an eyelash he had done miracles. He asserted that it was not supernatural; that I had willed it. I was sick at heart to think that I had been the cause of bloodshed; even the blood of a brutal tyrant. But I thrilled, as I think almost any girl would, at the thought that I could so impose my will upon my husband.

**I**T WAS an ecstatic feeling to know that I could knead as clay this one, who, if he did but wish it, might rule all the world. Wherein, you see, I was very much a girl.

“Then,” I spoke, “as long as you love, you will obey me. You shall be ruled by a woman.”

He laughed.

“Hardly that, Roselle. I shall go my



The fiend came rushing across the Atlantic, obeying as fast as he could  
the summons of the Rebel Soul

way as usual. At the same time you shall be my wife and sweetheart. You are the only thing on earth that for me can have attraction; the rest are playthings. I am a spectator. In you alone I can have pure pleasure, because you are pure, innocent, have no conceit, and I can love you."

"Supposing," I bantered, "that I should cease to love you."

I said it only to tease him.

I shall never utter the thought again. No, never! The look he gave me I shall never forget. It was as if the blood had all passed from his body, his eyes were cold and hardened, a great fear filled them.

"On that day," he said, slowly, "on that day—forgive me when I say it—on that day you die. And on that day God pity the race of man! On that day I shall lose all restriction."

He was pitiless; he was cruel, as merciless as marble. I had no doubt of the omnipotence of his vengeance. I am afraid I trembled. Perhaps he perceived it. The expression flitted from his features and again he was tender. He drew me to him.

"Come, Roselle," he said, "we must not wander into questions that you do not understand. You must look upon me as a man. You must continue to love me. And I must be worthy, be great, be noble, make myself deserving of your affection.

"What you have beheld are but beginnings. I have powers that are beyond understanding, but I have you to guide them. Your love to me is worth more than all the worlds of the cosmos, and can do more good. Now let us forget it."

Which, indeed, we did. At least we did not speak of it to each other. In a few moments we drew into the station and after a brief stop were once again on our road to Russia. But for hours afterward, through all the flitting landscape, through the clatter of the train and the shouting, my mind was seething.

I had many thoughts and dreamings; I wondered. And most of all I pondered deeply, uncertainly, over what was coming.

But not even in my wildest speculation did my dreams come up to the truth. It is a way he has of always overtopping climax. I had thought that we were on a great, long honeymoon. He had told me nothing. I had no reason to think of him as a citizen of Russia, much less as a prince.

Surprising? Not near so much so to you as it was to me. It was consternation. As I remember I was too dazed to realize what had happened. Without warning I had been lifted to the heights of dreamland. Remember, I was a girl, a democrat, and reared in the breath of Western freedom.

I only know of our driving from the depot and our arrival, after that all an iridescent maze of splendor, like the weaving of a dream, wherein I was a queen and an object of adoration. I have a recollection of what was passing, of men in braid and gold and of haughty manner, of women, splendid, beautiful, resplendent, conversing with me; of compliments and favors and comments on my beauty; of a multitude of people around about me doing politest homage, and the pride of my husband.

I could not speak a word of Russian; I could not understand it; but they accepted me.

Perhaps it was better that I was shy and timid. I knew that I was no princess, nor had enough of blood and breeding to claim the distinction. I was so overwhelmed with the revelation and its suddenness that I could do naught but fall back upon my own girl self and be natural.

Strangely enough, it caught them. They were one and all courtiers and curried favor from my husband. He was a power among them.

To my astonishment, he spoke the purest Russian. The women were his slaves and the men his servants; his words were maxims and his whims injunctions. He lived, talked, dressed in Russian. He was everything that a prince should be; even when he is born to the purple. He was natural; he was not questioned.

But I knew it was not so. When we were alone I threw my arms about his neck and asked him:

"What is it all about, George? What is its meaning? I am no princess. You know it. Neither are you a prince. Why this imposture?"

He laughed, took my bare shoulders in his hands, and kissed me.

"No princess! Why, why, little one, of course you are. You are a queen!"

I shook my head.

"No, no, George. Not that. I am a girl, your sweetheart. I love you; but I am no princess. All this splendor; all these women; beaux, counts, and others. What is it all about?"



"Little republican!"

I nodded my head emphatically.

"I am. Yes, George, I am an American. I wish to be honest. I know you are not a prince, we are impostors. Why this name! They call you the prince of—I can't even pronounce it. And I am princess of—"

"Do not attempt it," he laughed. "You would not succeed." Then he laughed again. "You dear little rebel! The princess of something she can't even pronounce!" More laughter. "Let me advise you. Some day you and I will go out to a hill and roll down to the bottom—out of the convulsion and the excitement we will evolve the title. It is the only means for you to acquire the pronouncement."

"**B**UT," I exclaimed, "you do not answer me! Are you a prince?"

"Of course not."

He did not deny it, did not even evade it; the answer that he gave betrayed the contempt for the part that he was playing. There was that in his intonation of a world of pleasure and of a secret delight. He led me to a divan.

"Listen," he said, "Roselle, this is one of the things of which I warned you, and there are many more in store, I utilize all circumstance for my pleasure as well as for my purpose. It is great sport playing prince."

"You know the old, old saying: 'In Rome one must be a Roman'? The princes of this land have all the good things. Wherefore I am prince. I like it and I desire that you be my princess. 'Tis the law of man that the easy spots are for those who take them."

I shook my head. "We are impostors."

It appeared merely to amuse him. "Impostors!" He repeated my words. "Roselle, you are amusing. Pray, little girl, and what are they? Can you not see it?"

"They are of the nobility!" I returned.

He broke into laughter. He had a contempt that was shattering.

"Nobility!" How he did belittle the very title! "And pray, little one, where do they get it? Because they impose themselves on the poor, blind masses. The only right they have—before the devil; they have nothing to do with God—is the ignorance of their victims."

"We are above the whole canaille. I could be Czar tomorrow. Their nobility is merely a fetish, ours is at least sincere in that we are able. 'The tools,' as

Napoleon said, 'are for those who may use them.' And I am strong at wielding, Roselle."

Somehow I knew that he was right; if real inherent worth and ability were a claim to title he could be king of all. I put my thoughts into words.

"You could be king of the world!" I exclaimed.

"Do you wish it, Roselle?"

"No!"

"Nor do I. It is the destiny of man. Just the same, I am going to be some spectator. Pleasure, and the good things of all the earth! That's why in Russia I am a prince."

He was so strong and beautiful and could carry so easily the part that he was playing. I wondered.

"Are you a prince in any other country?" I asked.

There was a twinkle of merriment in his eyes; a laughter that was for all of mankind. He nodded.

"In several. I have a score of mansions. I am a top-notch everywhere. I enjoy myself immensely. And you are my little princess."

He spoke as if I were a doll. It is a way he had always. And I would have had it so. I was not ambitious, I was happy, I lived for my husband, and I was girl enough to know that as long as I remained thus I could wield far greater power than if I tried to be his equal.

But though I loved him, I had perceived, before this, his serene disregard for laws and conventions. He was an iconoclast with a contempt for all of mankind. Although he sipped their honey and shared their pleasure he derided all their symbols. In his way he was wicked. With myself alone was he honest. I knew it.

"Don't you think," I asked, "that this is wrong? You are too great and too noble to be a mere impostor. These people still have a right."

He interrupted me. He held one finger to his forehead.

"Here is the only birthright. Ability is the right to title. There is no other. These"—he waved his hand—"are pigs! I despise them. I play with them. They eat out of my hand and like it. I am a prince!"

He laughed and almost as suddenly sobered.

"Yes," he said slowly, "and if the poor fools knew who I am, they would think me the devil."

Well, it ended there—I continued to be the princess. For a mere girl I did splendidly. At least that is what George said. After the first novelty wore off I enjoyed it, though not, I am afraid, in the way that he did. I was sincere, whereas he was merely playing.

He jollied them along and played upon their weakness. In his tactful manner he handled them for his own amusement. He was a manager and they the actors; he shuffled them about like puppets for his pastime.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE MAD MONK

**B**UT in a while he began to tire. We journeyed on to St. Petersburg. It was there that a little incident occurred of which I shall tell you.

We had been in the city for some days. We had taken in the operas, the places of amusement, been to the palace, and during our stay had enjoyed ourselves immensely. One day George came to me.

"Roselle, tonight we shall remain in our apartments. Or rather, you shall. I shall bring a visitor. I wish to show you off. Be alluring; be enticing; be as suggestive as you can."

"George!"

"No, no," he said, "not that. You do not understand me. What I wish is that you array yourself in all your beauty. Attire yourself in your best creation, show all the allurements of your girlhood."

"Be modest. Modesty is a million times enhancing. The man is a connoisseur."

"Who is he?"

"A slave."

"A slave?"

"Yes. My slave, and the master over all the Russians."

His slave! And the ruler of the Russians. My husband! Though I deemed him the greatest man in all the world, I could not for all that grant him this power that was so tremendous! A prince he might be; but the ruler of the Czar!

It was impossible! Besides it was impossible and incomprehensible that one such as this should come to see us. And on such a visit! I revolted.

Almost every woman is proud of her beauty and the worship it inspires, but I was a Western girl raised in the sunshine, and I cared not a whit for princes nor this sort of adoration.

"George," I said, "for once I must refuse you. If that is what it means to be a princess I wish to go back to the land from which I came. If I must be shown off like—"

But he seized me in his arms. His laughter and his tenderness told that I was mistaken. He petted away my resistance.

"Little girl," he laughed, "what do you think your husband means? Not for a million worlds and all the pleasure in the universe would I stoop to such an action."

"He is not a prince. He is an impostor. He is my slave, and sworn to obey me. I have made him and have lifted him to power and splendor. He is infamous, and a scoffer of women; I wish to teach him a lesson. I am proud of you, Roselle."

Of course I was a bundle of curiosity and perhaps I was a bit afraid, but I did as I was bid. By his manner and tenderness he had convinced me of his sincerity.

I shall never forget it. I had thrown aside my European finery, and chosen a simple gown such as I might have worn in my girlhood. I was again the girl you have known at home, romping with the children. I was the same girl that I was when George first met me. Though he might have preferred another, I have always honored, for some reason, that dress above all the others. If this man was such a judge of women I would be a girl. Perhaps I feared him.

It was over sooner than I expected. In fact, so soon that it was unexpected. The man to whom I was introduced was an individual. I recall the introduction, the strange smile of my husband—and a man.

To this day I could not tell in detail just what he looked like. I remember a robe, whiskers, and two eyes burning. He bowed. But when he raised his head his looks were gleaming luster. Though I had seen many people I had never beheld a man such as this.

There was about him all over a thin veil of fascination; velvet, fawning, silk-like. He was a man of no great looks, but for all that he was wonderfully, magnetically handsome. The rush of emotions that he engendered in my breast were startling, but most of all I feared him. I loathed him. Yet for all that I would have dreaded this man's power over a woman. But that was all. What followed I did not look for.

He started to say something, but before he had uttered one syllable George had seized him. In a blaze of anger he clutched him by the neck and shook him, tossed him about the room as though he were but a bunch of rags.

Such wrath I had never beheld in my husband. The man screamed with terror. I rushed in to stop it, but before I could do so, George had reached the doorway, dragged him to the corridor, and kicked him contemptuously down the stairway.

It was terrible. I was frightened, dumfounded, too humiliated at the brutal scene to speak.

For a moment my husband stood there, rapt as it were at the pleasure of that falling body. He smiled contemptuously as if he had done a deed that was holy. Then he turned back to me.

"George! George!" I exclaimed. "What is it? What did the man do? Surely he did nothing!"

But he turned to me. His eyes were blazing; his words even more so:

"He thought!"

"Thought?"

"Yes. You have heard of Caesar? Caesar's wife is above suspicion, I am greater than Caesar! No man upon this earth may look upon my wife with even a thought of evil!"

"But surely you did not know. How could you? His thoughts!"

He looked at me. The idea that I was but a woman, that I was far beneath him, and that I could not understand seemed to flash suddenly upon him.

"Roselle, you do not understand. Caesar was but a man. He could see but actions. I can read a man's soul and his thoughts of actions. I knew every thought the man was thinking. What occurred tonight you may never understand. But it was necessary. It was not even in the power of one with such volition as myself to stop it."

"But," I exclaimed, as I seized his arm and gazed up into his face, "he will kill you. He will kill you. He is the—monk!"

He assured me, patted my cheek into confidence.

"No, no, little one. Have no fear. He is a hound; the son of a dog. I shall destroy him. When his work is done I shall slay him before the others. His fate is settled.

"For the present there is no danger, he fears me, he is my slave. Without me he could not continue a single day, and

he knows it. He is my slave, his poor magic is but the whim of my fancy. He dare not even whisper."

**W**AS there ever such a husband? Greater than Caesar! And even more jealous of his wife! What was I to inspire such a love in such a being? I was but a girl child from the land of the sunshine! I had no great merit but my beauty. He who might have wed the greatest princess, had chosen me from all the world of women! Is it any wonder that my heart swelled within me; that my whole body thrilled, that I threw my arms about his neck?

"Oh," I breathed, "George, my George, who, what are you?"

But just then came a clatter on the door. A voice, fearful, frightened but terribly angry, bid us open. In a moment the place was full of men. At their head was a little man—the owner of the establishment. He was old, bald headed, and as I remember, had a great nose that twitched with anger.

He pointed at my husband.

"There he is," he said to his men: "Seize him!"

But they did not. Not a man among them stirred a foot nor muscle. They gazed one and all at me and at my husband; queerly, as if suddenly stricken with abject terror.

I, too, was afraid. Yes, and even the man before me, who almost with his last word was affected. What it was I do not know, unless it was George's bearing; he was calm almost to contempt. He was not one to bear interference. His words foretold their actions.

"Come, you fellows!" he snapped. "Get!"

I am sure that not a man of them could understand a word of English, but they needed no interpretation. They scurried, almost tumbled through the doorway. The last one turned to the one who had been their leader. The poor fellow wrung his hand in anguish, his spirit entirely withered.

"Oh," he moaned, "ruined, ruined, ruined. I am lost forever!"

And George laughed at his terror.

The man was so crushed and broken! The terrible beating that had been administered to the monk, had driven him out of his senses. The provocation was perhaps sufficient. If the monk were as powerful as it was whispered, revenge would be swift to follow. I pitied him.

The man groveled; though he trembled I could see great danger in his eyes; he was of the kind who can take a cowardly and terrible retaliation.

"Oh," he groaned, "what have you done? The man is the most powerful in the empire. Why did you assault him? And in my establishment! You know who he is. I am ruined—you—he—"

He stopped, almost choking, his mind so full of convulsion, his emotion so poignant that the intensity of his feeling stifled utterance.

"Sit down!" said my husband. "Think!" Then: "You are afraid of this man? You really think he is the most powerful man in Russia? You dread the consequences of my action?"

"Ruined!" groaned the other.

"Listen!" said George. "Tomorrow we shall go to see him, you and I. What has happened will be known by no one. We shall see who is really the master. He shall grovel at my feet and beg for mercy. He is a mountebank and an impostor."

The man gazed at my husband. The words had been delivered in such a tone that they were convincing. Though it was incomprehensible to him that one should be so powerful, there was no doubting their effect upon him.

He gathered courage. As he did so he regained the semblance of a man of affairs and position. His words had a clear precision.

"You can do this?" he asked.

"Exactly."

"Then," he turned, "you are wonderful; I should like to see it. Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow."

The next evening the man stopped me in the foyer; he fairly bubbled with politeness. His eyes were full of joy and wonder.

"Madam," he said, "your husband is more powerful than all the Russians."

## CHAPTER XXII

### INTO GERMANY

**T**HAT ended Russia. A few days later we were again on our journey westward.

I had beheld so much of my husband that I was prepared for anything. You may well think that I was frightened. But I was not. If he was something more than man, almost supernatural, he was still my husband. No man was ever such

as he; no man could be so tender. Every move that he made was an adoration. So why should I fear him?

But just the same I could think, and I thought deeply.

He was clearly very powerful. What I had witnessed convinced me that he was an enemy of Russia, at least of her institutions; that he was an iconoclast who could, if he chose, shatter the greatest nations. I asked him.

"There, there," he laughed. "Now you are getting into politics."

"But," I exclaimed, "tell me! Is it not true?"

He thought a moment.

"Roselle," he said, "do you remember what the master called me?"

I shuddered.

"Oh," I said, "it was a terrible name. The Master said: You are the Rebel Soul."

For a while he was silent and gazed out of the window.

Then he spoke.

"He is right. I am. I am the Rebel Soul."

"But," I exclaimed, "what is it! You are splendid, great, wonderful, good! What is a Rebel Soul?"

"The Rebel Soul," he spoke slowly, "is a shatterer of institutions, a crusher, a destroyer, a thing of evil. He despises mankind. He is an avenger."

It was so terrible that I placed my fingers over his lips to stop him.

"No, no!" I exclaimed, "not that. I will not hear it. You are great, and good, and splendid. You are like an angel. I know that you are but talking. You do not despise mankind. Man is a splendid being."

He kissed my fingers; then he gently removed them.

"No, no, Roselle, I mean it. Man is but a worm. I despise him, I am an avenger. It is a good thing that you are with me. I hate the great and the powerful. I only attack the mighty. And it is fortunate just now that the mighty are so wicked. I have marked them for destruction.

"We are just now come from the great hotbed of oppression; I shall destroy her. The strange monk you saw is but one of my tools. He works magic; but it is the magic of a fool. What little he has accomplished has been at my inclination. He is my instrument to irritate the great eruption. I shall consume Russia."

"But," I interrupted, "you are a prince of Russia."



# Into the Infinite

By Austin Hall

## Part III

*He was greater than St. George of dragon fame; he was without hope of salvation; he cared not that he was standing alone against the evils of all darkness. He asked for no succor; he was defiant. He believed he would conquer, alone, by his will and his flashing genius*

**A**fter his adventures with George Witherspoon, the Rebel Soul, Walter Warren became a prosperous banker, and lived happily with his wife and Roselle.

The Master, the leader of the Order of Sevens, told Walter that George had become an internationally famous criminal, and was known as "The King of Thieves." But he was sure that, unmoral and unfettered by man-made laws as he was, George had a great power for good in his nature, and unknown and unearthly powers for either good or evil. The master received Walter's promise of assistance in redeeming him.

One night George came to Walter's house, and begged him to do what he could to save him from himself, at the same time warning him that in the future he would seek to do him harm. One of the children was sick, and George cured him and left a valuable emerald in his hand. He met Roselle, and they loved each other at sight.

Walter received warning that Witherspoon was going to rob his bank. He received assistance from Simpson, the slow-witted chief of police, and Wilkins, a detective connected with the Order of the Sevens, and working under the Master's orders, who had trailed George in many lands without being able to arrest him. But in spite of them the bank was looted on the night of a ball, and later in the evening George appeared at Walter's house and carried off Roselle.

The Master went in search of George and Roselle. Two years passed. Then Walter's wife received a letter from Roselle saying that she and George were married and happy, and telling of their life. In Russia George was a prince; in Germany a baron, a colonel of Uhlans, and pet of the Kaiser. While in Berlin he received a mysterious visitor, and from their conversation Roselle had learned that it was through selling his soul to this evil personage that George derived his supernatural powers, and that he had grown so strong that the other could no longer control him. The shadow of war was already falling over Germany, and Roselle had induced George to go to France. There he had become the friend of statesmen, a leader of men, and successful in finance. One day in Paris they saw the Master, and George told Roselle that he would call on them at their hotel that evening. "But before he comes there is something that I must tell you," he said.

Roselle's letter, dated June 1900, is continued in this instalment.

## CHAPTER XXIX

"I HAVE SOLD MY SOUL"

**T**HAT was the beginning. How was I to know that he was about to make a sort of confession? We returned to our rooms. George lit a cigar; he always smoked after eating. I could not read, and I was too excited to do much more than to sit in a tremor of impatience.

It was about eight o'clock. Outside the

electric lights were beginning to blaze into the darkness. The rumble and noise of the streets, the strange hum of the city, the strident cross-currents of artificial life accentuated my eagerness. What was he about to tell me?

But he said nothing. I drew the curtains and came over and sat beside him. It is the one pastime of which I never grow weary—to sit and watch him. He is not like other men—I am always hungry for his beauty.



"I was a woman—it was myself for whom my husband George and the Thing of Evil were fighting; my love had been the inspiration that had snatched my husband from the evil bond that had held him to the fiend"

He was splendid, leaning back in his chair, his light hair almost silver in the half light, his face finely chiseled, his eyes half shut in contemplation. Half carelessly he reached over and held my fingers. There was something like a silent message in the touch. I was startled. Finally he spoke.

"Roselle," he said simply.

I am sure that I cannot explain it. The very accent of the word! It is almost unbelievable that so much feeling can be put in a single intonation.

"Roselle!"

Was I frightened? I do not know. But I spoke calmly.

"What is it, George? What is it? Let me turn on the lights."

"No," he answered, "it is better as it is. I would have it so. You are beautiful. It is peaceful; it is the gloaming. I must tell you."

I had never heard him speak with such an accent; there was a tone of solicitude that was unusual. I pressed the hand that was over my fingers.

"You frighten me, George. What is it you would tell me? It must be—"

"No," he interrupted, "you must not be frightened. But I must tell you. Let me ask you, Roselle. Do you know me?"

"Know you? Why—"

"Understand me?"

"I do not know what you mean, George. Tell me."

He was silent for a moment.

"You know I am not like other men. There is a great secret about me. I am not like others."

"Of course not," I answered. "You are great, wonderful, splendid."

He smiled indulgently.

"Of course, Roselle, I am to you, because I am your husband."

I held his hand tightly. I am positive that a tremor passed through his body. A slight breath of air rustled the curtains into somber shadows. A fitful breeze fanned through the open window.

"And this secret, George," I asked. "What is it?"

"Listen," he said, "and I shall tell you."

"You have noted many times, have you not, that I am not like others? I am something different. I am a type of isolation."

"Yes, George," I answered, "I have noticed."

"And you have known me by many names—George Witherspoon, the Rebel Soul, and others. I have been called the

King of Thieves, a prince and a baron. I have lived like a shadow, or, to use the contrary metaphor, like a gleam of sunshine.

"I have not lived as have others. Life to me was not the fitting out at birth into a given channel. I have held life and ruled it—I have been its master. I have laughed at the fate that has been so potent with others. Fate has been my plaything. Do you follow?"

"I think so."

"I have had the riches of all the earth, its surfeits and its pleasure, its largess and its luxury. I have shared its splendor, I have even tasted of its crime. I have been cruel and selfish. The millions I have squandered are not to be numbered.

"I have genius. There is nothing on earth that I may not do. I am the first man to have full control of his brain and actions. I am different. So much so that I am not human.

"I make no mistakes. I am alone. There are only two, in all the world, who can begin to understand me. Yourself and the Master. And I have drawn you into the shadow."

"The shadow?"

"Yes, the shadow. The great battle that must be fought. I shall battle for your life and mine; for our very souls. The Master will be our ally."

In an instant I sensed his meaning. The darkness opened and I was peering again into that library in the city of the north land—the calm, poised, handsome figure by the table, the statuette of Descartes, the books face open on the floor; the handsome face wreathed with derisive laughter, egging, taunting, with eyes sparkling with amusement. And another figure, grim and distorted, terrible with evil, raining out a storm of anathemas at his derision.

How often had I conjured that picture? How often had I hoped that he had thrown—even as he had tossed out that loathsome creature—all evil and wickedness out of his life.

My intrusion I had never mentioned. I had always felt, in a guilty sense, that I had been spying on the privacy of his life. I was certain that some day his love would come to me with its secret. And it was true. I made my confession.

"**G**EOURGE," I said, "I know. You must pardon your Roselle. I was a witness that night of the whole scene in



the library. I had no thought of intruding, of spying, of listening where I was not wanted. I was merely coming to you, to be with you during the evening, to sew and dream beside you, to watch you as you studied. You know how I have always loved to be near you.

"And I ran into that. Oh, it was dreadful. That loathsome creature—he said, he said—oh, George, who is he?"

He held my hands as in a vise; his breath came deeply, his form was shaken with emotion. I understand that it was not fear, that it was love for my own frail body. Love to him was of more meaning than to any man on earth. It consumed him.

"You ask me who he is, Roselle? I cannot tell you. I do not know. But the words you heard him speak are the truth. I have sold my soul!"

It was terrible. To have such a confirmation. It could not be. I would not have it.

"No, no!" I exclaimed. "George, it is not true. It is impossible. I will not have it."

But he continued:

"Nevertheless it is the fact. I was taken to the top of the mountain. And I was not divine. I was shown the riches of all the earth and its fulness. I was but mortal. It was all mine for the taking, for such a little thing as a soul.

"I was full of life and action—but a boy. I had neither father nor mother. In my veins flowed the hot blood of adventure. Worlds, woman, song, glory, power, and adventure, genius beyond that of any living mortal were offered to me.

"And what was a soul? A mere flame that vanishes into the darkness, a flicker that goes out, unseen and forgotten. It was so distant. I was young and could live forever. What cared I for a soul that was weighed against all this pleasure? It was a wonderful bargain; I was human, I closed upon the spot."

"Then," I faltered—a great fear, almost terror, was clutching my throat—"then he is the devil? Oh, George, it cannot be. Surely—"

He took me in his arms and drew me to him. I was trembling. I could feel his hands fondling my hair and his hot breath against my forehead. He kissed me; it was like the pouring of his soul into that one caress.

"It hurts me," he said, "to tell you. Until I met you I was evil; the most

evil one in all the world. I have stolen fortunes. I have taken a delight in toppling over the great and powerful. I have wantoned and wallowed in untold riches! I have had a heart of steel and no mercy. I have had a delight in the wicked; I hated truth and virtue. I contaminated all with which I came into contact.

"I am not human. I have been warped, twisted, and thrown into infinity. I have come out an angel—an angel of evil.

"It was our compact. For my soul I was to have all this. But I have made no compact with the devil. Of that you may be sure. No, Roselle, he is not the devil."

That was even worse. He must be even more evil. He could not be a man. What use would one man have for the soul of another?

"Then," I said, "you do not know who this terrible one may be?"

"I know nothing. He is terrible, as you say. He is neither sex no gender. He is evil—abstract. But you must not think him supernatural. He is not. That much I know. It is a combination of laws and forces. I am merely the product of an unknown law, a miracle, an unguessed concept.

"And that is the strangest part of all. I who have everything else am refused this one thing. In this I am not one whit wiser than a man. I know naught of the law that governs my existence. I only know that I am not man—that is as we conceive man. Neither am I spirit. I know not what I am."

Was there ever such a confession? Was ever a girl wedded to such a husband? He was great, wonderful, magnetic. He was not an automaton. He was flesh and blood and life and passion. He was as human as myself. And yet by his own words he was something else. What was he?

I ran my hand over his splendid features; I could feel the warmth of life blood, the pulse of his heart-beats, his moist breath flushed against my fingers. He could love. He must be human. I dwelt over each perfect detail, tenderly stroking each curve and muscle.

In the darkness I could sense the eyes that glowed with passion; eyes somber, blue, smoldering, yet clear with life and genius. No man ever loved as he. It was his all—it was holy.

It swept and consumed me like a flame. I could understand what it was for a maiden to be loved by an angel. Ah!

That was the answer. If he were not a man he must be an angel. It seemed impossible, but it must be so. I was not versed in mystics; but what other thing could he be? He performed miracles; he was controlled by no human power nor action. Why was it impossible? His love, his genius, his beauty—everything proclaimed it.

### CHAPTER XXX

#### THE COMPACT OF EVIL

“**G**EOURGE,” I said, “you are—you have not sold your soul; do not say it—you are an angel.”

He gripped me convulsively and went into laughter, the musical, clear, bell-like mirth that was always his. When he laughed there was a melody that was pervading. I cuddled in his arms. I was a frail, foolish flower compared to his spirit.

“Spoken,” he said, “like a true love. I did speak but figuratively. I am not an angel. I am not holy. An angel is eternal. I can die.”

I placed my hand over his mouth.

“Do not say it,” I said.

Tenderly he drew my hand away.

“You must hear me, Roselle. Come, I am getting nowhere. I must tell you. The Master will be here shortly.

“If I was to be an angel, little one, I was to be one of destruction. We sealed the compact. I was young and foolish. I was to have everything—he was to have my soul. We both were satisfied. Our bargain was specific.

“But it chanced, in this one case, that the devil overstepped his wisdom. I was to have everything; not a thing excluded. As long as I followed the paths of evil I was wrought unto his purpose. He had thrown me into the infinite and brought me back even as powerful as himself.

“Yes, more powerful, for I am fearless, and in me there is still some speck of virtue. It was this that was the undoing of our pact. It drove us into mortal combat. Now he fears me and would slay me. He dares not be open; he cringes with his hatred. I defy him with my laughter. One of us must slay the other. And it was you who did it.”

“I! I did it!”

“Yes, you, Roselle. It was your love. I was to have everything, the earth and all its fulness. When I was thrown into the infinite I was tempered a millionfold. No

man can love a noble woman and still be evil. My love is as a thousand; it is the fact of my creation. I cannot help it. I had still a spark of virtue. You have fanned it into a conflagration.

“And therein comes the conflict.

“The thing of evil is against me. He was sworn to man’s destruction. I was to be his instrument. I was to ride with the whirlwind. All things were moving nicely—until I found you.

“The inevitable happened. I loved you. My love engulfed me; I who was being tossed in the whirlpool found suddenly a thing to live for. With it came virtue. Your little hands have plucked me out of the tides of evil.

“My status has been broken. I who am the Rebel Soul am now a rebel against both God and the devil. I am alone. I am brilliant; have genius and fear nothing. For myself I care nothing. But I must look after you. That is why I have called the Master.”

“But George,” I interrupted, “you must not talk so. God is not against you. You are good now, instead of evil. There can be no middle course. God is always with you.”

He looked at me queerly.

“With me, Roselle? God? That is impossible. It cannot be. You must remember that I am George Witherspoon. And I do not care. I am neither man nor spirit. I am an anomaly. In the credence of ordinary mankind I am impossible. I cannot come under religion; I am outside of all your rules. I am alone.”

“No, no, George; not alone!”

He thought a moment.

“No, not alone. I will amend that. I have you and the Master.”

“Myself and the Master?” I said. “I can understand myself. I am your wife. What has the Master?”

“That is what I must tell you,” he answered. “I am not exactly alone. There is one who, I think, may understand me. Certainly he is different from the others. He is wisdom, he is thought, he is greater than his fellows. He is receptive, he has imagination. I have known him since my boyhood. I have been his pupil; he is the only one who has ever been able to inspire my admiration.

“The Master is good; he has not one spot of evil; he is old and has perfect poise. Even in my youth, when I was a flame of evil, I had reverence for his greatness. There is a possibility that he may understand me.

"Certainly I do not understand myself. Therein I am as weak as any mortal. I am not boasting. I can do magic. I can overstep all rules of thinking. I transcend all time and distance; but I cannot interpret the simple law of my causation.

"I am at conflict with a devil. I am fearless. Nevertheless wisdom is still the better part of valor. So I have called the Master. It may be that in time not distant you will need him. Things may happen.

"He who is good in all things will not hesitate to give you the benefit of his learning. Obey him implicitly. And remember—I cannot be defeated. I shall triumph even over the devil. Yes, even if I have to follow him into hell."

It was terrible to hear him talk so. But I was under the glow of his genius. It was impossible to be near him without being stirred to the depths by the magnetism of his personality. Although I was fearful, and had a feminine dread, I had a thrilling eagerness for the conflict that was impending.

I believed him. It was stupendous—it was heroic. He was not only against all mankind, but against all existence.

Alone, great, beautiful, fearless! My husband!

For my sake, and because of the emotions I had aroused, he was a rebel, even against that which had made him the Rebel Soul. He was greater than the St. George who went forth to slay the dragon. He was without hope of salvation, he cared not, he was standing alone against the evils of all darkness. He asked no succor, he was defiant, he would conquer alone by his will and genius.

Just then a servant came in with a card that he presented to my husband.

"The Master! Ah! Show him in at once. Roselle, you shall see the old friend of our childhood. He has a little surprise for you. He will ask it, or it will come as an inspiration."

**I**T WAS the Master. In the shadow, owing to the dark robe that I knew he must be wearing, I could not more than half discern him. But I could sense his presence; the mellowness and peace that proclaims the advent of a kindly presence. George turned on the lights and there he was—the good old Master.

He was smiling. The same old man of serenity and kindness that we had ever known him. He did not appear older;

he had reached that stage of age and wisdom when years have lost their withering power. As of old, he was robed in solid black, which was accentuated by the white cuffs that protruded slightly from the sleeves above his finely tapered hands and fingers.

There was always something about the Master that spoke perfection; even in his years something of the litheness of the panther, ease, elegance, and delicacy. In his youth he must have been splendid; he who in his age had such poise and bearing. There was nothing infirm about him; but a grace and delicacy of movement which even a youth might envy.

In all respects he was the old Master of our childhood—his beard the same white silver, his eyes the same soft kindness, mellow with good will and understanding and dancing with the limpid shimmer that betold his wisdom.

He looked to the one and to the other. Surprise and congratulation.

"Well, well," was his cheery greeting. I could not forbear embracing him, and of weakening into a little sob. Like an old grandfather he patted the hair of my head. I heard him mutter: "Roselle." I think that even he was a little softened.

George found him a chair. They shook hands, and I could not but mark the keenness and intensesness with which each regarded the other. It was not a mere look, but an interpretation, as if each was peering into the soul of the other. They stood thus with their hands clasped, George frank and smiling. I noticed that the old man's eyes grew brighter, an incredulous but for all that delighted intuition lighting them into soft glowing.

"George!" he exclaimed, pressing the hand that he held. "George, my boy. Is it true?"

"It is true," said my husband.

What he meant by that I do not know. But it pleased the Master. His smile grew broader. He pressed George's hand with deep emotion.

"At last, my boy, at last! I was always sure that you would come back to the Master. Such is a woman. I was certain of Roselle. You would do anything for her?"

"Anything in the world, my Master."

The Master sat down. He was so like a good grandfather. He gave a cursory, fleeting look about the apartment, as if

interpreting us by our surroundings. I could not but smile; it was very good to see him; to have him with us.

George came over and sat on the arm of my chair, with one foot dangling and one arm behind me.

It seemed to please the Master, as if he was beholding just the one thing that he had come for. The twinkle in his eyes had just a suggestion of the mischievous.

"What is a woman?" he asked.

George laughed. The imputation was no doubt myself, and the hold I had upon him.

"You have guessed it," he answered. "You foretold; it has happened exactly as you predicted."

"Just so," smiled the Master. "Roselle, you are to be commended. You found the old man's advice worthy?"

I did not answer at once, but the slight pressure that I gave to George's hand, and the one I received in return, was a silent attestation that we both understood him.

"It was worthy, Master. I have never doubted. It has had its reward," I said at last.

"It is good," he said, "to see you and to find you so." Then with a little severity in his tone: "You are both rebels."

**T**HE intonation of the last remark was of that slight degree that expresses mild reproval. I had done no wrong that I was aware of.

"Am I a rebel, Master? You speak as if I had done ill. Was it wrong that I love George Witherspoon?"

"I am afraid, Roselle," he said, "that your love has made you a bit selfish. You are both very wicked. You have fortified yourselves by isolation. You have fled away from all others to be by yourselves.

"I can understand George here; he was forsworn on the day he attained manhood, he was ever an insurgent and a rebel; he ran away from his Master—but I cannot understand Roselle. What has become of the little girl who was ever so pretty and confiding, who was so soft-hearted, and who was ever so solicitous of her loved ones?"

The reflection of his voice had shifted almost into scolding. It was not harsh; but of the mild sting of disappointment. I could not understand it. It pleased him that we were happy. I had done nothing that could merit censure. Unless, indeed, it was to love my husband;

and that plainly had his approbation. I could but wonder.

"I do not understand you," I answered. "What is it, Master? What have I done?"

He smiled calmly, and looked, not at me, but at my husband. I fancied a note of recognition. I glanced inquiringly up at George, then at the old man before me.

"Please, please tell me," I said. "What have I done? What loved ones?"

At the same time that I realized that there was something strange about the interrogation, I became suddenly aware of a shadow, of an emptiness, of something missing out of my life. The words of the Master stirred dim sovereign memories, vague, calling, but forgotten. It was something that I must regain. I tried to remember. The old man helped me.

"Roselle," he said kindly, "you have not written. Have you forgotten Clara, Walter, and the children?"

So that was it! That was the part of my life that had been blotted out. I had forgotten. Why was it? The very best things of my girlhood had been washed away. The sound of your names was an open sesame to my recollections. On the instant the old life walked before the screen of my memory. I could see you, Walter and Clara, the children, the home among the madronas, the quaintness and beauty of our little city.

The children playing beneath the full sweet blossoms of the big magnolia. A curtain had been snatched away. The old home, the scent of the far Pacific; the soft wind from the bay, the blue, limpid sheen of water in the distance.

I could hear the whistle of the familiar local; the birds chattering their insistent melody in the trees; the unrestrained glee of childish laughter. My heart yearned with sudden longing, to see and be with that which I had so long forgotten.

For a moment I was silent with the excitement of my recollections. It was incomprehensible. And I had forgotten! The dearest memories of all my lifetime! Though I was accustomed to the impossible, there was no explaining this ungrateful lapse of memory. All my loved ones! It had been years since I had seen them. And I had forgotten!

I must have risen; George was speaking, and he caught me gently by the arm.

"Sit down, Roselle," he said, "It was I

not you. You are blameless. It was I who erased the past from your memory. You shall write to them in the morning. It is the surprise that the Master was to bring you. You must write to Clara and to Walter."

"Why did you do this?" I heard the Master asking. I heard them, although my thoughts were miles away. My present surroundings and the shiftings of my memory were woven together into a blurred distinctness. "Why did you do this?"

George laughed shortly.

"Why? I presume you know. I was the Rebel Soul. And I loved her. Why was I to share her love with another? What cared I for her recollections? It was my nature to take that which I desired. I hated the ones from whom I had taken her. She was mine; I kept her for myself."

"And it is different now?"

"Yes, Master, it is different now. I—"

But he went no further. He stopped as if he could give no fuller words; they were full of meaning, as if a new man had spoken. It pleased the old man. I remember the gratitude in his benediction.

"Amen," said the Master.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE VENGEANCE OF EVIL

**A**LL this occurred two days ago. Since then we have returned to Xanadu. I am very happy. I have been writing steadily on this letter, which is not a letter at all, but a book. It is not my fault that there is so much to relate.

There are other things that I might tell, but I have only touched on what is the most important. It is so uncertain that I doubt whether you will understand me. And no wonder.

When I glance back over what I have written I cannot but feel that every occurrence, however trivial, is of the abnormal. According to all rules and conduct, such a tale could not be true. We are anomalies, myself and my husband, we are out of the laws and fashions, we are impossible. Yet we are true, living and potential.

It is so much like a tale that I sometimes find myself doubting my own fancy. It is much like a dream; it is indeed the land of nowhere. When I look back on the realities that once existed,

the prosaic life of my girlhood, and contrast it with the illusive, filmy witchery of the present, it seems to me that I am like one on a beautiful height gazing down on the prosaic, mist-covered expanse of forsaken valley.

Below us are the streaks and shadows, the level life of the common; about us are the heights and colors, beauty, grandeur, ruggedness and adventure. We are in the clouds, nearer to infinity, closer to the sunshine. Though we live near mankind and may see him, though we may rub elbows with him by day, we are for all that aloof in the distance.

When I was a girl I was forever delving into some book of the early writers; some tale of early discoverers, buffeting on through the storms of unknown waters, sailing up misty channels, through newfound gates, and past strange headlands, nosing into the limpid bays and rivers, poking about for the golden cities and the people of the sun.

No girl ever perused with such a thrill for adventure. It was a time of enchantment, of lure and call, of brave men and heroes; of fair women. For hours I would seclude myself in my room, and, while the curtains of the past were lifted, spring full swing with my imagination into the age of heroes.

Then would come the awakening. I would look out of the window up the hot paved street and watch the lazy grocery boy making his languid deliveries, the pedestrians swinging along the sidewalk, a butcher wagon twisting around a corner or an automobile bearing a fat and placid drummer down the highway. The air would be hot and stifling; a shimmer of heat danced above the pavement. It was prosaic, it was all a sameness.

My heart would swell with impotent rebellion. To be condemned to such an age! To live like a mere insect in this age of money! Money, money, money; that is all we cared for; that is all we thought of. There were no more heroes. There were no more lands of great adventure; no misty continents beckoning from afar, no uncharted channels, no northwest passages awaiting in solitude for the great discoverer, no tiny barks on the storm-tossed ocean.

It was the age of barter, of commerce, and civilization. Balls and theaters were our amusement, or a motor trip up into

the mountains. The girls did not love their men for their bravery and their heroism, but for their looks and wealth. Those who married settled down to a life of flat, even years to raise more children to make more money. The blood had run out of humanity and run golden.

Where were our heroes?

My mind was filled with the heroes of romance. I wanted red-blooded men, full of sacrifice; strong, manly, who were willing to stand against the world for an attainment, pulsing, full throbbing, active. I cared not for market heroes. I wanted a man and a fighter.

It was that that drew me to George Witherspoon. I had heard his story. He was alone. All men feared him. He was great, wonderful, and a criminal. At least that is what they called him. Society had set its standard; the police had measured him by it and had found him lacking.

Either that, or he was above our society and standards. He had laughed at their restrictions and had defied them; he was great enough to take measure of his greatness, he was brave enough to defy convention. He was himself; he was alone.

What a sequel! I had longed for adventure. I am sure no girl has ever before lived such a life as I have. I have been borne to the land of nowhere; to the home of the sunshine, to the realm where the impossible may ever happen. Such is my husband!

I am happy. After all that has occurred, the warning, the mystery, the foreboding, it does seem meet that I be depressed and worried. But I am not. And after all, why should I be? Have I not asked for the sunshine? Has not my husband promised? It is impossible that I even think in sadness. I am attuned to music, the melody that is the spirit of George Witherspoon. He pervades me like an exultation.

And now in closing.

You know that I am happy. I am sure that you will rejoice at hearing from the one who was with you so much of her girlhood.

You have no doubt been always fearful, dreading what might have fallen. I can understand your forebodings and what you may have thought of my husband.

Oh, Walter! Do not harbor any thoughts of evil. Remember him as he was in your childhood—beautiful, won-

derful, good. He is mystery; but he is not evil. Though I know not what he is, he is at least my husband. He is good, kind, gentle. Whatever may happen our love can have no wither.

And now, good-by. Love to all and the little ones. Kisses all round. Your Roselle.

P. S.—It was but yesterday that I finished your letter. I was so happy. It did seem that I was living in the sunshine. I am not happy now.

It is hard for me to think clearly after what has happened. But I must write; I must tell you.

It is that terrible thing of evil. My husband! I am sure it is the thing of evil. Oh, why can it not allow me to have my husband? What have I done?

But I must tell you. And I must hurry, because I am afraid.

IT WAS last night. I had just finished your letter. I was so happy. My thoughts were back with you and the little ones, and the white magnolias, and the scintillations of the ocean sunset. I could see the waters. I could almost see myself standing by you, peering into the distance at a steamer just tipping the horizon, creeping in from far-off China.

My heart was with you. It does seem strange that such a climax of my happiness should be the moment of my disaster. I had arisen mechanically from my desk and stepped over to the window.

What I saw was not the waters, but the green lawn of the park, and the shadetrees, and behind them the beautifully tinted sky of our own French sunset. Half absently I noticed some one walking beneath the trees in the distance. Then again, and this time I saw my husband.

He was coming up the driveway; he was afoot and walking hurriedly; he was bareheaded. At the moment it struck me as unusual. There was something in his bearing, in his gait, that did not seem as it should be. It is strange that I should have noticed it from such a distance.

His hat was clutched tightly in one hand. As he came closer I could see that he was breathing heavily, his mouth was open, he must have been running. I could not understand it. There was that in his steps that told of evil. It must be something terrible indeed when it could so stir George Witherspoon.

As he approached the mansion he broke into a run. Below I could hear the patter of his feet as he rushed up the marble steps. A door swung open. I could hear him on the stairs.

I turned to greet him; to be ready for his smile. It was the one great hour of the day that I longed for. The door swung open, and he was standing there before me. I heard his voice.

"Roselle."

Never shall I forget that moment.

Oh, Walter! He was standing there, his arms outstretched. He was beautiful. His face was clear-cut and ennobled with passion and devotion. He was sacrifice and yearning. But there was something else. I saw it and I screamed. I ran over to him. His arms closed about me. I could see it. He was blind!

He held me tightly. I could feel his heart beating; the pulse was even. His fingers ran over my features. He kissed me.

"There, there," he said, "I have found you."

He was not frightened. There was that in his voice of a great calmness.

"Oh, George!" I exclaimed, "what has happened? What is it? You are blind! You have been stricken."

He laughed.

It was strange and unnatural that he should be mirthful. It rang with a mockery that was defiance. His arm came down about my waist.

"It is nothing, Roselle. I am blind, but it is nothing. The devil has merely lost his head. I am not the only one who is wallowing in the darkness.

"Besides, I have you. You are everything; I can feel you, I can hear you breathing. It is the first blow of the conflict. He cannot win. I am his Master."

He laughed again. Never have I heard such laughter. It was more like gloating, as though he were watching some secret spectacle, some quick stroke of his genius.

"Let us sit down, Roselle, that we may talk while still we may. There, now—let me have your hand."

He took it and turned my wedding ring thoughtfully about my finger. I was frightened, dismayed, at this sudden disaster; I sensed immediately what had happened. The first blow had fallen; the terrible one had struck.

What had been the retaliation? I knew my husband; that his wrath would be

even more terrible than the other's venom. The two were in conflict. Only one could triumph. Again I heard his laughter.

"Roselle," he said, "I have called the Master. It has come at last. I am blind. How long I am to remain so I cannot tell. That is for my devil. In his narrowness and evil he thought that I loved only your beauty. It is the heart of evil that it cannot know virtue. He has overreached himself; in the superlative moment he has lost his head, which is the way of evil."

Again he laughed.

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "George, why do you laugh? Why do you laugh? It is terrible. I—"

He clutched me.

"Listen, Roselle," he said, "I have been stricken. You shall see why I laugh. You shall see the other. I struck back. I, too, can wield the fire. We shall see who is the Master. I cannot be conquered. You shall see it. See!"

At the word the room went to darkness. I was frightened, and clung to him, trembling.

"On the side wall, Roselle," he whispered; "on the side wall. See it?"

Then I beheld it.

**I**T WAS as a screen laid before the shadows, a perfect vision shot into the distance, to a place I knew not of; a room stricken and dirty—a dark room. On the floor were books and papers, on the walls shelves of books reaching to the ceiling.

It was a room of shadows, only half lit by the electric globe that glowed in the corner. The carpet was of dark and fantastic pattern; the windows were high and the light was slanting. In another corner was a bed with tumbled blankets. I noticed that they moved; that they were heaved and tossing. At first I could not distinguish more, the light was so dim and musty, and the place so filled with shadow.

But just then a streak of light streamed through the window and filtered through the shadow, falling slantwise. Never shall I forget what it lighted. A form upon the bed, in convulsion, terrible, ghostly. The mouth was open, the eyes were bulging, the tongue was black and swollen, its whole body was writhing. Never shall I forget that face! The eyes blinked at me like twin dots of centered hatred. It was the thing of evil!

I shut my eyes in horror. When I opened them it was springing about the room in the agony of convulsion. It was like a rat. It was caged; terrible and impotent. Its arms were about its stomach. It would roll and tumble, pant and blink its hatred. Never was a thing more wretched nor in greater agony. And yet never was a thing that deserved less pity.

"Blind, blind," George was saying; "and I wonder just how long?"

I shut my eyes to exclude the horror that I was beholding. When I opened them the scene had vanished.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "it is terrible; it is unnatural; it is unholy!"

He pressed my hand as he answered:

"I was taken to the mountain, Roselle. The devil and I both were foolish; we must make payment of our folly. It is a question of endurance, a contest for the rule of darkness. You see that I am powerful. I have been stricken; but I have not been stricken singly.

"It is you for whom we are fighting. It is a question whether I may have the love of a noble woman or whether I am to be the slave of wickedness forever. Our compact was made upon the mountain; I was to have the earth and its fulness. I shall have it. I shall triumph—a compact is binding even to the devil. I am unconquerable; the virtue you have instilled shall override all this evil."

It was good to hear him say so; but it was a portent. The struggle was but beginning; these two beings, so far removed from others, were in mortal conflict. I shuddered with dread for what might be impending; I longed for the Master.

I would not leave my husband; he was blind, and it was urgent that he receive my ministrations. I knew not what might happen; my thoughts were tumultuous. In my dread and horror I could not think clearly; I was frail and alone between two mighty forces. It was away from reason; they were fighting with unknown weapons; they were impossible; yet real, tangible, potent.

I was the woman—it was myself for whom they were fighting; my love had been the inspiration that had snatched George away from evil. These two beings who were so like spirits were testing out their souls by a contest of bodily endurance. It was terrible and unearthly; and I shuddered to think of what it might come to. "Love, love," had said the Mas-

ter; "you will be triumphant." Did he foresee such a struggle? And, if he did, might it not be that he would help me?

I spoke to my husband.

"Did you say that you have sent for the Master? Can he do anything? Surely, with all his wisdom, he can throw the balance into your favor. You know his maxim."

He drew my hand over into his lap and stroked it; although his eyes were sightless, there was a passion and beauty in his face, an expression that betold his greatness.

"Roselle," he said, "I have sent for the Master. You are not afraid, are you?"

It was another instance of his power. I don't know why, but for the moment I was calm and settled.

"No," I answered, "I am not. I was but now that you have spoken I feel brave and courageous. You pervade my spirit. How do you do it?"

He smiled.

"I am glad," he returned. "It will do for the present; but there will come a time, very shortly, when you must be calm of your own volition. Then you must remember that you love me. Think of nothing else. Remember that you are fighting to keep a soul out of darkness. Do not leave my body."

"Your body! You will not die!"

"No, no, little one. It will not be death; but very nearly so. I must tell you. Let no one have my body. I shall not be dead, though death may be stamped on my features. Life is only animation; it will be suspended."

At the moment his hand grew clammy cold, a tremor ran through his body, a shudder, as if something was being pulled asunder; his form became limp and collapsed; in spite of my frantic efforts he lurched forward and fell inert, dragging me with him. His lips alone were moving; like injunctions from another world I heard his words, faint and indistinct: "Roselle—love—Master—don't surrender."

That was last night.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE END OF THE LETTER

AS SOON as I could calm myself I called a servant. Together we placed him on a bed. I smoothed the pillows and laid him back upon them. He was natural in his beauty, like one sleeping;



his lips were wreathed with a pleased expression.

I stroked the fine locks of yellow hair away from his forehead, twisting it back between my fingers. As I drew them away the hair sprang into curls and ringlets. I touched his cheek—it was cold. The heat of life was leaving quickly. He was not breathing.

Nevertheless I told the servant that he was in no danger. I did not wish for a doctor. He had given me warning, and his words filled me with courage. I assured myself that he was merely sleeping. I would remain with him until the coming of the Master. It was his request.

Yet I will confess that when I was alone and kneeling by the bed and gazing at his features my heart was full of anguish. He was mine, mine; great and beautiful, as splendid as a god; he was like no man living; he was as majestic and imposing as the great dead Alexander. I picked up his hand and caressed it and wet it with my tears. For me he was braving all these perils. He would not surrender.

And what was I that I should awaken all this sacrifice and devotion? I was tender and delicate, a wee little body that might be crushed like an egg-shell! There were many others just as beautiful; thousands with far greater beauty. What was I that I should be so chosen; to be the wife of such a husband; to be wedded to infinity; to be mated with a being like this!

He was mystery. My love had brought him back to virtue. I, who was such a little thing had been a potent force in his salvation. His love had never shown any spotting. To me he had never been harsh for a single moment. The light I have ever known in his eyes was the love-light; it was inspiration like light from heaven, the soothing soft glow of genius and devotion.

How long I remained kneeling there I do not know. My mind was full of fancies and conjectures—the struggle of my loved one, the power that was against him, the evil—and the thing of evil.

The thought wrought upon me—filled me with terror. I pressed the limp hand, kissed it, and wept over it. It seemed that as I gazed into his face, so set and beautiful, that he could understand me; there was a calmness and repose about it of one who had attained victory. Then I prayed.

Prayed? It was such a prayer as I had never breathed since my childhood. I prayed to our Redeemer; to the one who, thousands of years before, had also been taken upon the mountain. I prayed for forgiveness, for strength, for my husband. He alone knew the battle; He who had fought it to a triumph could understand me. There upon the floor, kneeling by the bed, I stood between the Redeemer and my husband.

I stepped over to the window. Through the curtains I could look up into the wonderful night-sky of early summer. A million stars were gleaming, flickering like the lights of angels, fitting like the lamps of heaven, tiny messengers from the far-off distance.

In the soft breeze that was blowing, in the whispering of the trees, there was a strange concordance. There was in the quietness a peace that would be forever. It was akin to music, a rhythmic enchantment of swinging cadence. It caught me! I clutched the sills as I listened. It was music, strange, weird, entrancing, like the melody of the worlds, a symphony out of the distance.

It died away. I don't know what it really was, but I am sure I heard it. Or perhaps it was just my fancy; or it may have been that for the moment I was lifted up and tensioned so that I could commune with the higher forces. It may have been my prayer.

I returned to the bedside. It was close to midnight. In spite of my prayers and courage I was beginning to feel qualmish. The room was still and lifeless except for the soft rustling of the hangings. Once a paper caught by the breeze through the window blew across the carpet; the noise of its crinkling flight startled me.

I felt myself praying for the Master. It was getting close to the time and hour when anything might happen. My mind was seething—I was not superstitious, but I had seen so much that I could doubt nothing. The training of my childhood had implanted in me an awe for the wee hours of the early morning. Besides, the room was so quiet; I was alone, and—I thought of the scene I had beheld upon the side wall. Ever it comes back to that—and my husband. I must do something.

So you see why I am writing this postscript. I am alone, waiting for the Master. My husband is upon the bed in a death sleep. I am fearful—almost trem-

bling. As the hours have passed I have felt my courage stealing from me. I am afraid.

George is here, helpless and defenseless. Where is the Master? What can I do, who am so little? Every moment that I write I can feel something stealing toward me—my mind is growing weaker and my fear increasing. I don't know why it should be. Let me see. I shall be brave, strong and courageous. Love—I write it that I may see it. I don't know, as I shall write much more until I have seen it.

What am I saying? Something—something. Oh, Walter, there is something; I don't understand it. It was terrible! I am afraid! If the Master does not come, something surely will happen.

Oh—

**T**HAT was all. The remarkable post-script came to a sudden ending. Just when we were all unstrung, unnerved, and wrought to a height of feeling came the abrupt conclusion.

It was now late in the evening. We had not stopped for dinner; we had long since turned on the lights to assist our reading. In the shadow I could see Clara. Her face was twitching, in a tightly clenched fist the last sheet of paper. My throat was parched. I dreaded the import of the ending.

It was not natural. Something had happened. After all our happiness and hope of the past few hours was to come this shock and disappointment. The sudden stop, the abrupt break in the sentence proclaimed more plainly than words what may have happened. I felt suddenly cold and deadened; I arose unsteadily and stepped over to my wife.

Her eyes were dim and misty, her breast heaving; with one hand she was sorting the leaves of the letter, placing on top of them all the envelope that had enclosed them. As she did so I noticed in one corner a sentence in a handwriting that was familiar. I picked it up and read:

Mailed by the Master

I must confess that the notation of the Master was like a ray of sunshine. Whatever had occurred, at least the old man had arrived. Somehow, throughout all this mystery, he seemed destined to appear at the crucial moment. Whether it was his wisdom, I cannot say, but he

was ever on hand at the right time. George had summoned and he had responded; but had he arrived in time? That now was the whole question.

I called it to Clara's attention. It was our one great ray of hope, and you may be sure that we searched over every sheaf and page for the slightest further message. But we found not one more word; just that, the one sentence, "Mailed by the Master." And there was so much to it that we might interpret by implication, so many ways of construing it—success, triumph, or disaster.

But, however equivocal the message, there was one thing certain—the Master had arrived. That in itself was worth whole reams of promises. He had not tarried, and the mere fact of his presence was proof that all would be done that could be done.

I could understand what the strength of their united personalities would be against this evil. An analysis of what Roselle had written increased the conviction. Everything had come to a quick and sudden turning. George Witherspoon had turned to virtue. He was the George Witherspoon of old, great and fearless—it was a proper climax to his genius.

What a life! To be born a rebel, to be indomitable, to know no lord nor master! How proper it was that he be called the Rebel Soul! No matter what he did he was still in rebellion.

But Clara needed reassurance; the mystery, the unexpectedness, the horror of the whole affair had unnerved her. She loved Roselle, and she had antipathy for the other. To her George had never been other than a wicked scapegrace, splendid, to be sure, and of great personality; but for all that, essentially wicked. The letter we had received, with its tragic ending, was about all that she could bear.

The whole thing was so impossible and so fraught with shadow; and we were in the twentieth century. Was it possible that there were forces which we, with all our science, had not conceived of? It must be so. I could not accept it as supernatural.

Some irresponsible genius for evil was employing some unknown power for his own wicked aggrandizement, and George Witherspoon was his instrument. How glad I was that Witherspoon was a rebel, and the Master was on the ground to help him.



It was like the "Sleeping Beauty" tale beloved of childhood, only here were two asleep—a princess and a real prince, with an old man to the rescue

But Clara was not the one to go into reason, she was thinking of Roselle, and, womanlike, while under the stress of emotion, could only see the worst. I reassured her, and gradually quieted her fears.

"If it were as bad as that," I told her, "the Master would have written. He loves Roselle as much as we do, and he loves us, also. He would not fail us in an emergency, he merely had not time, it was rather an abrupt ending; you telephoned that she was happy."

"I know I did," she answered. "But, Walter, it was so much like a book. I had read only the first few pages, I was so glad. I never dreamed—it is so mysterious, so impossible. Were it not for the handwriting I would not believe it Roselle at all; it is too much like imagination. Why must we and ours be picked out for these manifestations of the impossible?"

"Not impossible, Clara," I amended, "or there would be no manifestations."

"I know," she answered. "Why we?"

I smiled at that, because really I could not answer it. I could only say:

"I suppose there must be some one."

We had dinner, a late one, eating perfunctorily, merely to satisfy our bodies. But it did us a world of good. There is nothing that conduces to optimism like a good full stomach; it is wonderful how our feelings fluctuate with our appetites. We returned to the letter.

It was deep in the morning when we ceased our reading, and hours later before we ended our discussion. We analyzed thoroughly and endeavored to find coherence, but it was impossible. It was indeed a message out of nowhere, all upside down and out of reason, but we were certain of its truth, we had faith in the Master.

Incredible as it may seem we were inspired with courage and a trust in the future. I don't know why, but after that first break of disaster we breathed more freely. Things were coming to a climax. We felt, somehow, that we were to have Roselle, and, who can tell, perhaps George Witherspoon.

When I retired to my room I stepped over to the window. I could not help thinking of some of the last words Ro-

selle had written. Here, too, the stars were gleaming, the same stars that she had looked on. Here, too, the trees were rustling, a permeating peace spread out forever. It was like reading into a soul to gaze up into the night's great distance, there was a pulse to earth that beat to music, a great throbbing rhythmic cadence that swung into a melody that was earth and heaven.

Roselle and George Witherspoon! Where were they? Let the good God protect them!

Then I went to bed, and I dreamed for the thousandth time of George Witherspoon—the George Witherspoon of my childhood.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

#### AT THE HOUSE OF THE SEVENS

FROM that day on, as you may surmise, we watched the mails very closely. We were unstrung and unnerved by waiting; it seemed that word must come very shortly; we both of us thought, with the promptings of our hearts, that more news would soon be forthcoming. We cheered ourselves with the anticipation that it would be of the kind that we could welcome.

But none came. The days drew into summer, and then again into autumn, and as each day receded our hopes grew dimmer. From the very first the whole case had been a fluctuation of excitement. First would come a storm and a very tempest of mystery and excitement, and then would come reaction; the whole thing would go to the doldrums and there would be no stir whatever.

Months went by, one after another. Not a word. With our anxiety and concern we were tensioned almost to the breaking-point. Whenever I came home in the evening Clara would be waiting.

"Not a word?" she would ask.

"Not a word," would be my answer.

It was hard to say it, but there was nothing else to tell her. Of course I endeavored to cheer her, and did my best to hold up her spirit. But the load was heavy. I noticed with great solicitude the look of sadness that was growing into her features. And she had been beautiful. The little wrinkles were coming about her eyes and her lips had a way of drooping; there was a hopeless yearning about her whole expression. Not even the children cheered her—her

thoughts were ever on Roselle and her danger.

As the time wore on I also went more to worry; I spent whole hours at the bank in brooding thought. I began to neglect my business. It was difficult now to attend to details. Everything that I could I left to my assistants. I had but one thought and object—Roselle.

Until now I had no idea that one could so focus his thinking. Whatever I did and wherever I went I could derive no pleasure. I was growing old with worry.

At last I could stand it no longer. I journeyed over to the city and threaded through the streets until I came to the House of the Sevens. It was the same as it was when first I had found it; the great blank wall with not a single window and the black, heavy door in the center. The numbers on the door were slightly tarnished, arranged in the same diamond:

7  
777  
77777  
7777777  
77777  
777  
7

I recalled the day when I first had found it and the coincidence that had led me to the doorway. As I gazed on the blank wall it seemed emblematic. It was the home of the Master; it was the place of wisdom—and it had but a single entrance.

I caught the significance: "But a single road to learning." In that place I had once before found succor—it was there that I had first met the Master. Here was neverending research and study; here the doings of the earth were classified and shelved for reference; here was wisdom.

I turned the knob and entered. It was the same as ever. The old porter was seated on the same stool where first I had seen him. He was reading the same everlasting magazine; his clothes were the same faded black. He glanced up as I entered.

"Ah," he said, "this is a surprise, Mr. Warren!"

"Yes," I returned, "I do not come often, I am mostly a man of business. But even I have need at times of wisdom. Have you seen the Master?"

His face grew saddened.

"No, no," he answered. "No, the Master? It has been years since I have seen

him. He is gone. I do not know, even, if he will return; they do not tell me. Can you—"

"No, I cannot. It was that which brought me—I had hoped to find him. I suppose I must be satisfied with the others."

He opened the door that led out of the vestibule into the main part of the building. It was much the same. The same cone-shaped arrangement; the rooms serried along the sides, the same clatter of typewriters; the same clerks and students.

At the lower end of the cone was the great glass room of the Master. It was deserted. The chair was drawn up to the desk and the books arranged with order and precision. It was as it should be. There was no one who could take the place of the Master and his desk was sacred.

A man came forward, a Mr. Thompson; he was one of the Master's chief assistants; I had met him once before. He was tall, slender, black-eyed and slightly stooped; his hair had receded so that now he was not only figuratively but literally a highbrow. In his hands he held a roll of papers. I had noted that everybody in this strange place was forever holding papers, notes, clippings, odds and ends gathered from the ends of the earth. I had often thought that, however they might classify their strange philosophy, it was at least Baconian in its method; it was the most minute thing I ever saw in its detail.

"Ah, Mr. Warren! This is unexpected. Is there something I can do? You were looking for some one?"

**T**RUE to his code, his eyes had a wondrous softness; there was a mellowness about his voice, a fluent kindness. He led me to an office. It was a small one, with dark-toned fittings, though wonderfully well lighted; the desk and all the furniture was of walnut, dark and somber; a series of bookcases at one side of the room reached up to the ceiling. By my every-day habit of reading titles I made an approximation. The strangest assortment I had even seen—Hindu, Sanskrit, Chinese, Hebrew, and not a few German works, whose titles wandered all over the backs like a jumbled sentence.

I wondered whether it was possible that he had driven his brain through all this wisdom. In an adjoining room were

a number of stenographers busily engaged with copy. He closed the door.

"You were asking for the Master. I presume you are interested in the case of George Witherspoon?"

I nodded. I wondered whether he knew more than I did. I had always been under the impression that the Master had retained this case for his own special direction.

He tapped on the desk with his fingers. I noted absently that they were long and tapered, the nails pink and transparent; on one finger was a ring monogrammed with a number seven.

"A strange case," was his comment. "The most remarkable on record. Have you heard from the Master?"

Now that was just the object of my visit. He was interrogating me on the very point on which I desired information. But I happened to remember the writing on Roselle's letter. This I told him. I did not go into detail, as I did not think there was time, nor did I know whether he would understand it.

At the recital his face brightened. He ceased thrumming with his fingers and listened to me with alert attention.

"It is good," he said when I had finished—"good to hear from the Master. Do you know that is the first word that we have received of him for two long years? We were growing worried. It was his orders, but we were just about at the limits of endurance. Our only guarantee of his safety was that his drafts had been cashed in Paris. We were becoming alarmed. Many things might happen. The Master is no longer young." I smiled rather vaguely. Somehow I could not picture the old man coming to violence.

"And Wilkins?" I asked.

"Wilkins is with the Master. They had taken this case under their own supervision. George Witherspoon was always to the Master a pet hobby. We collected detail, but the Master supervised it. It was always his contention that Witherspoon was—"

"He called him the Rebel Soul," I said.

"Yes, I know. A rebel. One of the secrets for which we are striving. A personality living and potential in whose body is the great essential, conscious and accessible."

"You mean?"

"That in George Witherspoon is the great secret of all philosophy. The why and the where of mankind."

"The Master told you this?" I asked.

"Not exactly. Except by intimation. I have only become convinced in the last three weeks of its importance. It was always looked upon until recently as the Master's own special case. Of course we all knew something about it, but we had never gone into detail. Even now I would not be in it but for the Master's absence."

"You were alarmed?"

"Exactly. He had sent us no word whatever. He is a very old man. If anything had happened we would continue the work where he had left it. We must find the Master. But, first, we must know all about the case on which he is working."

He stepped over to a filing cabinet and returned with a great sheaf of papers. These he spread out upon the table. Some were very old and thumb-worn; others new. He waved his white hand over them almost caressingly.

"Somewhere in there, and in George Witherspoon, is one of the greatest secrets of mankind."

It was not exactly news to me. But I knew George Witherspoon. If the truth is in fire, it was my experience that George Witherspoon was a conflagration. He was hard to get at, and he was impossible to handle.

This man, tall and slender, slightly stooped and ascetic, would go out and, with no apparent effort, draw from George his secret. It was the assurance of the scholar; the confidence of the cloister. Somehow I felt that George was in no danger.

"So you were going to the Master's assistance?" I asked.

"To France. Tomorrow."

But just then a door behind me opened and I heard a voice that made me leap from my seat with a joyous exclamation:

"I am sorry, Mr. Thompson. But you have been anticipated. I have returned to calm your worry."

It was the Master!

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE VICTORY

**R**EALLY it was a coincidence—a remarkable circumstance that I should have chosen this day, of all others, to come to the House of the Sevens. But coincidence and the remarkable had been characteristic of the whole case.

The Master, after the usual congratulations, led me down into his own glass office. It was some time before the joy and excitement of his arrival had abated. There were many with whom to shake hands: some of the women wept, and I am afraid that a few of the girls could even have kissed him.

Through it all he smiled like a patriarch who had returned from a long and perilous journey. In this, even he was human—he was here like a great, happy father in the midst of his family. I could understand it; to them and to me, to all of us, he was a saint, not sullen and austere, but mild, mellow, gentle—what love and truth ever should be.

At last we were alone.

"And now, Walter," he said, "I suppose your first question is of Roselle."

Emphatically I nodded.

"Roselle is well."

"And George?"

"George Witherspoon is well, also."

"That is good news," I answered. "Since we received Roselle's letter Clara and I have been in a perfect fever of torment. You wrote nothing—merely, 'Mailed by the Master.' It told so little and left so much to implication."

"It was rather cryptic," he commented. "But at that time I assure you that I was very busy. When I arrived Roselle was unconscious. She must have left off writing and stolen over to her husband. She was lying on the bed beside him.

"Mine was certainly a weird arrival. Accustomed as I am to the unusual, it was much more than I expected. The château was like a place enchanted. Even the servants appeared affected; the whole place was silent. And in that room was the unconscious Roselle—lying appealingly across the breast of her husband.

"I called the servants—all of them—and plied them with questions. But they would not answer. They were blacks, most of them, regular old-fashioned Ethiopians. To my interrogations they only stared blankly. There was something that had come over them one and all that held them in abject terror.

"I tried to reason with them and to reassure them, but it was impossible. For that one room they had a horror as if it were the abode of the devil."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"The only thing that could be done. I returned to the apartment where the pair were sleeping. It was the strangest

thing of all my experience. It was much like the tale that I had read in my childhood—of 'The Sleeping Beauty.' Only here were two—a princess and a real prince, with an old man to the rescue. Had the creepers been all over the castle and the place full of cobwebs, I would have thought myself in the land of fable.

"They were the most beautiful things that I had ever looked on, Roselle and her husband; you have no idea, Walter, of the beauty that is really theirs. And in that moment they were supreme. There is no beauty like abandon. No peace like sleep.

"They had no pulse whatever, and they were not breathing, not even with a stethoscope could I detect the slightest tremor. I had been summoned by George to hurry with the speed of lightning. It did look as if I had come too late."

"But," I interrupted, "what did you do? Surely you must have thought them dead."

"No," he answered, "I did not. They were warm. Dead people are cold. Besides, when I was dealing with George Witherspoon I was ready to accept almost anything; there was nothing for me to do but to accept a long, unbroken vigil. I must not for a moment leave them. It was the first time since his boyhood that George had called me. I must not forsake him. And you know, Walter, how long I had waited for George to call me."

Somehow I had always considered the Master as almost more than human; at that moment I looked into his eyes; they were full of tears; how great must have been his love for this splendid and erratic youth, whom most men had so feared and hated. Whatever he was and whatever his faults the old man had never lost faith in his former pupil.

"It was all inexplicable," he continued after a bit, "until I discovered your letter, or, to be precise, the one that Roselle had written. A strange document, truly; it explained everything."

Explained! I could not but wonder. I had read it over until it was threadbare, and I could make out nothing. It was all enchantment; though I had once been trained to the law and was proficient in analysis, I could not, somehow, get down to the real core and center. I made the confession.

"It is simple," said the Master. "All we have to do is to take the truth just as Roselle has written it. George Withers-

poon has been really taken to the mountain. By whom, we do not know. Perhaps by the devil.

"There are many in this century who do not believe in him, but we have no exact way except sophistry, for refutation. Who can tell? But certain it is that he has been taken to the mountain. At least figuratively. He has been tempted and he has fallen.

"Since the days of his boyhood he has been a mystery; there has always been something different about George Witherspoon. We knew not what it was. We studied and we watched him, but we could not understand him. He was a genius and had intuition more than human; he loved pleasure, was rollicking, good-natured, and was, I am afraid, not a little wicked. But none of us in our fancy had ever imagined that he had sold himself to a devil. It was impossible—"

"Yes," I interrupted, "and it is impossible. This thing of evil, whatever it is, is not the devil. I cannot believe it."

He smiled approvingly, his kind, gray eyes betraying the assent that our minds were thinking.

"Like a page of 'Faust,' is it not? And 'Faust,' we know, was fiction. What concerns us here is that we are dealing in facts, and that George Witherspoon is not lying. One thing we know, and that one thing we can work on. He has sold his soul."

"You believe it?"

"Most assuredly."

"Then the other is the devil. I accept it. What use would one man have for the soul of another?"

"That is just the point," said the Master. "It is all inexplicable. We must solve it, but we have at last made a beginning; we have now a hypothesis to work on—we know a few things. George Witherspoon is hardly human. He has sold himself to the devil; and last and greatest of all he is the devil's master."

**I** SHOOK my head. It was too much for me. I was willing to accept almost anything, but did not wish to rush into absurdity; I could only say:

"His master?"

"Did you not read the letter? The picture on the side wall—the thing of evil—its agony and its torture."

Then I grasped it.

"You mean—" I exclaimed.

"Exactly. George Witherspoon had

thrown him to his torment. Not a thing could help him except surrender. Whatever this one is that has taken George to the mountain, he has been outwitted by his victim. 'The earth and all its fullness.' George chose wisdom, everything—even the powers of the devil. Though he was wicked, he gave no pledge that he would remain forever evil; he retained, even when in the hands of this one, his innate manhood. The other is all evil; George has some good. Therefore he is the stronger.

"Hatred is ever narrow. This thing, whatever it is, hated Roselle, because she had inspired George again into virtue. And it hated George, and wished to watch him suffer. Hatred can never resist a desire for gloating. It struck George with blindness that he might never again behold his loved one; her beauty was to be, to him, sealed up forever. It was the mistake."

"In what way?"

"He left Witherspoon's mind unimpaired. And Witherspoon is the Rebel Soul. He struck back like lightning. He hesitated not one second to enter into combat, even with such a one as this; he is greater even than the one who made him—and he knows it. Roselle beheld what happened."

"And George?"

"He removed himself and Roselle from further harm and danger. The other could not reach him. He was in torment—the torment might continue forever. Even the devil knows when he is beaten."

"And what happened?"

The old man's smile was almost a chuckle, a sort of triumph.

"The only thing that could have happened, Walter. On the fifth day of my vigil George opened his eyes and began laughing. His blindness was gone. The devil had surrendered!"

I thought a bit before I answered. It was incredible, but in this case true to form. At last I spoke:

"I suppose you have found some explanation?" I asked.

"I have not."

"But surely George—"

"Knows not a bit more than you or I do. He knows everything, apparently, but this. He has the power, almost, of spirit; but he knows not a thing of his own causation."

"You asked him?"

"We had a long talk," said the Master. "George is the Rebel Soul. He is incred-

ible. He is impossible. He has powers that we cannot dream of. But in this one respect he is as much in the dark as we are."

"Then," I exclaimed, "Master, it can never be explained!"

He grew even more erect; his kind, mellow eyes looked straight at me; they flickered, as if quizzical at my doubt, but were determined to continue on the course unswerving.

"Oh yes, it can," was his answer.

"How?"

The answer came like a bombshell.

"You and I are going after this thing of evil."

I am free to admit such a statement was startling. I had become accustomed to a passive part in the drama, and it suited my temperament far better than courting active danger. I am not a brave man. I had no desire to be running about and burning my fingers by poking them at the devil. It was too uncanny, too full of shivers. If I must fight, I would far sooner take my frail, worn body out into the street and have it out in the daylight. I begged to be excused.

But the Master reassured me. In his kind way and persuasion he explained to me what he wanted. I was to be a spectator, nothing else. He worked on my love for my old playmate and Roselle; he asked me whether I wished to save them; he had clues that were invaluable, and that he thought would lead to the solving of the mystery. It was my duty.

It was the sort of logic that appealed to my better nature. I did love George, and I had as much feeling for Roselle as I would have had for a daughter. Though not my kindred, they were a veritable part of my destiny. I had been in the whole thing from the beginning; sometimes as an actor and at all times as a spectator. It was impossible, incredible, past all believing. All my teachings and faith had been perverted. George Witherspoon was forever dodging unharmed in and out through all our laws and reasons. There must be some explanation.

**T**HE last is perhaps what most influenced my decision—that and my love and feeling. Even a banker cannot resist curiosity. I was human. As a mere man I longed to have the whole thing solved, to be present with my own eyes and ears at the dénouement.

As an animal I was afraid. But one



could not be mere flesh when near the Master. He compelled higher things, thinking, and lifted you in a plane above mere blood and materiality. It is needless to say that I consented.

The Master rose.

"It is well, Walter. I am glad. I wish to thank you. It is what you should do for your former playmate, for your loved ones. Now go and arrange your affairs for a long vacation. We do not know definitely just how long it will take us. It may be a month; it may detain us a year—perhaps longer. We shall start in about four days."

"Where do we go?" I asked, rising.

He conducted me to the door, his fine old hand on my shoulder.

"Leave that to me, Walter. And trust me. We shall find our way."

And so it was that I returned to the bank. I had a number of capable assistants, and it was easy to arrange for a vacation. In a very short time I had so regulated my business that my departure would be hardly noticed. I had taken several short vacations before; but never before one where my return might be postponed indefinitely. But, of course, it was my own bank that I was leaving, and therefore I could do as I pleased.

But with Clara it was a different matter. Here, I was not exactly—as they say in common parlance—the whole boss of the roost. I have often thought that she was even more the director of my affairs than I was. She was a woman and being such could pull the unseen strings that compelled me to dance to her pleasure. I suppose that is what men have wives for. Certainly I know it is one of the reasons wives have husbands.

She did not at all relish the idea of my going after this thing of evil. It made her shudder. At the first mention she placed her hands over her eyes to shut out the horror. In the first full force of the announcement she was terrified. I confessed, then, how little I was possessed of tact.

At first she was bitter—dead-set against it. She put her foot down and objected flatly. But when I had related the whole story, and she had time to think again of Roselle, she began to soften. With her it was much as it had been with myself. It was our love that stirred us. We could be selfish with our fears when we thought of ourselves, but not when we thought of the others.

The sorrow, the affliction, that had come into our lives might be placed behind us. What was our love if we could not stand the test of sacrifice? We would thrust ourselves into the crucible for their salvation.

Therefore it was that she softened. In a few days she, as well as I, was making ready for my departure. It was a time of trepidation and suppressed excitement, like the start of a great adventure. On the other ends of the poles were our loved ones. It was a pilgrimage into uncertainty, a sort of "Pilgrim's Progress" into the land of shadows. I, a banker with a poor, weak, wizened body was going forth like the knights of old to battle with the goblins.

And so the day wore around. I journeyed over to the city, and from the House of Sevens went with the Master to the railroad station. Of course Clara went along with us. She bore up bravely. It was not until we were about to board the train that she gave away to her feelings; and then at the depot a handkerchief made its appearance. But the Master reassured her.

"Do not worry, Mrs. Warren. There is no danger. It will soon be over. Just think of the ones whom we are after. Think of the sunlight, of love and beauty. We are going after George Witherspoon and Roselle."

Clara answered him through her tears; she nodded her head emphatically.

"I shall be brave, Master; I shall be brave. For Roselle's sake and Walter's."

With that we had our last farewell and were aboard the flier. I had not questioned him as to our destination. I was on the great adventure, and he was the pilot.

Somewhere in this sea of mystery was the island of enchantment. Roselle and George were the fairy ones held by the fiery dragon that we must seek and vanquish. We were two knights of romance.

It made me smile to think of it. A pair of knights, indeed! An old man and a weak and sickly banker. And we were going forth to enter into combat with the devil. Was there ever such a picture?

We sped southward, first along the bay shore, then over the mountains, and finally out in the hot, dry valley that lay between the two great ranges like a broad, bare channel. I asked no questions, but consumed my time with the papers, and half-interested glances out of the windows. As we turned south

again down the valley, through the extended expanse of dry, hot stubble, stretching interminably to the shimmering foothills, I speculated on our destination.

The city of the southland, the land of sunshine! And I could not but give a dry smile at the paradox of the settings. Somehow, always in this case everything must be unusual. It was a case where the upside down must ever be foremost; and where the impossible was the possible. From the beginning it had flaunted the colors and filmy uncertainties of a long-drawn dream. Would there be no awakening?

## CHAPTER XXXV

### IN THE FOG

**I**T WAS morning when we arrived. A fog had settled, and a chill wind was blowing in from the water. The air was permeated with the salt that was the ocean. It was chilly, cutting, shivering to the very marrow. After the great heart of the valley, one felt the cold more than keenly. Outside of the depot we stopped involuntarily and gazed out into the streets at the grim shadows that were half concealed by the mist and the dripping moisture. A gust of wind splashed the fog into our faces.

"Like peeking into chaos," I remarked.

The Master nodded. His beard was already wet with clinging dampness.

"Like chaos," he assented. "You have named it, Walter. But let us hope that it is not exactly true to the appellation. The fog is unusual. May it not be prophetic?"

Whatever he implied, my interpretation of it was interrupted by a lurching of crowded humanity. Cries, shouts, and clamor, and swirling pedestrians. Another train must have arrived, and our two crowds had commingled.

Everybody was hurrying, swinging past us in hasty confusion. Shouts of newsboys, barkers, and a clangor of bells emerged from the fog-bank. A car swung around the circle, hesitated for a moment for its load of passengers, and turned again toward the city. I noted casually that the crowd divided and parted up the sidewalks without so much as noticing one another. Then I saw that in each car were a number of policemen. A newsboy ran out in the street and shook his fist at the conductor.

Then I remembered. The employees of the electric railways were on a strike. The city was in a turmoil. The papers had been full of it, but my mind had been so engrossed with our mystery that I had allowed it to slip almost unnoticed through my memory.

However, it apparently meant nothing to the Master. He sauntered forward, and as he was my guide I could do nothing but follow, although I must confess that I had no desire to ride upon one of these cars that bore only freighted peril. At the curb he halted.

I ventured a suggestion. I had no conviction one way or another; in such questions as this I always held the good American view—there is justice on both sides. I never insisted on riding—partly, I suppose, because I had never yet found the soft side of a brick.

But the Master smiled.

"There is no danger," he said. "We shall ride upon the Municipal; their men are not striking. A car should be along in a moment."

It came. But not until most of the throng had scurried away from the depot. Still, when it swerved about the circle, a good-sized group were waiting. In the jumble, I ascended to an outside seat with the Master. In a moment we were shunting into the city.

I would have approved of an inside seat, but there was not much room, and the car was comfortably filled with women. So I settled down to my place, and wished that my coat was warmer. The wind was cutting through the cold, wet fog-bank with a stab that was like a knife-thrust. I was sitting at the end of the seat next to the wall of the car, where I could get some shelter. Next to me was the Master; beyond him was another.

Like most passengers, I made the customary cursory half analytic examination of my companions. I always do it—I suppose because it is part of human nature to make a conjecture of one's fellows. One almost always finds some character that diverts or arrests attention. From a sweep of the whole car, my mind reverted back to one individual—the man who was seated directly beyond the Master. One glimpse of that face was enough to inspire apprehension.

He was an old, old man, very small, and, from the way he had of leaning with both hands folded over his cane, very feeble. His feebleness was what first

drew my attention—that, and his fingers, and the sinister way he had of clenching and unclenching his hands. There was something about their very tensity and the tightness with which they would clench that held attention. Here must be bitter thinking. I wondered half absently what the owner of such tight, hideous talons might look like. And it happened, even as I glanced up, that the Master moved slightly, so that I could see. I started.

I must confess that never had I beheld such a face, so old and aged, and so unlike man as we know him. The skin, what I could see of it, was crinkled and shriveled like rotten parchment; by an incongruity, the whiskers were black and bushy; the nose slightly hooked, sensitive, and cadaverous; the lips thin, compressed, slightly drooping, and cruel and selfish to a degree that induced a shudder. Then I saw the eyes; they were such a climax that I forgot all his other features.

They were not eyes at all, but twin spots of darkness. They burned and gleamed and glimmered; they were malevolent, hot, and hating—two flaming dots of sin. For a moment they burned into me until I squirmed: their brilliance was red-hot. I drew back for shelter behind the Master. It was my action that drew the man's attention to my comrade.

It was a moment I shall not forget when those two dots of sin centered upon the Master. The little one started and drew erect with a snap; the eyes went sharp, then quavered with a wonderful recognition. It seemed to me that here was fear; but if there was, it was almost choked out with hatred. It was sudden, sharp, and burning; if it was fear, it was a fear that was terrible in its tenseness—the cunning of a madman.

The eyes grew hotter, scintillating with a flaming iridescence; the straight, cruel lips trembled and the vulture nose twitched slightly; it was the convulsive focusing of a hard, cruel nature, of a soul that was burning out with defiance—an unspoken superlative imprecation.

The Master did not notice; or if he did, he maintained a serenity that was goading. The other leaned slightly over; the talons closed silently, fiercely, about the cane; the lips were moving. The Master smiled.

Even there in the car it was uncanny. Somehow I knew, on the moment, that

these two had some sort of affinity; that between these two old men, as opposite as the poles, there was some connection.

The effect of my companion's smile was immediate. The other subsided, turned about, and again faced the traffic; but I noticed that now the hands clenched harder.

I COULD not but wonder. I had never before seen such a creature. And he was dressed much like the Master—the same black cloak, long sleeves, the garb of the ascetic. At a backward glance, where one could not see their faces, one would have classified them as mystics of a kindred order.

Just then the Master turned slightly; his eyes were impregnated with significance, and he nodded. It was confirmation of my suspicions. He knew him.

By this time we had reached the crowded retail business section of the city. The fog had grown still denser. On the sidewalk, shifting up and down, the pedestrians stalked with the sauntering vagueness of ghosts. Automobiles greased heavily over the pavement; the moist-laden clatter of delivery sogged through the fog-bank; the car halted intermittently for passengers and again surged forward. I was cold and miserable.

We had come to the heart of the city. Out of the density I could hear the clatter of many hammers, the clinking of steel, and the noise of riveters. The fog lightened suddenly; and out of the sky, out of a building, I watched a long rope dangle. The car stopped suddenly. A girl, not more than a child, fair-haired and very pretty, ran out from the sidewalk. She motioned, and waited timidly until the car had stopped.

I smiled as I watched her wait for the complete cessation of the car's movement; a supplementary picture of a mother's warning giving the explanation of her caution. She was tremulously eager, for all her precaution. One little hand she held out eagerly; with the other she clutched her bundle. She was very pretty. Her skin was of that delicate sheen of color that is never given except in childhood; her curls were glistening with the moist crystals of the fog mist. Surely she was the last thing in the world that could presage a tragedy.

There are some scenes in life that have no transition. There was no warning, and it was so incredible as to be unthinkable. I can only tell of it from a horrified

recollection. I can still hear an oath and a guttural, hateful imprecation; and a sort of vision of our strange passenger rising from his seat and springing forward. It was catlike and tragic—and withal inhuman. The child screamed and drew back in terror.

The two are quite mixed in my memory; indistinct, but for all that vivid. The old man, hateful, his white lips working, springing off the car at the little, defenseless form beneath him. The child holding up her arms for protection, screaming. It was but an instant. Before we could reach them, he had caught her by the throat, shaken her as a terrier shakes a rat, and flung her to the sidewalk. I think the fellow laughed—a low, sickly gurgle.

I had jumped, and so had the Master. But the fellow was much too quick. I have memory of those beady black eyes and triumph, burning an unholy hatred. Then he plunged into the fog-bank.

We picked the little form up tenderly. For a moment there was confusion. The passengers descended; the conductor, note-book in hand, was volleying a storm of pertinent questions. Strange to say, no one had seen but myself and the Master.

We explained the best we could: the conductor was mollified when he found that the company had been blameless. It is strange how hard-hearted some individuals become in the pursuit of duty. He shrugged his shoulders and pulled the bell-cord for departure; as he explained, his car was tied to schedule; we could call the police.

Would that we could! A crowd had gathered out of the gloom like magic—a maddened, surging, ominous throng that was fast fluxing into a frenzy. The senseless child, limp and tender, with blood trickling over its face. The open scalp wound in the curls infuriated all who beheld it.

It was an evil moment. Here was a spark that might set fire to a city. I heard the confused, sharp ejaculations about me: "Scabs! Strike-breakers! Murderers!"

The car had passed on. The whole city was in a turmoil of partizan passion; a static repression that lacked but the incident for spontaneous flaming. We had stepped out of the security of innocence into this moment of no rime nor reason.

In an instant I grasped the purport; a twisted truth had grasped the crowd

about us; a perversion that but for speedy help might impend close on a tragic ending. I had ears to hear it—words that were too hasty and too insistent for denial.

"Some rich old money-bags had, from the steps of a scab car, attacked this little child out of pure vindictiveness. And he was an old man clad in black!"

The Master held the child in his arms. A workman had hurried with some water. He was bathing her forehead. An ambulance had been summoned. Every second the crowd was augmented by fresh additions, white-faced, hating, clamorous. Down the street I could hear the crash of breaking windows.

And that moment of all others! The Master was bearing the child tenderly toward the sidewalk. The water had refreshed her; her eyes had opened. They were wide with innocent wonder and incomprehension, blinking in half-conscious fright at the writhing throng that seethed about her. One little hand she raised wonderingly to her forehead. It was a simple movement. A tiny trickle of blood oozed down her fingers. She was puzzled. She gazed at it in absent bewilderment. Then she beheld the black robe of the Master.

I shall never forget that sudden flash into consciousness, nor the scream she uttered. It was terrifying from one so little. Her mouth was open and her eyes wide staring, her curly head thrown back, and her hat hanging by its ribbon.

In a perfect hysteria of terror she fought and struggled. In vain were the endeavors made to calm her. She struck like a little fury, shrieking into incoherence. The jam pressed closer.

The old man could not hold his squirming burden. A burly plasterer plucked her out of his arms. She clung to him; her finger pointed accusingly at the Master.

"It was him done it!" she cried. "It was him! He tried to kill me!"

It was a second that was foredooming! The crowd was frenzied; a perfect sea of madness. There was no place nor chance for reason. The assault on the little girl and her accusing finger was the spark of a conflagration.

A perfect storm of fists and hardened faces; my hat knocked off, my face cut and bleeding. What followed had no coherence. My mind was swirling; looking into a sea of faces. Shouts, cries, clamor, and hard fists shaking! Men and

women of all ranks and all stations.

The multitude writhed and extended, crescended with waves of hatred. It was so terrible that I remember but one single detail—that, and an ominous impotence. That one thing was a woman, far up the street on the sidewalk.

She was fat and screaming. She was lashing with perfect fury; her strident, cutting voice pierced through the clamor, devoid of reason or of mercy; the primal instinct for bloodshed, the symbolic goddess of the mob lust.

"The rope! The rope! The rope!" a cry went up. It was answered by a wave of crackling laughter. "The rope is all handy, waiting." The throng opened. Our captors bore us roughly before the unfinished building. From its top, suspended like a line out of eternity, was the rope dangling to the sidewalk. The impending peril settled my mind to clearness.

I looked out on the sea of hardened faces, and could understand from that minute the animal that is mankind, the certain atavism that is his in supreme moments. In the crucial, distinctive crisis he reverts in the administration of his justice, to his forebears. He is revengeful. In all that throng there was not one eye of mercy. Then I saw the Master.

He was standing before me on a pile of sand that was being used in construction. On either side were men who were to act as hangmen. He was standing erect as always, and as calm as ever. There was not one muscle of his face that did not bear up to his dignity. What a contrast there was in the old man's coolness to my trembling terror!

The Master, his black robe, his beard, his impassiveness and majestic imperturbability, the sea of faces, the rope hanging out of the fog from an unseen height, some boxes, and a platform used for mixing concrete. That was the picture. It looked much like the last. Our short shrift would soon be ended.

But at that moment, even in my fear, I caught out of the tail of my eye a commotion in the crowd. It began in the outskirts, rolled in a narrow lane, and advanced straight to the center.

I watched it expectantly, trusting that it might be succor. The crowd swerved and parted, opening a narrow lane. In its center, walking erect and alone, was a single figure. He was bareheaded, blond, and curly, a derby hat hanging from his hand as if he just had doffed

it. He advanced, looking to neither right nor left, and with easy, athletic step sprang lightly to the platform.

It was George Witherspoon!

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### A MASTER OF MEN

**F**OR some seconds he said not a word. It was one of the tensest episodes that I have ever passed through. He peered down into that multitude, into its very soul, with a magnetism that could be no other's.

Not a word was spoken. I don't know how he did it, but the clamor and roar of the mob abated with the suddenness and peace of a tempest dying. A myriad of upturned faces, white, silent, eager!

There was something that passed above them, that ruled them and controlled them. A manifestation of brute force dying; of that psychic mystery that has guided man out of apehood. It was silent, potential, magnetic.

Not a word. Whatever he was, devil or angel, he held them. I could not but thrill with awe as I watched him. He had not grown old. Not one wrinkle nor decrepit line was there in his features. Always twenty; the same vitality, beauty, and stalwart manhood. He was bareheaded; his hair had the same golden sheen; there was the same scintillating genius in his bearing—defiance and certainty of action.

The throng was awed into silence, hushed to an expectancy that was vibrant, thrilled, taut, keyed. It was like a current, some great wave, some secret oscillation. It was surrender. Before he had spoken a single word he had conquered.

But what would he say? What was the import of this sudden apparition?

Like a flash, I was submerged in the suddenness of my dismay and terror. Across my consciousness flashed the exploits of his hatred. He had never yet shown mercy. Never once since our boyhood had he altered the attitude of his malignant persecution. He had been evil, great, destructive, consuming, pursuing me through my manhood.

I was afraid; morally, physically, mentally afraid; I was afraid all over.

The heavy rope was ominous. It was vibrant, trembling as in eagerness for its victim. Would it be that my life so punctilious, and of such serene, smug respect-

ability, would be sacrificed in such a climax!

Just then, as if by magic, the fog suddenly broke and lifted. A shaft of golden light broke from the heavens, shining slantwise—the sun was still low in the sky—across the crest of a neighboring building.

The multitude was still in the shadow. But George Witherspoon was lighted, bathed in the effulgence. The effect was electric; somehow, even the elements conspired to make every move dramatic.

At the same instant he sprang into speaking. I say sprang because it is literal interpretation. It was action, fierce and wild, a dominant invective; a speech that could have been delivered by no other living mortal. He harangued and goaded them with defiance; threw into their teeth their brutish conception of justice.

He shamed them. Before every man's eye he portrayed a picture, loathsome, decadent, of bestiality and injustice; he deprived them of their manhood, and, in the fierceness of his rhetoric, condemned them to the realm of reptiles.

It was sublime. One man defying the wrath of thousands. The very audacity won their admiration. His fearlessness and denunciation carried them off their feet. He bore them down, trampled them by the sheer magnitude of his spirit and the full sweep of his genius.

He would save us! The full rush came on me. George Witherspoon, my playmate, he who was the Rebel Soul, performing an act of justice! In the blur of my fading terror, in my astonishment, I could not comprehend it. It was impossible; but there was no refutation.

He stood there, fiercely calm, watching every tremor of the multitude. He reminded me much of a god of old, delivering an injunction. No compromise; he would have naught but the obeying.

But there was one in that throng who had not heard him. I saw his shadow looming on the platform; a figure skulked about the cylinder that was used for mixing concrete. It lifted full up and straightened. I gasped.

It was Simpson, our police chief!

I had forgotten. It has been so long since I had thought of Simpson. Since the night of my incarceration he had dropped out of my mind entirely. He had been so set in his conviction of George's death that I thought he had abandoned the case entirely.

But it was he beyond mistaking. In the greediness of his spirit he had not heard a word that had been uttered. To him there was but one thought and purpose—the capture and the twenty-thousand-dollar reward. And whatever may have been his faults, he was not a coward.

The crowd sensed the tragedy. The very picture of that figure skulking up behind tensioned their taut excitement to a deadened silence. Faces whitened, mouths agape with wonder.

**T**HE skulker was a man of splendid stature; straight, and of that finesse and glowing vitality that belongs to clean, pure manhood. He was an athlete. He towered above the other by half a head.

But he was not like George Witherspoon. I am sure every man in the throng sensed it. He had not the spirit, the dare, nor the heart half devil. A mere man; he had not that scintillating action that was like the lightning.

In his hand he had an automatic pistol.

It was but a second. The intensities of climax come in shortest moments. He placed his hand on George Witherspoon's shoulder.

"You are under arrest!"

Never shall I forget it. Nor, I am sure, any one who saw it.

George Witherspoon turned. He was smiling. For the split of a second he was all nonchalance. Then a blur of action that was too fast for the eye to follow. The automatic flew into the air with a crackled explosion. For an instant there was a whirl of action, feet, and fury. Then out of it all—George Witherspoon.

In his arms, above his head, was the struggling form of Simpson. He lifted it as he would a stick of cordwood, heaved it, hurled it, spinning, out onto the sand-pile.

The multitude broke its silence. Already under his spell, it rippled with an awe that swelled and rolled into a roar of admiration. It was tumultuous, the spontaneous enthusiasm men have for feats of prowess. To his psychic force he had added a feat of muscle. The throng that but a moment before had been so swayed by hatred was now equally enthusiastic in its admiration. Such is mankind.

At last the police. Deep sirens cutting into the thousands. The heavy, speedy motors drew up before the plat-

form. A number of patrolmen quickly formed a circle. On the platform was George Witherspoon, laughing. The first officer stepped up to him, nodded familiarly, conversed for a moment, and glanced in our direction.

Simpson rolled over, dug the sand out of his ears, and gazed about him. He seemed puzzled. Either he had had enough, or his mind was clouded. His actions were slow and wooden. He glanced up at the other and shook his head. Then, like one bewildered, he turned and was lost in the crowd about him.

The first officer came over to us. The others cleared the street for traffic.

"Rather tragic," he remarked. "If you don't mind, I shall escort you to safety. We were a little tardy. I think that we can all be thankful to Mr. Witherspoon. It is one of the regrettable accidents that are incident to a troubled city."

"Then," I exclaimed, "you know him?"

"Who—Witherspoon? Well, I should think so. I have known him all my life."

It was the same. Ever he received protection. The very police were with him. At one word from him they were ready to let us go and to afford us their protection. However just I knew it to be, it did not sound logical.

"But," I exclaimed, "the crime—the assault on this child? How do you know that we are not guilty?"

He smiled.

"I have Mr. Witherspoon's word, Mr. Warren. Also, I have my eyes. And do you think that any one in reason, after a look into this old gentleman's face, would believe him guilty? One hardly expects bankers and philosophers to be traveling about assaulting little children. Besides, we have other evidence, and of far more purport."

George Witherspoon had disappeared. I have an indistinct memory of a heavy roadster threading through the traffic and his mounting beside the driver. We were left safe and sound in the hands of the lieutenant. It was best that we accept his hospitality and his offer of conducting us to our hotel in safety. After the reception that we had received he was glad, indeed, to make some sort of an atonement.

ONCE in our rooms, in peaceful quiet out of all the stress and tumult, I looked to the Master. The events of the morning had been so tempestuous and

so out of the ordinary as to be bewildering.

I had been led to believe, to be sure, that we were on the great adventure, but I had no idea that we were to begin it by a veritable leap into the whirlpool. It was impossible, out of reason, twisted and distorted. It was kaleidoscopic, a mass of scenes and excitement, each one distinct and indelible, but for all that shuffled into a whirring blur of consecution. My mind was whirring; it might have borne a load that was placid, but this tossing, seething puzzle of events was too much for its unraveling.

Nevertheless, there was one thing—yes, two things—that stood out plainly; the old man on the car, and George Witherspoon.

The old man—I might call him the apparition—was a being such as I had never beheld in my lifetime. Not in a thousand years could I forget those black eyes burning. I could shut my eyes and see them—two great cavernous holes licking with liquid flame. They were immeasurable depths, unholy, that reached into the beyond and forever. The great menace of the unrelenting! I could feel it reaching out and clutching, crushing out my spirit.

Then the contrast; the great, flashing, scintillating genius of Witherspoon. It had been years since last I had seen him. He was sunshine, immense, splendid, and magnificent. The old glow of his boyhood, the heat, the passion, the glamour, were unabated.

I could see him as he was when he faced that multitude, calm, beautiful, defiant. When he chose to be so, there was something about him that was out of heaven. The very light and sunshine that had that moment broken from above confirmed it. He was the antithesis of the other; the glory of the infinite condensed and centered; the great Man Spirit, real and eternal.

Yet I felt that they were the same. There was some link that bound them; one could not exist without the other—the positive and the negative—the two great poles that were as far apart as the wide reach of eternity. What were they?—the one coruscating with the beauty of heat and life and action; the other shivering with the somberness of death and withering hatred. The one all sunshine, the other darkness. What were they?

I appealed to the Master. He smiled.

"A little bit like the schoolboy, Walter.

You would have the answer before you have solved the problem; answers are not of much value unless we understand the means of their derivation. It is the problem that concerns us.

"It is the great, mysterious thing almost unfathomable that must be solved. It is some great truth of Cosmos that has escaped the keen detection of the mind of man."

Riddles as of old; the Master always talked in riddles. If it was a law, what law was it? I confess that I was impatient. If he knew, why did he not tell me?

"I do not know, Walter," he continued. "You must not overweigh my wisdom. I can merely conjecture. I am only mortal, and being mortal, can only arrive at results by material facts and logical sequence. It is the one great lameness of metaphysical speculation. We are objective; we live on facts and figures. It is the great bar by which the infinite is barricaded against the inquisitiveness of mankind."

I could understand him now. I was a skeptic from my father. I had felt always the impotency of man when he dipped into the depths and shadows. My answer was to my convictions.

"Yes," I replied, "and it shall be so always. There is a barrier that is great and unattainable; we can never surmount it."

He smiled again.

"You are pessimistic. Would you lose faith in God's creation, or in God Himself? Would you believe that the will on high is black negation? If you would, you are walking backward; you are retracing toward time's beginning."

"But what do you mean?" I asked. "I am a Christian, Master. What do you mean?"

"Merely this. We go on forever. Once created, we go forward, never ceasing. It is the axiom of all religions, the one law of all eternity, that God makes no mistakes. We shall surmount the barrier."

"You mean—"

"That it is a case of evolution. Evolution is the law of God. When the time comes we shall emerge from the objective. The mind of man is growing, changing, evolving; he is a babe in the lap of Time; he is just opening his eyes to the light about him; he is just beginning."

"Catching moonbeams," I suggested.

"Exactly. An infant, helpless, puzzled,

and weak; but beautiful. He is but just started on the path of time. We know not what he will attain to."

I nodded. Why question?

"But what," I asked, "has this to do with our mystery?"

"Just this, Walter," he answered. "We may be the first ones to peek over the barrier."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE HOUSE OF SILENCE

A BELL rang, and a boy handed the Master a slip of paper, which he read carefully, as if the message it bore might be of weighty purport.

"Is he waiting?" he asked when he had finished.

The Master turned to me.

"Our stay here has been short. We are more fortunate than I had hoped for. We shall leave immediately."

"Leave!" I exclaimed. I was hardly steeled. "And where to? We have but arrived."

He picked up his suit-case.

"Come," he said, "we must be going. We are now on the great adventure."

Wonderingly I followed him into the elevator across the lobby and then to the sidewalk. At the curb a closed car was waiting; not an ordinary jitney, but a great heavy car of beautiful lines and finish. Two negroes, uniformed in a cloth of greenish color, were in attendance, one on the seat and the other imperturbable, straight as a statue, on the curb.

At a word from my companion he smiled blandly, after the manner of his class, and opened the door. I followed the Master. The negro climbed on the seat with the chauffeur, and the car moved forward.

I settled back on the cushions. It was a quick transition. The rapidity with which things were moving was bewildering. I had waited months for a single word or clue, and now the suddenness of the day's events had dazed me.

Out of the window I watched the flitting houses of the receding city. I had an uncertain feeling, clutchingly pregnant, that we were passing out of the present; that the realism of life was gliding past us, to be left behind like a thing forgotten. We were bound for the future, over into the beyond, into the gossamer realms of fancy. It was like a dream, unreal, fascinating, fearful. There



was something that was alluring beckoning us on, a will-o'-the-wisp that flashed intermittently out of the darkness, ever so near, but never nearer.

I looked at the Master.

He was sitting beside me, snugly comfortable and contented. His serene composure was not a bit ruffled by the untoward experiences that we had passed through, nor was he at all unstrung as to the impending future. It was the way of the Master. He accepted all conditions, looked straight into the hearts and read the secrets. He had no emotions. It was his age perhaps, or perhaps his wisdom.

"Where are we going," I asked, "and in whose car are we riding?"

He reached his hand into his coat.

"The car is George Witherspoon's," he answered. "As to our destination, you may read." He handed me a paper.

My dear Master:

I have never refused you a thing in my life. Your request is granted. If you still insist on imperiling your life—so be it. Remember that I have warned you; that once across the border I cannot help you. I have despatched a machine and placed it at your disposal. If you are still determined, it is not for me to stop you.

But let me caution; once again let me warn you. It is certain death that awaits you. The one whom you would encounter is not to be weighted up lightly. Even I who hold him equal have not conquered. I am in the borderland, and I am afraid to let you enter. I do not deserve it.

It is best, I think, that you let matters take their course. Why sacrifice a great life such as yours for one so undeserving? My life is not worth it. With sincerest good wishes,

Your old pupil,  
George Witherspoon.

Had I not beheld a miracle but two hours back, had I not with my own eyes seen it and been such an interested recipient of his inspired justice, I would not have believed it. Even then it was impossible to my reason.

His status had become settled in my conception: I had relegated him to a class half devil. George Witherspoon with one iota of mercy! George Witherspoon solicitous for another's safety! It was impossible—it could not be!

And yet it was so. By some great transition, some uncomprehensible twist of fate, he had at last discovered to us one point of virtue. He was concerned over our peril. He—George Witherspoon.

The thought frightened me; it dismayed me. I am not brave, and I am frank enough to confess it. If it could wring from him such a note of apprehension, I was surely justified in my terror. But I said nothing.

In fact, I was too frightened to do much talking. A cold, clammy numbness settled down upon me that chilled my heart and marrow. I looked out of the window.

We had passed out of the city. We were gliding over the broad sweep of the boulevard that leads up to the foot-hills; in the distance I could see the blue sheen and the white wave-crests of the Pacific. Far out a steamer trailed a line of smoke as it plowed slowly southward; nearer shore a yacht or two, with gleaming white sails, and a flock of careening seagulls.

Where were we going? What fantastic haunt was to be our destination? We mounted a hill and dipped suddenly into a little valley—the greenest green of ripe alfalfa—workmen busily pitching hay, and the rattle of the mowers, miles of quiet contentment, prosperity, and work.

I passed back the paper.

"You are afraid, Walter?" asked the Master.

He smiled. "So was Simpson," he said. "I saw him for a moment after the street incident. He threw up his hands. 'I'm through with this case,' he said. 'Some one else can have the reward—if they can earn it.'"

We passed out of the little valley and began the ascent of the foot-hills. From the heights we could look back on the scene below us. I was a bit ashamed that I had confessed myself a coward.

"Would you like to see Roselle?" asked the Master.

"Roselle!" I exclaimed. "Roselle! Are we going to Roselle?"

"Perhaps. And so you would be glad to see her. What would you do for Roselle?"

"Oh," I said, "anything. I would give my life."

"Of course you would, Walter; you are not a coward, and you are not frightened. You are just a bit nervous."

Well, I had justification. It was not exactly such a train of circumstances as to throw me into high and gleeful spirits. When stepping into a noose one is likely to be a little doleful. So I told him.

"Yes," he said; "it is a bit ominous. But

not as much so as you think. I trust that we can surmount the dangers. We may be merely an old man and a sickly banker; but we are not afraid. We are armed with more than weapons, and I think that we shall conquer."

The machine made no noise. At that moment it came to me that we might be overheard. We had not said anything exactly incriminating; but still it might be best to be a little cautious. I pointed to the driver.

"Can these men hear us?"

"Hardly," he said. "Did you not notice?"

"What?"

"They are mutes."

"Oh!" I looked at him and then out of the window. "Mutes!" It baffled. It was enough that they should be negroes, but that they should be mutes as well was a bit too weirdly suggestive. It was unnatural; it was attuned too much to the cruel and subtle, the silken finesse of a genius—and a genius that was evil.

**WE HAD** mounted into the highlands. Below the mottled lowlands breathing with undulating verdure stretched with varied brilliance into the dim blue distance. The highway was following the backbone of a broad plateau. Portals and driveways and half-seen villas, white in the Southern sun, nestled into the cool of the lawns and palmtrees. The avenue, broad, paved, smooth as a dance-floor, tunneled through the verdure.

We reached the crest. The trees were larger and much older than any others on the boulevard. They had attained the size of forest monarchs, lifting their feathered heights into the heavens; the very wind, soothing, caressed them with veneration; there was a solemnness about the sound that was prophetic, an eery song that was a warning and a benediction.

The car swerved, turned into a driveway. The view was such as to bring an exclamation; far sweeping on every side into the distance. The city, though miles away, was at our feet for inspection; the blue of the ocean, and on the other side a bay that was flecked with the white sails of pleasure. We had entered an immense park, far-stretching, level, a solemn reach of dark green and shadow, an artificial paradise of subtle and trim precision.

I say subtle, because from the moment that we swung through the great stone

pillars, when we whirred upon the crest with its glimpse of the panorama below us, I had the exhilarating and altogether inexplicable sensation that one might sense in cloudland. There was something in the feel of the place that was of remoteness, of isolation, of a distance from one's fellows. I can hardly explain it; it is hard to get at the inner secrets of one's sensation, it is one of the intricacies of the human mind that defies plain explanation; perhaps it was intuition.

The whole place was of great beauty, quaint, quiet, secluded, pervaded by a calm of permeating softness. As we twisted about the clean driveways my spirits were quashed and dampened. I might say that the air was saddened—it was redolent and soft with aromatic odors, sweetened into excess of sweetness—into the bitter. It was much as though we had suddenly passed out of the broad bright sunshine into the portals of melancholia.

It was startling. My first sensation was a tightened gripping at my throat and an accelerated pulse. There was no wind. Upon this height where the breeze should be always blowing was a quiet, perverse calmness. Shade and seclusion, a deadened paradise looking out upon the world, but of a different world entirely.

But the greatest surprise was to follow. We turned a bend and came into full view of the mansion. Why do I say mansion? It was like riding through the pages of fiction up to a cold stone fortress of a feudal baron. It was torn out of the past and transplanted. It was too great to have an equal, and too awful; a stern, cold structure that loomed over all the landscape. It was of stone—hard, cold granite piled and cemented with such care that had it been in another age it might have defied the embattled thousands.

I shall not go into detail. It would be useless. I cannot describe it better than my own impression—that of the Bastille, the old French Bastille. It had all the solemn grandeur and defiance and the majesty that was frozen. The very sunshine that bathed its sides seemed impotent; there was a dunness to its color that was grim and a somberness that was of shadow.

The towers at the corners stood out despotic, high, forlorn, like the four great tyrants, their castellated tops serrated with merlons and embrasures. The dank



It was a superlatively cruel face; the most cruel I had ever seen! And the eyes—they were two burning spots of sin, scintillating with a flaming iridescence of pure hate

brown walls were interpolated with gleaming windows about which some bold green ivy, creeping daringly up the sides, wreathed and twisted surreptitiously as if desiring to read in the depths a great cold secret. The whole structure must have covered an acre and had but a single modern feature, a portico whose massive colonnade united the two front towers at the corners. From it a flight of marble steps descended to the driveway. Our machine stopped directly before it.

When I looked up at the great massive columns of marble, I had much the same feeling that *Agib* must have had at the tower on the Brassy Mountain. A man standing at the head of the steps was like an insect, such was the vastness of the contrast.

One of the mutes descended. He opened the door. We alighted. In another instant the car had disappeared. I looked at the Master.

"Well," he said, "we are here."

He spoke it with satisfaction, as if we had come on a long, far journey. From our height we could look out on the blue of the far Pacific; the immense distance and the isolation was an inspiration.

"Yes," I said, "we are here. But, for all that, where are we? It is like enchantment, like the imagination—"

But the Master was ascending the steps. I must follow. Above us, standing by a column, was a man. I noted with surprise that he was modern, a man much like myself. He was even smoking a cigar. There was something familiar. He was watching us quietly; he had a stubby gray mustache, eyes of the same steel color, and a derby hat that was pushed back from his forehead. Then I recognized him. It was Wilkins!

With outstretched hand he stepped forward; there was a glint of tragic humor in his eyes.

"Welcome, pilgrims, to the house of silence," he greeted us.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### WILKINS AGAIN

I HAD forgotten Wilkins. It had been so long since last I had seen him that he had vanished from my recollection. I was surprised to see him. Even had I not forgotten, I would hardly have expected to find him there ahead of myself and the Master. But it was he, nevertheless—the same stocky fellow, sober, clear-sighted, practical; his eyes with the same steel-like clearness, and in his manner a grimness that reminded one of a bulldog. He was a man of hard, sterling ability, of an honesty that had in it not a fleck of compromise.

But if I was surprised, it was not so with the Master. He shook hands in his sober way and nodded. I even fancied that there was a look of satisfaction on his face.

"Well, well, we're here! At last."

Wilkins bit deep into his cigar. His legs were spread apart, his cold eye running up and down the Master.

"Yes, we're here, Master; but now that we're here, like Mr. Warren, I want to know what we are going to do with it?"

The Master smiled faintly.

"Something wrong, Mr. Wilkins?" he asked.

"Wrong? Come inside. I thought when I came here that at last I was to get some action. I am getting it, all right. I have been here two whole days; and during all that time I have not heard a whisper. It is like a place of enchantment, a great doomed castle. I have been monarch of all I survey and as isolated as though I were on an island."

The Master nodded.

"Mysterious, eh, Wilkins? Well, let us step inside."

Together we crossed the stone floor to the archway. The door was massive, of a black, heavy ebony material with a great brass plate and knocker. It was plain and simple, but of a somber color and of much resistance. Above, in cold raised metal, was the letter "W." It opened easily, and we entered. Somehow, at the moment I thought, and perhaps properly, of the Three Calendars of the Arabians.

We found ourselves in an immense hall of silent, splendid, and magnificent por-

tions, from which numerous archways led out to different parts of the building; a great hall that, from its magnitude and elaboration, brought us all three to a halt of wonder. It was much more beautiful than anything I had ever dreamed of. The ceiling was so high and of such an effect and intensification as to seem almost beyond conception. It was a splendid combination of French and English Gothic that some great mind had employed; high, elaborate fan vaulting that might from its intricacy and precision have consumed all the skill, patience, and genius of a master of the time of Henry VII. The whole was interwoven with a tracery and foliation that were wonderful; the walls rose up toward the vaulting with a flamboyant effect that was much like liquid fire.

The high ceiling, the magnitude, the almost unbelievable blending of delicate and living colors, had been done with such art that, had this one hall been known, it would have been prized as one of the glories to which the human mind at times attains. It had effect, depth, greatness, and proportion; its intricate blend of colors was the reflected soul of a master. Even the mosaic of a floor would have been too priceless for a king. It was the effect of flowers; an invaluable work of time and detail that gave the effect of a bed of roses. I had always thought of mosaics as things of cold, hard beauty; this was the first time I had ever thought of perfume of flowers woven into stone.

In this high, vaulted hall we three strangers out of the common white daylight stood like three puny insects, standing with ignorant feet at the portals of enchantment.

Wilkins dug his teeth into his cigar with a sort of savage pride of possession; his feet he spread apart.

"Now, listen," he said.

It was said in such a tone as one would announce the eighth wonder of the world, a peculiar accent of certainty—as if he held a secret that defied unraveling. We listened.

But I heard nothing; neither, I think, did the Master.

"Hear anything?"

"No."

"Well, neither did I, at first. But it will come. Just wait. Do not make a sound."

And we did, we three, there, side by side, like three wooden men of enchantment. At first it was nothing—not a

sound, a negation of all life and movement, a pall of stillness. There was not a quiver, not even the intimation of a breath. I had never known what it was to be in a perfect void of sound. It was more terrible than death. Then I heard it—it was the silence!

Impossible, you say. But let me ask—have you ever been in absolute silence? Of course not. There is always some infinitesimal vibration. And, after all, has silence any sound? It sounds like a paradox. May it not be that negative, dragged on into infinity, will at last verge around again into a positive? Anyway, I am sure I heard it. It may have been expectancy or the vibrations of my spirit, or it may have been that out of the very silence my ear-drums sprang into action.

It was like the wind—a low, sullen vibration coming out of the distance, a moaning sound of a thousand thrummings. One could almost see it. It crackled, rose in crescendo, and died away. It was startling. Yet there had never been a sound. It was not earthly.

Wilkins was sucking savagely at his cigar. There was a sturdiness about him that would not be shaken. He looked at me.

"How about it?" The words were curt.

"I—"

The Master said nothing.

The detective tapped himself on the forehead.

"I thought at first that I was becoming unbalanced. What I want to know—did you hear it?"

"It is strange," I answered, "strange and unaccountable, rather weird."

"Yet," said Wilkins, "there was not a sound. When first I heard it I confess I was a bit frightened. It is not physical. It is ominous and impossible. I think it comes from here—" He tapped his forehead. "It is reassuring, that you, too, should notice it. I thought at first it was my own hallucination. The whole house is just like that—even the servants."

He motioned with his thumb to the spot of our arrival.

"Did you notice? Your chauffeur?"

"Mutes!" I gasped.

He nodded emphatically and dug again at his cigar.

"Yep! Mutes! And as black as midnight. The devil's own combination. It gets me. I have been here two whole days. During that time I have roamed from cellar to the attic. It is like the house of *Blue-beard*."

"Or *Agib*," I interrupted. "*Agib* and the forty doors. After all, it must be interesting."

"Yes?" snapped Wilkins superciliously. "Yes? Try it by your lonely. Try it by yourself, with not a single sound or flutter for two whole days. You heard it. Each time you open a door it will greet you. But you have named it. *Agib* and the Arabian nights. And in the good old U. S. A."

Truly he was wrought into a high state of feeling. He was not a man of quick emotions, nor one to be borne away on fancy. He was practical and accustomed to hard, cold reason. But he was moved, and it was all the more impressive. There was something about it all, the atmosphere, the exterior, the place where we were standing, that was depressing. If it had had such an effect on Wilkins, strong, sturdy, fearless as he was, what would it do to a poor, weak, shriveled banker such as myself?

It was the Master who broke our broodings. As usual he was cheery. The subtleness of the affair had on him apparently no effect whatever.

"Come, gentlemen," he said kindly, "you are overwrought. It may not be as bad as you think. It is good to restrain one's feelings. We must not fall to superstition. Are there no servants?"

Just then a door opened, and a black, even as the others, stepped forward. This time I noticed. He, too, was a mute. He had the peculiar facial expression of all those who lack articulation. His uniform was of the same dark green; on the sleeves of which I noted the small lettered emblem of his lord and master—a gilded W, finely woven.

He picked up our suit-cases and conducted us to an elevator. It was modern. With a quick shift he had whisked us skyward. As we shot upward I commented mentally of this commingling of the past and the present; like everything else, the elevator was noiseless.

OUR apartments were such as would have suited even the most fastidious. There was sober splendor even in the bedrooms. From the stone casement of the window I could look out on the park and into the far distance. It was like peering into another world.

The waters of the Pacific were glittering with the million sunbeams and seemed a million miles away. Somehow it was like looking down on the ages.

Our toilets made, we discovered that we were hungry. At least, I did. I had been through so much and had crowded such a varied excitement into the single day, that in the sudden rush of my appetite I could have eaten the hard side of a board. One may be upheld by excitement for just so long; then the stomach must be served.

Another servant, also as the others. He could not speak; but with a gesture conveyed his meaning as easily as if he were speaking. I noted then that these fellows had intuition. They spoke not, neither did they hear, but for all that they had an uncanny exactness. They could understand you, and with but a gesture could convey a whole ream of meaning. They were ideal servants. I had heard of rich men's notions, but never of such an idiosyncrasy as this.

The man conducted us along the corridor. He was erect and powerful and of a certain sinewy, pristine grace, though so black that he might have been dug out of the earth's dark shadows.

As we went along I noted the building's almost unearthly beauty. The ceilings were high and vaulted, painted, and adorned by that hand that out-Angeloed even Michelangelo himself. It was like walking through the maze of genius—an amazing experience that was much akin to the high feelings of an ecstatic slumber. The very sense of the work about you, the beauty, the genius, the fine, delicate strokes, the soft blends and shades, charmed you and thrilled with their subtle and permeating beauty.

It was such a contrast to the grim outside. One could hardly expect such superlative taste to be housed in such a prison. It was such an effect as one stepping out of the winter into a rich, full-blooming garden. The smell of roses, the sweet full-scented breath of perfume, the air of the south wind. It was in perfect taste. Whoever designed it had been an artist.

It is but natural that I should take in hurriedly, and not without awe, the significant details of our surroundings. The whole place was on the same imposing scale. It had balance; there was nothing so insignificant but that, in its place, lent its modulation to the whole.

There is nothing in the true and in the highest art of greater effect than this precise and painstaking judgment of slightest details. It would be impossible for me to give a minute description. There are some things better described by their

effect than by their details. The whole filled me with a whirl and a subdued admiration.

But I must not neglect the staircase. It was the center and capital stroke that brought out the cardinal exclamation. It was here that the master mind that had so conceived and constructed, had gone rampant in its greatness. It was such an affair as I could only conceive of in a dream—a masterpiece of genius and imagination. The long sweep and swing and symmetry swept from the upper floors with the beauty of gliding waters; the blue-white marble steps, the majestic curves, and a swing that was almost rhythm.

We were conducted to the dining-room. From the attentive attitude of the servants it was evident that we had been expected. There was a courtesy about their silence and deference that was almost servile; they fitted about like shades, obsequious to our smallest notion; they had a solicitude for our wants, and an understanding that bordered on intuition.

The room was simple, decorated in dark, cool colors; and fittings of sober walnut. It was a place to induce contentment. The white linen, spotless as the snow, the tableware, and the faultless service. Even here was subtleness and proportion; there was a suggestiveness that aroused the appetite and soothed digestion.

The cuisine was perfect. I don't believe I had ever eaten a meal with more enjoyment. As a rule, my stomach has insisted on chosen morsels and steadily refused to delight in good things. But here even it was vanquished. The chef must have been a wonder.

"When I dine here," said Wilkins, "I feel that I could continue on this mystery forever."

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE MUSIC

**T**HERE is no incentive to conversation like a good dinner. The Master had said almost nothing, nor had Wilkins. It was a way they had, both of them, of keeping their own good counsel. But now I felt somehow that I was at last to receive some information. It was the Master who spoke in his soft, kind way that was ever so sincere and earnest.

"Well, now Walter," he said, "now that

we are here and our appetites are satisfied, I suppose it is time that I give you some information. I have waited until we arrived at this place before speaking, because, to be frank, I was not at all certain that we would get here. One can never tell. However, I think now that we can speak. We are at last getting somewhere, and I think I am safe in saying that we are on the last leg of our journey."

I smiled at this, for we had come so far and our journey had been so great that this last leg might still be a long one. To me the case was growing deeper instead of approaching solution.

"It has indeed been a long time, Master, since first we took up the case," I assented.

"Yes, a long time," he returned.

He mused a bit; his eyes grew reminiscent. To him the mystery was more absorbing even than to myself. He was ever on some quest for wisdom, he was intent on the great secret that lurked unseen, but was directing with almost omnipotent exactness each sequence of the impossible. I trusted. I knew that it was not for nothing that we had come to this somber house of silence.

"Yes," he said, "a long time. But I do think we are approaching the solution."

"Pray, what is it?"

The Master was again silent for a moment. Wilkins and I were both of us eager for the answer.

"Have you no idea, Walter," he asked at length, "not even after reading Roselle's letter?"

"None," I answered, "that I would pin any faith to. I have endeavored many times to find a solution; but have arrived nowhere. It all seems so impossible. If—"

"No, Walter, it is not impossible. The facts are grim and certain. There has been not one thing done but through the perfect laws of nature."

"You mean," I exclaimed, "that there has been no trickery, no magic, in all his actions? How do you explain it? What are these laws?"

"Listen, Walter," said the Master. "You remember. Roselle herself has told you. 'The visitor in Berlin.'"

"You refer to the uncouth stranger," I answered, "the little man in the library?"

"Exactly."

I thought for a moment. I had thought of this same one many times before. And I had identified him this very day as the

unspeakable villain of the street-car. The case was drawing closer.

"Do you believe it?" I asked. "Do you believe that, and still say there is no magic? Is he the monster that we saw today?"

"The same," returned the Master. "And it is not magic, but the truth. George Witherspoon that night explained the case. We have seen our man. And we shall take a literal interpretation."

"Then," I exclaimed, "it really is the devil!"

"I did not say that."

"I do not understand you."

The Master picked up a fork and tapped with the end of it on the table.

"Try to remember, Walter. Did not George Witherspoon say anything about *Frankenstein* and *Faust*?"

So that was it—the analogy.

"Yes," I said, "I remember. His case is analogous with one half-way between the two cases."

"Who was *Frankenstein*?"

"A genius," I replied, "who created a living being that has lived in fiction by the name of his maker."

"You know the story?"

"Certainly; the creation destroyed its author."

"And *Faust*?"

"A scholar. He sold himself to *Mephistopheles*, whom he cheated in the end."

"And you don't believe either one of these stories?"

I laughed, and looked wonderingly at the Master.

"Hardly," I said.

He moved back his chair.

"In that I can hardly blame you; they were both written as pure fiction. Nevertheless, George Witherspoon has told the truth. The analogy is there, half-way between them. This is one of the cases where truth is stranger than fiction. And in this house you will have the solution. *Frankenstein*, *Faust*, and *Mephistopheles*—we have them with us, and perhaps a few others besides. I do not say how many. You would do well to brush up on your fiction."

"Is that all?" I answered. I did not mean to be sarcastic. "A nice prospect, truly."

"Oh, they will not hurt you," he laughed. "Not if you are careful."

"But," I exclaimed, "the explanation? What is it all about? You were to tell us. George Witherspoon sent us hither. Why did he do it?"

nothing to do but to take possession and look around. Which is what I did. I roamed about among the nine hundred and ninety-nine rooms of this—"

"Are there that many?" I gasped.

"Yes, and then some. So many that you can't keep track. You get lost, and before you know it you are going into the same ones over again. That is what I did until I played a *Little-Red-Riding-Hood* trick on myself with some pebbles."

"Pebbles?"

"Yes, some pebbles. I went outside and picked up a pocket full. Then whenever I went into a room I dropped a pebble. After that when I looked in a room I looked for a pebble. If I found it I knew I had been there before and was going backward. After a while I came to the south tower, where I heard it."

"Heard it?"

"Yes, this music."

"Oh," I said, "I see. What is it like?"

"Just what I said—out of heaven. A violin."

"Perhaps," I said, "some man—"

But Wilkins shook his head.

"No man ever played like that; it is impossible. You must hear it."

And really I began to feel that it might be so. There was a look in the man's eyes that was almost holy—as if the mere recollection of the thing was inspiration.

"Well," I answered, "I begin to believe you. May we hear it?"

"Come," said Wilkins.

**H**AD Wilkins told me that the place contained ten thousand rooms I would have believed him, especially after the next few minutes. He led me through a maze and very labyrinth of passages and splendid galleries, long silent, and of stone-cold splendor. On all sides were strange rooms and high-vaulted chambers, spacious and furnished in any one of a thousand styles and colors.

There was a room, evidently, for every period since the days of Caesar. Whoever had conceived it must have had a comprehensive acquaintance with the details and habits of man from the early ages. From the stone and rush chamber of King Arthur, through the elaborate and splendid furnishings of Louis-Quinze, every age was represented. It was unique; an *Aladdin* palace after a style that was original.

Perhaps you have noticed how I have compared so many things about this place to the Arabian Nights. It was be-

cause of a queer sense of illusion; because I could not rid myself of the feeling that what I was undergoing could be reamed into pages just as fantastic.

We ascended several floors—I do not know just how many—and turned and turned until I had lost all trace of direction. Then we came to a short, high curved passage. Wilkins turned and I followed. At the end was a great, heavy oaken door, reenforced and studded by numerous bars of heavy brass-colored metal.

What the bars were for I do not know. The door was open. The great flood of light and the stone told me that we had come to one of the rooms in the outer part of the building; the curve in one wall indicating still farther its location. I knew by that curve that we were next to one of the towers. Nevertheless:

"Where are we?" I asked.

"On an upper floor," answered Wilkins. "This wall here is the south tower; the door opposite leads out into one of the corridors of the library. I will open it."

He did, and I looked into a great place that from its peculiar shape made me think of the House of the Sevens. It was a great inverted cone; or, to be precise, a pyramid on its head. From the bottom the room spread out on a series of levels to the very top of the building, giving much the effect of an amphitheater. On each level were innumerable stacks of bookcases.

At the bottom, by the great, heavy, oaken table, was a man. He was old, with a silvery beard, and was reading a great tome by the light that was streaming from the center window. Then I saw. It was the Master.

"I just opened this to show you where we are. Now let me close it. Let us take a chair. I'll open a window. Will you smoke?"

I shook my head. Somehow I could not associate a desire for tobacco with such a place as this. Were it hashish or some essence stolen out of the cave of the *Seven Sleepers*, I would have considered.

"No, not here," I said. "But what of this music?"

Wilkins cocked his feet irreverently on a chair; he lit a great cigar and pulled with astounding vigor. Somehow the posture seemed forced to me, a defiant attitude of nonchalance.

"Just wait," he said, "and listen. This is my own pet spook. He always plays for me. There!"



He stopped. And sure enough, a soft liquid chord floated up as if out of nowhere. It was a violin, played with a tenderness and perfection that was above all ordinary music. Indeed it was not so like music as the symphony of a soul, a spirit pulsating, mellowed into liquid sound, all the feeling, love, anguish, laughter, and devotion in the world. It was not loud—one could scarcely have heard it fifty yards away—and it came out of nowhere. It floated, its softness and timbre were like mellow water, it was clear, liquid, perfection. Perhaps a violinist in his highest moments has a dream like this, the inspiration that he would attain to, but which he ever despairs of attaining.

And yet it followed no order of music that I knew of, no technique; whoever this one was, he was throwing aside all the rules as we know them; there was no ordered tune nor form, it was genius, pure genius and soul, flooding out in a rampant melody of expression. It, was, indeed, as Wilkins said—music out of heaven. An angel would play like that; no one else could do so.

It ceased.

Wilkins was sitting in his chair. But his whole attitude had undergone a transformation. His irreverent feet had been withdrawn from the chair before him. His hard, practical features were softened, his eyes glowing with a light that was almost holy. He bowed his head. I held my breath. Never before had I felt so light and hallowed, so near to my Maker.

But there was no more music.

We waited. We were both of us like souls who had approached the portals of heaven, had heard the golden cadence, and were loath to leave it. I shall never more doubt Wilkins.

But at length he stood up. He was not the same man who had entered; he was subdued, silent, ennobled.

"Come, Mr. Warren," he said gently. "Let us go."

## CHAPTER XL

### A TALK WITH THE REBEL SOUL

**WE OPENED** a door softly. It was the one that led into the library. I could not but note the difference of our departure from our entrance. The music had taken away all our skepticism; the worldliness had been driven from our natures.

I wonder if, after all, it is not the secret of communion; may it not be that the bridge across the infinite will be suspended from chords of melody? I am sure I cannot tell; but at that moment I could have believed it.

Wilkins closed the door.

"Well?" he spoke in interrogation.

"How do you account for it?" I asked, returning the question.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't account for it, Mr. Warren. I listen. I have gone beyond accounting."

"You do not think it human?" I asked.

"Did you not hear it?" he returned.

"How can it be? It is unlike anything that we know; unlike music as we conceive it."

"Pure inspiration," I assented.

"Exactly. Something higher. The poet's dream."

"I did not know that you read poetry," I said.

"Never read a line of it in my life. But in there"—he pointed—"I would rather be a poet than anything else. That thing gets down in under. There is no doubt of a soul."

Such is the potency of inspiration. There are secret chords and vibrations in us all, which, once touched, are transformation. How can we account for them? It was with me even as it was with Wilkins. There is no doubt of the soul.

We were standing in one of the galleries of the library. Below us, under the soft glow of light, I could see the Master, reading. In all this immense place of condensed and stored-up learning it seemed fitting that he be there; he had the proper dignity to give it color; he was the embodiment of it all; the force that gave it life and direction.

I made an indication to Wilkins.

"Have you told him?" I asked.

He nodded. "Let us go," he said.

We found the Master immersed in a great scroll of old parchment, so old that the print was scarcely legible. It was not print at all, but writing, or, to be more precise, dabs of uncouth and mysterious hieroglyphics. One of the blacks was coming out from between the shelves with another armful. The old man handed him a slip of paper, the other read it and smiled. I noted that this one was older, and of more intelligent bearing than the others, and that his eyes glittered with an obsequious admiration when he looked at the Master. He, too,

was a mute. He returned immediately to the gallery.

The Master looked up. There was an eminent glint of satisfaction in his manner.

"Ah, Walter," he said, "it is you. How do you like the house of silence? I presume Wilkins has been showing you about. It is a wonderful place, is it not?" He made a little gesture with his hand to indicate the uncounted volumes. "I hope you have made the find that I have. The greatest library in the world. I have discovered at last the true librarian." He motioned toward the mute. "A man who says nothing, who knows every one of his books and is a lover; not a watchdog.

"Pray tell me what you have discovered. There is much in this place for us both to learn."

I nodded. Then I told him of the music; or rather Wilkins did. He repeated the tale just as he had told it to me after dinner.

It pleased the Master. I had thought it might surprise him; but it seems that there is nothing that will disturb him. Nevertheless he stood up from the table.

"It is well," he said. "Let us go up, Wilkins. I, too, would hear this music. Walter, you wait here until we come."

With that they departed.

At the moment the black came up with another armful of books and manuscripts. I noticed that they were brown and timeworn, as if taken out of the ages; even on the outside they had the color and the mystery of things long lost and forgotten. The fellow spread them out on the table and began to arrange them. I picked one up.

It was like no writing that I had ever seen; the ink, or whatever it was, had gone to what was much more than a faded yellow, though it was still dimly legible. It might have been Chinese, but if it was, it was of a kind different from that now written. I turned over the pages. I noted that a great many places had been underlined by the black of a modern pencil. Then I found not a few slips of parchment torn and ripped at the edges, and the name of George Witherspoon written innumerable times.

It was his own handwriting. That I knew for certainty, and for two reasons—first because I knew it; because it grew up alongside of mine from my childhood—we had gone to school together, lived together, and slept in the same bed until

we were twenty; secondly, because of the attestation of the torn slips at the margin. It was the habit that no one in the world possessed but George Witherspoon, of tearing off marginal strips of whatever he might be reading and chewing them in abstraction. He would have torn a strip off the Bible; there was nothing too sacred or too valuable to escape him.

But what use could he have had for the literature of such a language? It is strange that, even as I wondered, I should have my answer. A shadow fell on the parchment and I glanced up.

On the opposite side of the table was Witherspoon himself!

I started. In spite of the assurance of the past few hours I was afraid. I had reason both to love him and to fear him. I dropped the parchment in some confusion. He said nothing.

"I WAS just examining this strange manuscript," I remarked. "I was wondering what it could be. What language?"

It was the truth, of course, but I am afraid my speech was rather perfunctory. The other noticed it, a twinkle in his eye.

"Still the same timid Walter, eh; afraid I'll eat you? Just a wee bit afraid?"

He laughed in a teasing sort of way. It was his old manner just a bit; the taunting tone that I had ever been afraid of. Then he turned the conversation to the manuscript. He reached over the table and selected a leaf.

"Not the least in the world," I answered.

He turned down one of the corners.

"It is something I would like to present to every young and aspiring author; to every general; to every one in pursuit of fame."

"What is it?"

"You cannot guess?"

I confessed it.

"Well, I will tell you. It is a page of the Chinese Shakespeare. A page of real work, a page out of immortality. I mean man's immortality. It was given to me by a Chinese wise man."

"I do not understand you," I answered. "I have never heard of a Chinese Shakespeare."

At which he nodded.

"Of course not. Neither has anybody else. Which proves that you do understand me. It is a sample of your fame and what it amounts to. If I was to tell you that this man was once more famous than our own Shakespeare, and even a

greater poet, would you believe me?

"Of course not. Shakespeare has been dead three hundred years, and you say that he will live forever. What are three hundred years compared to eternity? And what is this one? His name was Wan Su. He lived fifteen thousand years ago. For five thousand years—a period as long as your whole history—he was the very pedestal of literary greatness. What is he now? You do not know him. And nobody else. He is gone, and so are his people. And at one time they covered the earth. Fame? Pooh!" He snapped his fingers. "A breath of a second! In fifteen thousand years your Shakespeares and your Napoleons will be forgotten."

Perhaps it was true. I had not thought of it. Mankind surely is good at forgetting. But I denied the truth of his philosophy. It was negation. Even if fame is a will o' the wisp, it leads man onward. Man is a positive creature. So I spoke:

"It may be so just as you say; but I cannot accept it. No philosophy based on what's-the-use will ever do anything for humanity. It is better forgotten before it is thought of. But let me ask you—this writing is dead. How did you acquire it?"

"Very simply," he answered. "The people of whose lives it is an interpretation passed away thousands of years ago. But there were a few struggling, wretched survivors who overlived through the lust of blood and conquest. They withdrew to the deep and inaccessible corners of northwest China. It might interest you to know that they were almost Caucasian."

"But theirs was in no way the greatness that was their fathers'. All they possessed was a dim misty tradition of former greatness, and a few wise men. It was the assiduous zeal of the latter that enabled me to acquire these priceless relics of anti-historical greatness. They have copied and recopied and preserved their literature even to the present generation."

"But," I exclaimed, knowing how such things would be valued, "how did you persuade them to relinquish possession?"

He again placed the sheet upon the table.

"That was easy. In such cases there is always a time and a place for seizure. I had heard of these manuscripts, which, you understand, are not the original—not even the old Chinese could conquer time like that—but exact copies handed down by their wise men. I determined that I

should have them. I aided and abetted a great Chinese bandit in an insurrection. I held him under my control and insisted on the whole library."

"And he delivered?"

"All. Except perhaps a few volumes that became scattered by the wayside. They will be picked up in time."

ARE you surprised at my wonder? I had known this man as a child. He was controlling in mysterious manner many things to his will, even rebellions in far-off China. For the sake of a few books he would start a revolution, perhaps overturn an empire.

I could only say:

"You have a wonderful collection."

"You like it?"

"What I have seen. The whole place, the palace, is an elaborate conception of genius. To me it is like the palace of *Aladdin*. I presume it has the forty windows. Who built it?"

There was a twinkle in his eye.

"Perhaps my jinnee. The jinnee of the lamp."

Of course he was talking figuratively, so I answered him in kind.

"Then," I said, "you do have forty windows; the thirty-nine and the one unfinished."

To my surprise he nodded, and I saw that he was serious.

"It is even so," he answered. "There is the fortieth window, or to be precise, there is one thing unfinished."

"And this?" I asked.

"Is myself. Like *Aladdin*, I have called in the artificers and the great magician. I have talked with the Master. He insisted on the undertaking. He knows the penalty that impends with failure. I allowed him to dispatch Wilkins on ahead."

"You came with the Master. I want to say that you do not seem to measure up to the standard. Before you were started you plunged after death headforemost. I had to save you. I shall not do it always."

I understood, and I spoke my thoughts.

"Then," I said, "this thing, this one on the car, was the Thing of Evil."

He nodded.

"And he is in this house?" I asked.

"Exactly."

"Then," I said, "perhaps you may tell me who he is. And who you are. What is it all about?"

He shook his head.

"That I cannot. Because I do not know

But I can tell you one thing—I am the only one that stands between this one and promiscuous slaughter.”

“You do not know what he is?”

“Not at all.”

“But,” I said, “yourself. You surely can tell me that.”

He smiled. It seemed to me like acquiescence.

“Perhaps,” he said, “you would not believe me if I told you.”

“I would believe anything,” I answered, “anything.”

“Then,” he said, “I will tell you. It is this—I am the only man on earth.”

I smiled at this, it was such a ridiculous assertion.

“No doubt,” I said; “no doubt. But if this is so—pray let me ask you, what am I?”

“An object.”

It was astounding, but somehow it did not seem like impertinence. Had anybody else called me this I would have been insulted. It was much as if he had called me a bug. An object! Yet after all there was that about it that told me even then that he might have some basis for the assertion.

“Thank you,” I defended. “I choose to regard myself as a man.”

He laughed merrily.

“No, Walter,” he said, “you are not a man, and never will be. You are objective. You have no control over your life and actions. You are a victim of circumstance. You are the slave of body, of gout, politics, finance, and influenza. Your only title to the assumption is your egotism.

“You roll along in a rut of predestination. You excuse yourself by your religion, fatalism, and your philosophy. You are an animal grown wise, a lump of flesh with intelligence, an object.”

I thought hard for a moment. All that he spoke might be so. What he said generally carried conviction.

“And the people of the streets?” I asked. “The unaccounted millions teeming and beetling over the earth’s wide surface—do you place them in the same classification?”

“Certainly,” was his answer. “All of them; every one; mere objects, animated, to be sure, and with a bit of intelligence, but with no control.”

“You are the only man? Pray—”

“Because I am my own master,” he said. “I am mind, not body. I am not objective. My will and volition come from inside

entirely. My body is but the vehicle of my spirit, a machine and not one thing else, to be treated well while I have use for it, and then to be cast aside.

“I control it! It answers perfectly to my mandates. It is in perfect correlation. I am subjective. I am lord of myself. I am not a victim of circumstance. I laugh at fate. I am my own master.”

Such a man! But I began to get some glimmering of his meaning.

“Tell me,” I exclaimed; “tell me, you can do anything?”

“Almost anything. I can overcome time and distance, I can annihilate space. I am master of volition, I am subjective. I first and others after. Objects are mere externals. I live in spirit, but still in body. What is it?”

Then the inspiration.

“If you are so powerful—I would see Roselle.”

“Ah—”

And at the word I sank in my chair in astonishment. It was done so suddenly, almost to the instant of my speaking. He did it without quivering an eyelash. I could see him still standing on the opposite side of the table.

**I**T WAS very astonishing. The whole room went to darkness, and I saw. It was plain, almost as the real flesh and action. It was Roselle. She was the same beautiful girl, only slightly older, her skin was as clear as ever and as smooth as the softness of a rose. She was smiling.

It was a simple picture of a great sunlit room. On the floor was a Persian kitten. Even as I looked Roselle jumped up playfully and rolled a soft-ball of yarn at her plaything. The kitten sprang. I could almost hear the girl laughing. She gathered the kitten up in her hands, patted it, and cuddled it in her lap. Then she resumed her sewing, or whatever it was that she was engaged on.

That was all. It had passed like the flitting of a vision. I had seen Roselle. There was not a single doubt in my mind as to its reality. When I looked across at the other he was still standing beside the table.

But he was not the same Witherspoon, the eyes of this one were mellow and tender; burning with hallowed love light. And he was subjective. At the moment I thought, and perhaps rightly, that even if he was it was after all merely allied to the objective like the rest of human beings and mortals.

"Money. Yes, I have considerable. This old mansion is full of it. It would delight your financial eyes to behold it. Some day you may see. But when you do you must be careful; it is the tribute of the devil."

"The devil?"

"Yes, Walter. And you must be careful."

"And he is in this house?"

"You have said it," was his answer, "and a more uncanny devil than ever stalked through a dream of *Faustus*."

I would have answered, but at that moment I suddenly became aware that we were not alone. I turned and discovered the Master and Wilkins standing beside us—I could not tell how long they had been there. But it was evident from the eyes of the detective that he, too, had witnessed the scene on the side wall. There was a wholesome respect and admiration in the critical scrutiny of his eyes; an awe that was amusing. It was so totally out of the run of his experience; he was so practical and real.

Then I remembered.

"Mr. Witherspoon—Mr. Wilkins."

You couldn't jar Wilkins. He stepped forward with his stubby hand extended.

"Yes," he greeted. "Glad to know you, Mr. Rebel Soul; glad to know you."

George Witherspoon took the hand. His eyes twinkled. The plain, blunt honesty of the other seemed to please him.

"So this is Wilkins? If I remember, Wilkins and I have done a little jogging about of our own, have we not? Is it still the intention to arrest me?"

But the irrepressible detective shook his head.

"Not," he said, "until I see a blacksmith."

The eyes of the other sparkled with understanding.

"And why the blacksmith?" he asked.

"To forge me a pair of tongs," said Wilkins.

At which George Witherspoon went into a burst of his old-time laughter. When he had subsided he placed a good-natured hand on the officer's shoulder.

"Not a bad idea at that. You go get them—they may come in handy."

However, Wilkins was serious. The Master had seated himself beside me and was content for once to let the other do his talking. I smiled, for it was all so enigmatical to Wilkins, whose straight, hard sense refused to revert from its training. He went straight to his point.

"I want to ask you, Mr. Rebel Soul, who it is you have up there in the tower?"

Witherspoon smiled.

"You have heard him?" he asked.

"I have. We all have. And I want to ask you if you have a trained angel?"

At which Witherspoon again went into laughter. I could see that he liked Wilkins.

"That is for you to find out. The walls will not be thick enough to resist you. That is what you came for. You are on the great adventure."

Which ended it. Shortly afterward, with an admonition to enjoy ourselves, Witherspoon departed.

It was but a few hours of the evening and I had but begun my exploration. The great library alone would suffice for days. I was almost as eager as the Master to delve into its recesses and to unearth its treasures. I have always been first of all a book-worm.

But I was not to be alone. In a few minutes I discovered that I was being shadowed by the sturdy Wilkins. For once he was bashful and followed me about the shelves with the furtive awe of a child. Occasionally he would draw down a book for an awed and clumsy perusal. In such a mass of learning he was helpless, and there is nothing so pitiful as an unreading materialist among a mass of books. Finally I went to his assistance.

"What is it, Wilkins?" I asked. "Can I help you?"

"I—I think so, Mr. Warren," he answered. "I think so. I would ask that black-fable of a librarian, but what's the use? And I can't fish it out myself. If I could read these books here I'd sit up for a professor. They're way above my head. What I want is the children's department."

I smiled.

"The children's department? And why the children's department? Surely your appreciation would call for something heavier."

But he shook his head.

"No," he said, "I want just that; the fairy tales. I want to get a line on this case. My mind is in a rut, and I am going to get it out. I am looking for this story about this *Meph*—what's-his-name that we were talking about at dinner."

I chuckled.

"Oh, I see. You mean *Mephistopheles*. You will find that in '*Faust*' though it is hardly a juvenile. It is a German work. Perhaps we can find a translation."

I CALLED the Master. Sure enough, at the old man's behest, the black librarian brought to us the book he had asked for. In fact he did more; because when Wilkins left us he had under his arm not only a copy of Goethe's "*Faust*," but likewise a copy of the "*Frankenstein*" of Mrs. Shelley.

It was some hours later before I again thought of him. In fact, just before retiring, I called one of the mutes, or black fables, as Wilkins called them, and made an indication that I would like to see the detective.

It was surprising, and almost droll. I was led to one of the most sumptuous chambers of the whole palace. The bed was a canopied affair that would have befitted Napoleon; the coverlets were costly imported silk of intricate design, and in the midst, in bachelor ease, was the pink pajamaed figure of the detective.

It was almost a shock to see him. Somehow I could not imagine Wilkins in pink pajamas. He was just beginning to need a shave. He was smoking one of his black cigars and reading. He blew a smoke-cloud when he saw me.

"Hello, Object!" he greeted.

"Why Object?" I asked.

"Isn't that what the Rebel Soul called you? And I'm another, only I'll define it. I'm a fine-looking object, ain't I? How do you like my bedroom?"

The look in my eyes was perhaps enough of expression, for he went on.

"I chose the best, Mr. Warren. I can sleep just like a king, and feel like one. I've been reading this Dutchman's story."

"You mean Goethe."

"Yes, only it sounds more to me like goat with a cloth on. Goath, Goethe. But I presume you're right. Whatever he was, he ain't no fool. I've just got well started."

"Then after all," I asked, "you think it may have some bearing?"

"Surely. This fellow wrote it for a fairy tale. Had he known George Witherspoon he would have been writing history."

"Then you think—"

"Sure, just that. This *Mephisto*. He and George Witherspoon are the one and only."

It did sound ridiculous, but after all it was only natural that once he got started the practical Wilkins should swing to the opposite extreme of the arc of reason.

"Perhaps," I ventured with a smile. "But how about *Faustus*? May it not be that he has sold himself—"

But Wilkins interrupted; his answer was almost snapping.

"Who? That guy? Not on your tin-type. I should say not. He ain't selling nothing. And if he was, I'd hate to buy it. He's the real *I*, that guy; the whole thing—and then some."

It was startling, of course, but after all a certain sequence followed not long after that induced me almost to the same opinion.

## CHAPTER XLII

### IN THE SOUTH TOWER

FOR a few days I saw next to nothing of the detective. You could not have dragged him away from those books with a tractor. I was left alone to my explorations. I saw the Master, to be sure, in the library, but he had gone again into silence.

He and George would sit in long discussions, but when I discovered that it had to do with that old Chinese, and that half of their conversations were in an Oriental singsong language, I fell back to my own resources.

I spent hours and days in curious exploration. There was a mystery and a secret about the place that would not unravel. Forever I was finding some new passage or set of chambers at which to marvel. The place was a fascinating jumble of everything on earth. One could have threaded and rethreaded through it a year without making much more than a beginning.

Often I would go up to the south tower and listen. I could never forget that music and its inspiration. When I felt lonely and out of the world and afraid, as I often did, I would go there. And it never once failed me. It was like all the goodness, all the virtue and all the hope in the world centered into melody. One could forget almost anything in the strength of its inspiration. It made one feel that whatever the meaning of all this mystery and shadow there was at the center a pure heart burning.

It was on one of these intermittent explorations that I at last discovered a stairway. It was in one of the rooms on the upper floor of the building. The door was open, and I had entered. It was bare but for a beautiful green carpet and a small, oaken table, and in one corner a narrow metal stair that led up to the ceiling.

With an exclamation I knew it for one of the things I looked for. It led up to the roof of the building. It was a way out into the sunlight. In a moment I had mounted and unbarred the little trap and stepped out into the open.

Did you ever come suddenly through a bunch of underbrush to the top of a mighty mountain? Do you remember your exclamation? For hours you have toiled through the foliage with a sense of isolation. You long to get outside, to be on top, to feel the sense of mastery at the summit. Then you can understand my emotions.

I was here at last, with the thrill of freedom. All the mystery and question of the building was beneath me; I was in the sunlight breathing the open air of distance. There lay the same blue sky, the same far-reaching ocean, the same wooded mountains. It was all real and lifelike. I could see men, real men, working in the distance; an automobile driven by a man was coming up the highway. I could not but wonder at the completeness of the isolation, like nothing that one could conceive of, like the depth of ages, a gulf of time separating us from the present. And yet, in the midst of all—men, life, love, and action all about us.

I examined my surroundings. I was standing on a floor almost level, though sloping slightly to allow for the draining of water. It was a parallelogram with four circles at the corners, lifted perhaps about two feet above the main floor, and which I knew to be the towers. The roof itself was of stone, well mortared; a few vents and chimneys in the center, and against one of the vents a ladder that might have been left by the builders. I stepped over to the south tower, ascended the extra two feet and looked over the rampart into the perfumed garden.

Below me was a mass of semitropical profusion, myriad colored and giving off aromatic odors. The beds about the building were in full blossom, the lawns like velvet emerald and the trees sighing with the soft breeze of the ocean. It was like waking up in the spring-time. For a time I was drowsy with contentment; gazing at the beauty, the garden, the landscape, and below the height a bay that cut into a neck of land from the ocean. I watched the white sails of the yachts, and on the other side of the strip of blue a beach teeming with people. A summer hotel stood out white against the background. I thought I heard music.

Music? Yes, but it was not such as comes from a summer resort. It was my own musician. I remembered then that it was on the south tower that I was standing.

It was not until it had died away and the shadows were growing long that I opened the trap and descended to dinner. For some days now I had been alone. The Master was engrossed with Wither-spoon and some secret; and Wilkins with *Mephisto*.

I had been left to my own resources. But on this night I found the detective; he was waiting, and, no doubt as a reaction to his silence, was unusually loquacious.

"Well," he said, "I have finished it."

"Goethe's 'Faust'?"

"Yes, and his *Mephistopheles*, and his *Margaret*."

"You like it?"

"A great piece of writing. And I might say imagination."

"It is," I answered; "but with no bearing on life outside of its poetry and its allegorical interpretation."

"Its which? I didn't see that."

I went into explanation. Wilkins nodded.

"I understand you now. That was Goethe's intention. He didn't know as much as you or I do. I have always been cold and practical and hard-headed. Mr. Warren, and I have never been superstitious. Had anybody told me about this case I would not have believed them. I would have proved out of common sense that such things could never happen."

"And now?"

"What would you have? I have eyes, have I not, and ears? And I am not such a fool but what I can use them. I would believe anything."

"You are ready to accept a literal interpretation. Do you still rate George as the *Mephisto*?"

He nodded.

"Why not? He comes nearer that than any other. He is not *Faust*. *Faust* was passive, a mere plaything. This Wither-spoon is the whole works."

I had already, of course, related to Wilkins all that I knew of the Thing of Evil. I was convinced that that one was the center of it all, the real one that was at the source and the beginning.

I DID not relish the idea of George as *Mephisto*. I had faith in him; he was in my lights as true as I was. I was like

Roselle, I had never wavered. Neither could I incline to superstition. I, like the Master, was confident that when all was stripped away, when the case was bared of weirdness, we would find at the bottom, after all, material facts and sequence. It could not possibly be supernatural.

"Then," I asked, "how do you account for this evil one, this black monster that lurks somewhere in the building?"

"He is in here?"

"He is."

"That is good. Mr. Warren, I don't believe that I have to account for him. That is for George Witherspoon."

"You mean—"

"Just this: That George Witherspoon is it, and the other is his puppet."

At that moment I disagreed. I had reason to feel a certain confidence in my opinion; but it was not to be enduring. It was only a short time later that I was almost as much convinced as Wilkins.

It was the next day, shortly after the noon hour. I had disclosed to the detective the secret of the stairway. It was one of the things that his keen eyes had not discovered. Now that he had labored through his "Faust," he was keen to continue with his investigations. When I mentioned the ladder on the roof his eyes lit with a sudden inspiration.

"I have an idea, Mr. Warren. Did you ever notice, when outside in the grounds, that there are windows in that tower?"

"But no doors on the inside," I said.

"Exactly. But there are windows, and one of them looks out on the roof of the portico."

I nodded. I had noted it several times.

"What do you propose to do?" I asked.

At the question his eyes sparkled with anticipation.

"Do? Why, can't you guess? Do you imagine that I am going to pass up my first chance to see an angel? I have heard him. Now I am going to try to see him. It is simple—the ladder is a piece of fortune. All we have to do is to ascend to the roof and lower it to the portico. In two snaps we can look in at the window. I am going to see what he looks like. Come along."

I did. In a short time we were standing on the stone floor in the sunlight. The ladder was still where I had seen it. Wilkins picked it up with manifest satisfaction. It was long and would evidently reach to the portico.

But it was heavy. The wind was blowing and it was difficult to handle. So I took one end. It was grimy and covered with soot, and smeared me with filth. If I was not so dainty and unused to exertion I would not perhaps have noticed it. It certainly did not bother Wilkins. In a moment we had carried it over to the tower. I looked at my companion. At his direction I assisted in turning it about and laying it crosswise on the tower.

Wilkins nodded with satisfaction. I stepped over to him as he pulled out one of his black cigars and lit it.

"Some view up here, Mr. Warren, isn't it?"

"It is," I said, "it is. A splendid panorama. The whole country, the sea, the sky, the distance."

He had his sturdy legs apart—it was a way he had of standing, especially when watching.

"Yes, it is. Just like daylight."

Somehow his words had the intonation of one just emerging from out of the darkness.

I did not answer. I was brushing off my clothes; I had taken out a handkerchief and was snapping off the dust and cobwebs.

"I am afraid you will find that lost labor," he commented; "we are going down the ladder, you know, and climbing down a wall like this is hardly a silk handkerchief job."

"Who, I? I had not thought of going down myself."

"Certainly; don't you wish to see the angel?"

Then we heard the music. For a moment Wilkins stood stock-still, his whole attitude in attention. Then he whispered:

"Now, Mr. Warren, easy!"

I did as I was told. Together, as quietly as we could, we slid the ladder over the parapet. It was not as easy as the telling, because it was heavy, and more so when the center of equilibrium was over the side wall. But Wilkins was sturdy; by climbing to the rungs he succeeded in landing it on the portico. Luckily, we made no noise.

He turned to me.

"I'm going over, Mr. Warren. If I make any motion to you, get on the ladder and come after; don't be afraid. I will not call unless there is something you should see.

"Now for the angel."



CHAPTER XLIII

THE QUEST FOR THE MUSICIAN

WITH that he climbed over, and rung by rung made the descent. As I watched him I could not but comment that he must have done this thing before. He was a man of hazardous profession. I wondered how I, with my inaptitude for climbing, would perform on such a flimsy stairway. He reached the bottom.

The tower was high, and, as I was directly above him, I could not see more than the top of his head and his shoulders. I recall that he had on a black derby hat, which, setting squarely in the center of his figure, gave to him a grotesque appearance, something like a queer and ugly bug. He hesitated for but a moment. The music was still playing.

It must be remembered that he was directly beneath me. I was forced to

climb a bit and lean over the parapet in order to see him at all. This made me a little dizzy, but I was curious to know what was to come of our little adventure.

He crept down slowly and cautiously. I could see his hand pressing against the wall, and at length see him peeking in at the window with great stealth.

At last he looked up; his finger was crooked in indication for me to go down, and he stepped over to the foot of the ladder. I needed no second bidding. In a moment I had let myself over the wall and was on the flimsy ladder. I don't know why ladders are made so frail. When I looked down on the diminutive Wilkins and the gulf below me I experienced a gulping and sickening nausea, and a desire to leap. It seemed so easy.

I closed my eyes to recover control and clung on tightly. I had ever been weak in body, and never much of a climber.



"In this house you have the solution of the whole mystery of the Rebel Soul. *Faust, Mephistopheles, Frankenstein*— There is analogy between George Witherspoon's story and each of theirs"

I thought at that moment what a fool I was to trust myself on such a ladder. To make things worse the wind began blowing. I could feel myself swaying in an incredible arc, though I suppose it was not much more than a vibration. I clung on with frightened desperation.

But at length the vertigo left me. I don't suppose it continued more than a few seconds. I began to descend. You can imagine just how carefully I felt for each succeeding rung—I believe that my finger-prints are still on the sides of that ladder. At last I felt the abrupt halt of a floor beneath my feet. I had reached the portico. I looked up at Wilkins, and noticed a piece of steel in his hand.

"What are you going to do with that?" I demanded.

"Do? What would I do? I'm going to jimmy that window."

Well, I could not stop him. Before I could make any further comment he was plying his craft; which, from the way in which he went at it, is half-burglar. It was not the first window he had ever opened. I wondered whether the one inside might not stop him. But there was no opposition. In a jiffy he had raised the sash and climbed inside.

"All right," he whispered. "Here, let me have your hand."

We were in a round room exactly the same size as the tower. It was a combination of library, studio, and music-room. On an easel was an unfinished canvas of a Pacific sunset. I am not a judge of art, but if true art is naturalness this was the work of no uncommon hand. On the table were a palette, a number of brushes and other appurtenances of the profession.

On another table were a number of musical instruments, most of them violins. Wilkins eyed them critically, one of them he picked up; from several bows reposing side by side he made a selection. I had no idea what he was going to do. He closed one eye, as if he were trying to remember something out of the years. Then he rasped out "Yankee Doodle."

I say rasped because that is just what it was. Wilkins nodded.

"That's a Strad," he commented.

"A Strad? How do you know?" I exclaimed. "I—"

"Why," he said, "can't you hear? Where are your ears? The timbre. Did you not notice the beautiful sound?"

I have never seen a Stradivarius, nor

heard one; and, of course, I could not judge. I could only nod.

"But this musician? Why did we come—"

My companion placed the instrument in its place. I think there was just a little longing in his eyes—there was music in his soul, even if he could not get it out with his fingers.

"That's right," he said, "the musician. We must find him. Once I get him I'm going to make him sit down and play for me the rest of my life."

But just here a new difficulty presented. The round room was about thirty feet across; on one side was a circular, iron stair that led both up and down. Had the mysterious occupant ascended? At first Wilkins suggested that we go in opposite directions, with the implication that one or the other would be sure to find him.

But at that I demurred. I would much rather stay with him. I am not exactly brave, and though this musician looked anything but vicious, I would much rather enter his presence in the company of one that I knew was flesh and blood.

"All right," said Wilkins, "what'll it be: up, down; up, down; up—"

"Down," I said.

"All right, down she is."

**W**ILKINS took the lead. The room below had no windows; the walls were papered but sheer, without the least trace of an opening. An electric light was glowing faintly. Apparently it was a sort of dining-room. On a table in the center reposed the remains of a meal not long finished. Wilkins turned over a few fragments and sniffed with satisfaction.

"Well, that's one comfort."

"What?"

"He eats just like you or I. He's human. I can forbear the angel; long as he's got the music. If he's a man I can hold him."

"But he's not here."

"We'll find him, never fear."

I looked about.

"Shall we go up or down?"

The detective pointed to the stair.

"She goes down, don't she? That's the way we started—we'll go to the bottom. We've got plenty of time for the top."

But this time when we descended we ran into the dark. I believe it was the blackest place I ever entered; it was dark with that intensity that borders on nothingness and imbues in one a sort of con-

## CHAPTER XLIV

## THE EVIL ONE

ception of pure space. I was compelled to hold one hand on my companion's shoulder to keep my courage. I like daylight.

"Hang it!" Wilkins exclaimed.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"We're up against something. I bumped my nose. Wait till I get a light. There now!"

He pulled out a pocket flash-lamp and turned a round glow of light before him. It was a door. It was heavy and wooden. Wilkins tried the knob. It was locked.

"We will have to go back," I whispered.

"Who? Us? Not on your tintype. This is right where we go. Locked out, eh! Here, hold this light!"

I took the lamp while he fumbled in his pocket. In a moment he had something in his hand and was working at the lock. In this hole I felt creepy; I could hear something creaking on the stairs above me; I think I heard some one pounding.

They spoiled a good burglar when they made Wilkins a detective. The barred door was only an incentive. He worked with eagerness and anticipation; in no time he had it open. The light that flashed over his shoulder bored its way through a long, low passage.

"Gimme the light," he said. "It's getting interesting. Now come on."

I would much rather have gone back; but, nevertheless, I followed. My bravery was of the common variety—I would follow when others did the leading; I did not wish to be called a coward. You can depend upon it that I clung close to Wilkins.

It was much like a cave. It had a musty, dripping feeling; the air seemed deadened, but for all that moist and laden. Perhaps it was the absolute absence of ventilation. I noticed that the floor was of stone and that the ceiling was curved; a sort of moss was growing on the side wall. When I looked back I had the feeling that we were the only ones on earth. Why are such strange passages ever constructed?

But there was one comfort. That was the light. As long as that held out we could at least keep some sense of direction. I began to speculate on flashlight batteries and the length of their life. Wilkins was walking on his toes; I was careful to follow his example. Then he held his hand out behind him. I grasped it.

The light went out!

IT WAS only the pressure of my companion's hand that kept me from exclaiming, I was so disappointed. I had never known that a ray of light could have such value. I started to whisper; but the detective placed his hand rudely over my mouth. I thought I heard him breathing "Fool!"

I could do nothing but obey him. When he pressed me against the wall I made zeal to press even closer. He held my hand; I could feel the pressure of reassurance that he gave, and I squeezed back as an indication that I understood him. Which I did not.

He crept cautiously along the side wall, holding my hand and leading me behind him. I began to see dimly. Was I becoming accustomed to the darkness? No, it was a light, a faint glow ahead of us. We crept up closer.

The passage down which we were stealing had opened into a room. It was a place of some dimensions; I could not distinguish just how large. It was faintly lighted by a small globe hanging in what apparently was the center. In any other place on earth it would still have been semi-darkness; in contrast to the passage it was like the full sweep of the sunshine.

Wilkins halted suddenly. The grip on my hand tightened, it had a world of meaning. We heard a sound.

Never shall I forget that sound. I am a banker. There is one sound which, to a man's ears, is ever like music, one never forgets it: it is the curse, and the one thing that can send a tingling thrill through the veins of the coldest. It was money. It was gold!

I listened.

There was not a doubt of it. I could hear the metallic clatter of falling metal; it had the heavy, distinctive ring of the precious mineral. And it was not that of single pieces, but handfuls; some one was literally shoveling gold!

I caught my breath. The sound ceased. Even as it did the light went out and a door creaked heavily.

"Now," said Wilkins.

We stepped boldly into the room. Somehow my withering fear had left me. It was as if I had been charged with an electric life and eagerness. There was a

AT LAST we discovered a door. Wilkins pried it open. Once more we were in one of those passages of chaos.

But now he was in a hurry. In spite of the fact that we were rushing into certain death, he almost dragged me in his haste. It was a place much like the other. He used no caution. Verily I believe that bravery can border on madness.

Then suddenly we came to a door. For a moment I had some respite and safety while he labored with the lock. We were at the end of the passage! We had passed no one. Therefore we were safe for the time.

But I did not like the dark. It was fearful, treacherous, ominous. My ear was bleeding. I began to feel faint; I think it was from loss of blood. I don't think it was fear. It was so dark behind us. I looked back; it was dreadful. What if—

I whispered, "Can you get it open?"

"Just a minute; hold the light. There, now let me. Heavens, can't you hold it still? There now—well, for the love of Pete! Here, let me have it."

I passed him the light.

I don't know why he did it, but he held the flash square in my eyes and gazed down into my features.

"Well, I'll be jiggèred!" Then he said, very kindly: "Well, do the best that you can, Mr. Warren. I'll try to hurry. Perhaps on the other side we will find some daylight."

We did. I was never so glad of anything in my life. I believe I would have gone mad had I remained in that dank, clammy darkness much longer. I can be brave when I have to, but it's got to be in daylight.

We were at the foot of an iron stairway much like the one we had descended. At first I thought it the same, but when we had ascended to the next floor and discovered a room of wild disorder—books and papers on the floor and every indication of confusion—we knew it for another.

Wilkins put up his flash-light. He nodded at the disordered furniture.

"Rather unkempt, eh, for the trim and well-ordered house of silence. Looks like excitement. Most likely this is the north tower. The other we thought contained an angel. I wonder if this one houses his nibs? It looks like it."

I did not answer because he had started up the stairway.

"Come along," he said. "I think that he went this way."

The next room was much like the one we had entered in the south tower. It had windows. It was a relief to look out of them at the fresh, green landscape. The fog was just sweeping into the grounds. So we could not have been long under the building. But it was long enough, I can assure you. I shall never go there again.

We found our bearings. We were looking out on the roof of the portico; against the opposite tower we could see the ladder down which we had commenced our journey. But that was all. The room was much like the one that we had left. In a corner was a case full of books; in this tower there were books wherever you looked. Wilkins picked one up. It might have been written in Greek or Sanskrit.

"Huh," he greeted. "Well, come on, we don't get anything here."

The next one was more encouraging. Though it was round like the others it boasted a door to break the monotony. A desk graced the center; a table, some whisky in a bottle, a number of pens and some red ink stood on it.

Wilkins inclined his head attentively; he dipped some on his finger, spread it on the paper, smelled it, and nodded satisfaction.

"It's him, all right—the Old Boy himself, as sure as I'm a good-looking bachelor."

I had gone just about far enough. There are some scents that can get entirely too hot. I had already had some taste of the other's effectiveness. In a broken mirror I had a terrible glimpse of my features. The side of my face was blood-stained; the other was white as powder; my eyes lighted with a strange, terrifying weirdness; my ear was cut.

I wanted to get out and to get out quickly. I was content to stay in the main part of the building; the towers could retain their secret; I even believe I lost my love for gold. I shut my eyes on the recollection. I pointed to the door.

"Let us go. Let us get out of here!"

"You are afraid?"

"Yes."

I think Wilkins' eyes were kind. Perhaps he understood. I have too strong an imagination to be a brave man.

"Very well, Mr. Warren. I shall see you out. Then I am coming back to get him."

I was relieved to hear him say it. He opened the door, and we stepped out. As I surmised, it led into the main part of the building. I even thought that I recognized the room when we entered. It had the quiet softness that I had always noted in the library. It was one of the rest-rooms adjacent. Wilkins understood it as well as myself.

"Well, I guess we are safe now. I will turn you over to the Master."

He turned the knob of the door that led into the next room. It also was a rest-room. It contained a heavy, cloth-

covered table, chairs and a carpet. At the table were two figures. We both of us drew back aghast.

It was this one that we had been pursuing! It was the Thing of Evil! And it was sitting at the table opposite the Master.

I don't know how long we stood there. I was too afraid, Wilkins too full of wonder. And I don't remember much more, unless it was Wilkins' very slangy expression:

"Well, well," he said, "wouldn't it get your goat!"

(To Be Concluded in Next Month's Issue)

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**Into the Infinite** **Part Four (Conclusion)** **Austin Hall** 114

Titanic forces poise themselves for the final struggle to possess the Rebel Soul. Will the strange secret of his being now reveal itself in the clash of the loosed lightnings?

*Published serially in All-Story Weekly, April 12, 1919.*

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*All Stories in this publication, with the exception of the concluding installment of "Into the Infinite," are either new or have never appeared in a magazine. For "Into the Infinite," please see footnote on page 114.*

# Into the Infinite \*

By Austin Hall

## Conclusion

*Titanic forces poise themselves for the final struggle to possess the Rebel Soul. Will the strange secret of his being now reveal itself in the clash of the loosed lightnings?*

**A**FTER his adventures with George Witherspoon, the Rebel Soul, Walter Warren became a prosperous banker, and lived happily with his wife and Roselle.

The Master, the leader of the Order of Sevens, told Walter that George had become an internationally famous criminal, and was known as "The King of Thieves." But he was sure that, unmoral and unfettered by man-made laws as he was, George had a great power for good in his nature, unknown and unearthly powers for either good or evil. The Master received Walter's promise of assistance in redeeming him.

The Rebel Soul seemed to be following his evil genius when he kidnaped Roselle, married her and took her abroad. But he was more than good to her and she loved him with unflagging devotion, in spite of the supernatural powers which he showed in outwitting and despoiling all of those whom he wished to fool or surpass. She clung to the idea that he had never harmed a helpless person, and that her love would make him finally an all-powerful benefactor of humanity rather than a superlative force of evil.

All the evil in George Witherspoon's life was personified in a small malignant being who avowedly meant to spoil Roselle's life and plans, and who had some mysterious covenant with the Rebel Soul. At last, in a strange mansion in America, Walter, the Master, and Wilkins, the detective, join forces to grapple with the Thing of Evil itself.

## CHAPTER XLV

### THE DUEL

**I**NDEED it would be just that—a duel. I don't know just the exact meaning that the term is meant to imply; but it was surely to the point and suggestive.

It was a sort of climax backward. Wilkins had been wrought to a high state of excitement; our gruesome adventure underneath had been just what he was after—he was getting action. It was his purpose to capture this one who was the whole crux of the mystery and bring him bound and tied, to the Master. The danger was but spice to the adventure. And he was forestalled. He was disappointed.

We stood in the doorway. The other two did not notice us a whit, or if they did, they did not betray it. It was impossible to come upon them without a halt of wonder. It was an imaginative conception portrayed in the flesh of the living.

I had read many speculations concerning the good and evil that is mankind, of double personalities, of the teachings of religions—that man is between two forces: God and the devil—but never did I expect to encounter the two abstract philosophies face to face, personified in the forms of men. But it was so. One was everything that the other wasn't. Good and evil. Love and undying hatred; the hope and the negation of humanity.

In the contrast the Master was great with unlimited effulgence. We had always loved him; there was ever something in him of the future, he was so devoid of evil. He was as high in the plane of virtue as the other was low in the depths of evil. It was a picture to hold the eye and mind; of the two great forces, of the opposite jinn of mankind come in conflict.

The Master was reading. That, as I remember, was the strangest part of it all. Apparently he was absolutely unconscious of the other. Even when he looked

\*In the future FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES will feature either new stories, or stories which have appeared only in book form. In deference, however, to the thousands of readers who have been following "Into the Infinite" we have included the final instalment in this issue.



Whose gold? Whose but Death's?



across the table, square in the other's face, he seemed not to see him. His eyes never lost their soft, mellow expression; there was not the flicker of emotion, not the slightest flexing of a muscle. How different was the other!

It was Roselle who had named him the Thing of Evil. And he was just that. He was everything that I would hate to be; a nightmare of human flesh and action. He was evil, evil intense, and of a greatness unparalleled. There was something about him that threw one back into memory; that roused certain deadly animal emotions. He was carnal, without spirit, deadly and alluring.

Alluring? It seems a crime to say it, but it was so. One could not behold him without a certain weakening, a surrender, a desire to do I know not what. Had it not been for the presence of the Master I would have been doubly frightened. Perhaps, too, it was the real, hard, material voice of Wilkins beside me that reassured me.

"Old Nick himself!" he was saying.

And I caught sight of his blue-barreled automatic. I really believe he would have used it had it not been for the Master. The old man looked up and with an almost imperceptible change of expression flashed a message to the detective. The latter subsided and put the weapon in his pocket.

It was a duel. The strangest duel, perhaps, that man has ever witnessed. And it had one element that has been true since man's beginning—the evil was on the aggressive. From its chair opposite the Master it was ever lifting up, its lips breathing silent imprecations, its eyes scintillating like flame. It was terrible and unholy, and yet withal it was strangely impotent.

The Master went on with his reading.

The thing writhed with exasperation. It could not get started. Whatever its power, it was impotent before the Master. It was cringing, it was defiant, it was helpless!

Perhaps it understood. Here was one who could defy all the subtle arts of the devil. Its nose was white and twitching; its hands clinching; and then—

I saw it. I would have screamed. The Master looked over calmly. It had drawn a knife and was just in the act of hurling it across the table. The arm was partly raised when it was arrested by the nonchalant glance of the Master. The weapon fell upon the carpet. Never was

such a strange duel beheld by mankind.

But at this instant there was an interruption, a silent impinging intuition of a thing approaching. The static air was broken. Something—I could feel it—someone. I looked up at the door on the opposite side of the room, and I saw it.

It was George Witherspoon!

The Thing of Evil is such a nightmare that I loathe to pen it. It is terrible, almost supernatural. But if the one was supernatural so was the other, and as beautiful as the other ugly.

Whatever was George Witherspoon, he was a conception of beauty attained to its utmost. He was ever twenty, with the utmost perfection of physical proportion. Somehow one could not think of him as evil; he gave one the impression too much of perfection.

I was not disappointed.

He stood still but a moment. He was smiling. There was laughter in his eyes. He glanced over at the Master. Even in that one glance I could catch admiration. I really think he loved him.

Then he stepped forward. What he did was unexpected.

He plucked the evil one by the ear. There was no resisting; the thing cringed and whimpered, but he obeyed like a recreant schoolboy. It was the work of but an instant. Wilkins and I were brushed aside. With a quick movement the Thing was thrust forward. George locked the door. And I heard Wilkins say:

"Yea, you betcha. He minds *Mephisto*."

THE whole affair was surprising. The afternoon's adventures had come to a strange and unexpected culmination. It was inexplicable. Instead of clearing, the mystery was getting darker. It had grown threefold. There was an affinity between them, something I could not fathom.

But one thing was certain: George Witherspoon was the master; this one incident proved it beyond all question. Certainly there was something between him and the Master. I reflected that they had been for some days in long consultations. It is not likely that all their conversations had to do with the Chinese of the ancients. The Master would not turn from his purpose, and his purpose was George Witherspoon and his secret.

The Master raised his eyes from his book. He was not perturbed a whit by the sudden interruption. He watched it with calm interest. When the other had

locked the door and turned, he spoke quietly:

"Give me the key, George."

It was placed on the table.

"Very well."

The old man arose, stepped over very quietly and unlocked it.

"You know what you are doing, Master? I have warned you. You are playing with death."

The old man smiled softly.

"Very well. So be it. Life or death."

George Witherspoon bowed. In a moment he was gone.

Things had now come to such a pass that I was determined on some sort of an explanation. And so was Wilkins. If the Master knew, it was no more than right that he should tell us. Who was this strange monster—and what was this one, all light and genius? I was positive that he knew something. We asked him.

The Master nodded kindly, and I think his eyes twinkled.

"Very well, Walter, it may be true. Perhaps you are right. But let me ask you: Have you looked in that mirror yonder?" He glanced quizzically at Wilkins, who was covered with soot and cobwebs. "Is it not possible that you yourself have something to tell the Master? You are wounded." He rose softly and examined my ear. "Only a flesh wound. Tell me, Walter, of your adventures."

So I told him. He listened eagerly. I related it all from the beginning, turning to Wilkins for corroboration.

"And who is this little monster with whom you were sitting," I asked, interrupting myself before he had finished.

"Ah," said the Master, "that I can tell you. Perhaps you know already. He is the one who carried George Witherspoon to the mountain."

"The purchaser of his soul?"

"Exactly."

"Then," I said, "I quit. He is nothing but the devil. I shall believe with Wilkins."

The Master smiled.

"Please go on with your story. How were you wounded perhaps—"

And so we related the rest. Of our entrance to the tower, our search, and the discovery of the passage, of the gold and the fearful thing that had struck me in the dark, and finally the pursuit that had brought us here.

The Master considered. I think that what we said inclined him to his former theories.

"You found this gold, you say?"

"Millions."

"Millions? That is well." He closed the book that was before him; and there was finality in his tone. "I think, Walter, that I can promise you a solution. The case is drawing to a close. And now, gentlemen, you had better have a good bath and something to eat."

Of that there was no question, we both of us were very dirty. We rose to go, but the Master stopped us.

"One word, gentlemen. Perhaps it is just as well that you know that tomorrow we shall be alone in the House of Silence. George Witherspoon is to leave us, and we shall be left to fight for our own salvation. I wish to warn you. If you come into one of these rooms and discover myself and our friend up yonder in a sort of silent conversation do not disturb us. And let me ask you finally and fervently not to be alarmed. Have faith in the Master. That is all."

And so it ended, our interview with the Master, and the escapades of the afternoon. It was as usual, the real was the unreal, and our adventures ending in nothing.

When I thought back I could not but note the absolute contrariness of events. We had drifted, not pursued; we had followed one event after another, and in the end we had found nothing. In the first place we had set out to discover the strange musician and had found only deeper mystery. We had pried our way into the tower, and we had lost him. Then the passage, the gold, the thing in the darkness, the pursuit, the north tower, the scene in the study-room, the advent of George Witherspoon, and lastly our interview with the Master.

It had been an afternoon of surprises, with never a one explained. Most of all, and what was the most humiliating, we had at the end of it all been dismissed like schoolboys. I had sought some satisfaction from the Master, and instead had yielded myself into doing most of the talking.

Not that I cared. I had implicit confidence in his wisdom, but I did have a little pride, and was beginning to feel that the time was at hand when I should be taken more into his counsel.

And Wilkins. He had been all for action, grim and certain. He was going to finish this thing with his brawn and muscle. Had he been left alone and allowed to have his way, one person in

the House of Silence would now be lying on his back with a lead bullet in his head. It was hard for him to understand the weird, subtle course of the Master. He was hard and practical; and it was no easy matter to abnegate thirty years of training even after the reading of "Faust" for three nights in the House of Silence. Though he had gone to the tip of the arc of superstition Wilkins still had great respect for steel, even when dealing with the supernatural.

**B**UT was it supernatural? Somehow I kept repeating the question, not audibly, to be sure, but in my mind. I had the Master's reiterated assurance that it was not; and my own reason told me the same, but if it was not supernatural, what else could it be? There was something epicene about this Thing of Evil; something sexless, as of a thing out of body—human, to be sure, but with an extreme distortion; of great and unholy wisdom and fascination.

Fascination! No word was ever coined that could describe it. It was not hypnosis, but something far above it. One could almost feel that here was a great and unholy spirit, clinging to a decayed and worthless body; a great soul that had been perverted.

The Master would have no violence. From the very first he had warned against all killing; he had ever a faith in more subtle ways of fighting. He would have no police and no material interference. And I knew that he was right. There was something at the bottom of it all that must not be shattered by a physical interruption. I realized it, and so did Wilkins, who very aptly specified it when we came to dinner.

"Well," he said, "I came very near spilling the beans."

Wilkins was forever using absurd expressions, but he had a way of getting more out of them than I could derive out of pure authorized English.

"What beans?" I asked.

"Why, the beans, the whole pot and porridge. I can't forget that I'm a human being. I've been trained to follow my man and pin him down when I get him. In this case it would have done no good. The Master does not wish to destroy the deck until he has found the joker."

"And this monster is the joker?" I asked.

"No, he's part of the deck. The Master wishes his secret."

"But will he get it?" I asked, knowing well what would be the answer.

"Get it? Get it? Say, now will he? Leave it to the Master. He's a fox that would make a stone dog wag his tail. It's going to be some battle."

"Then you think that there will be a fight, after all?"

"Yep. Up here." He pointed to his forehead. "These two old birds are going to have a thinkfest; a private shenanigan of their own, the high-brow heavy-weight championship of the world. And Johnny Wilkins is going to be the official timekeeper."

"You wish to imply by that, I presume, that they are about to enter into some sort of duel of hypnosis; some crucial test of the subjective."

Wilkins bit into his cigar.

"Yes," he answered, "I think so—I suppose that's the Latin for what I was saying. A sort of devil's ping-pong. They're going to eat out of the same soup-ladle. And I'm going to be there to see that there is no hitting in the clinches, no slugging below the belt. It's going to be a fight to the finish, with clean break-aways."

I have no familiarity with the nomenclature of pugilism. There has ever been, in me, an element of abhorrence in these bestial exhibitions of brutality. I was essentially gentle in my nature. When we were children I refrained from the contests that required the skill and strength of mere brute muscle. It was George Witherspoon who enjoyed them. He would, even as a child, journey across the town to witness a fight. He was enthusiastic for contest, for wrestling, boxing; sports that to me seem to be brutally wicked. I have even reason to suspect that under assumed names he sometimes stepped inside the roped arena, or whatever it is they call it.

However, I am not entirely ignorant of the thrill of conflict. I have played golf, and I can understand the excruciating excitement of a close contest, and I can appreciate, too, the inestimable value of chivalric honor and fairness. Even if I was not familiar with all the expressions of the ring I could gather that Wilkins had delegated to himself the duty of arbiter in case of unfairness. He was like a great loving, watchful mastiff where the Master was concerned.

He took out his blue automatic and placed it on the table; likewise two extra loaded clips.

"Yes," he said, "that is the job for Wilkins. The Master has the brains and the wisdom. I am going to let him play his own game. At this kind of business a worldly detective can only bungle. But I can watch, and, if necessary, when the time comes I can do a bit of shooting. Old Black Eyes is going to put nothing over on the Master."

For all of his roughness Wilkins was a splendid man. I was grateful; the presence of the detective would relieve my apprehension considerably. I wished no harm to come to the Master.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### A BATTLE OF TITANS

THERE are certain inner springs of thinking that are beyond scientific explanations. Premonitions and intuitions. The learning of all our wise men has never been able to explain the baffling exactness of our subconscious prescience. That night, when I retired, I experienced a strange anticipation for what might be impending. I had a feeling of lightness, but at the same time an alternation of spirits that was depressing. I had no way of knowing, but I somehow felt that we were approaching the crisis, that the next few days were promising a final series of developments.

What these would be I had, of course, no way of foreseeing. Nevertheless, I was so positive and my mind was in such a swirl of excitement that it was hours before I could sleep. And even when I did it was only to fall into turbulent, tumultuous dreaming, to find myself in a phantom land of stalking shadows where impossible things happened, where everything was upside down and depressing, and where I was but an infinitesimal speck among numberless thousands. It was perhaps not more than a reflex of the realities through which I was passing. Certainly there was not any great demarcation between the two illusions. One was as unusual as the other.

In the morning, when I descended to the dining-room, I once again found myself alone. Wilkins had been before me. His new occupation left him no leisure for my company or conversation. The sturdiness of his nature, once started, held to his task with the tenacity of a bulldog. He would not leave the Master. He was a bodyguard with the faithfulness of a mastiff.

As might be conjectured it was near the library that I found him. One glance through the open door disclosed the Master, sitting, as usual, by the massive oaken table and reading with the same imperturbability that was such an essential of his nature. Wilkins was in a room close by, where he could see every nook and cranny of the library. He, too, was reading, but with an effort that was perceptible and amusing. It was a great heavy tome, whose impressive and somber binding was a sort of exterior index to its contents.

I nodded.

"Is it interesting, Mr. Wilkins?"

His eyes had a strange, gray color as he replied.

"It is. That is, it will be if I can find out what it is about. I was just trying to get a trace to the Master's wisdom. But I guess I will have to pass it up. It's too much like a heavy bombardment. The words are so long that by the time my brain has waded into the pronunciation it's too overloaded to grasp the meaning. It's too high for a flatbrow like Wilkins. Guess I'll have to go back to *Mother Goose* and *Mephisto*."

"And this strange one, the one you call his nibs?" I asked.

"You mean 'Little Black Eyes'?" he answered, at the same time pointing to his automatic reposing by the volume. "Oh, yes, he has been here. They played the first set-off this morning."

"Played?"

"Well, that's what you might call it. It's some sort of competition. Evidently Little Black Eyes doesn't like the Master."

"What did he do?"

"Do? I don't know as he did anything, but it is evident that he isn't a sluggard. If he aimed as many faces, and shook as many fists, and looked at me as he did at the Master, he would have me climbing for the dog star."

"And the Master?"

"Oh, he doesn't seem to mind it. Rather, he seems to enjoy it; he just goes on reading. He has a fine system of defense, has the Master."

"How do you account for it?"

"I didn't, exactly, but I've a theory. From the looks of it, the Master has a sort of finesse at this devil's ping-pong. He plays with system. He's no amateur like the other, and I think he has got his goat."

"But suppose this evil one should re-

sort to violence?" I asked him anxiously.

"Little Black Eyes? Then—well, about then little Blue Bird will sing a little song."

He tapped his automatic, and I had not a single doubt that he meant to use it.

**I**N THE afternoon I returned to the library. Now that this strange duel was on it was almost impossible to stay alone in the building. I was sensitive to strange fears and trepidations; the silence which before had been so suggestive was now even more ominous in its intensity, its vacuumlike stillness soul-tearing and destructive. Its total lack of sound was hysteria, a static inertness that bordered on to death itself. Worst of all was the climax, the mysterious paradox of silence into sound; hair-raising, like the rushing out of souls on a vacuum whirlwind.

I could not be alone. Even the library with its strange occupants and its duel of the occult was a merry crowd beside the rest of the house. I must have company.

As in the morning I found Wilkins in the side room, sitting at the table with the little Blue Bird automatic still before him. But this time he was not reading.

Far from it. He was alert, and as stiff as a ramrod; there was that to his tense, strong body of a crouching leopard; his face was set, and it seemed to me that he was scarcely breathing. One hand he held alert over the embossed butt of the Blue Bird.

I closed the door softly. The very posture of the detective was enough. The static tensivity of the atmosphere was magnetic, an irresistible lure of a thousand forces. There was something incessant, like the unceasing waves upon solid walls of granite. I stepped to a chair beside the table. Wilkins elevated a warning finger.

There was not a sound; and yet to my excited imagination it was like all the conflict and unloosed tumult of bedlam. One reeled at the contact, the air was charged with unseen scintillations.

I was afraid. I would have gone back, but I could not. Something held me, whether I would or no, to the seat by the side of Wilkins. I will not define it, for to do so would take me into that which I know not. I can only say that it was so.

My eyes were drawn as by a lode-stone through the open door into the library. The table, the scattered parchments, the Master, and the Thing of Evil. The whole view was as in a vision—the rising corridors of books, the great swinging doors of the library, and beyond the full sweep of the splendid stairway. I was as tense as Wilkins. I, too, would have liked to have an automatic.

Truly it was a duel of the occult. The very vibrations told of the strength of Titans. These two old men, so physically frail, were in terrible conflict. I know not how it was, nor what the forces, but I could sense it. And most of all it was evil. Whatever this black one was he was trying to beat down the Master.

It was not strength of muscle. At that he would have been as inept as the frailest insect. He was old; so old, that he had passed beyond the suggestion of flesh and manhood; he was decrepit, aged, feeble, weak, and yet endowed with the strength of thousands. He was unearthly. It was his eyes. They were his all—his being, the searing weapons of an intellect unlimited and evil. And they flamed at the Master.

Never was there such a contrast. It was as if the double nature of man had been separated and divided, driven to utmost extremes of good and evil, and then suddenly brought together. It was a battle that was epic, and allegory personified in action. Never shall I forget the Master.

One cannot look upon extremes without vivid recollections. I would that all the good that is in man would center and grow into the culmination that was the Master. It was fearless, white, spotless, irresistible, and it was calm. As I looked upon these two, so allegorical, my mind lost the sense of their materiality. They were not mere men; but the two prime essences of man's emotions—love and hatred.

And they had come into conflict, a conflict that was weird and impossible and could not be, and yet was for all that the greatest one that can be conceived of. Is it possible that one can destroy the other, and that man be all love or hatred? What right have we for such extremes of good and evil?

But there was no violence. The Master was all nonchalance. Never once did he stop his reading or betray by the slightest quiver that he was even remotely conscious of the other's presence. If the

other was evil he ignored him; he did not deign to notice him; he would not even allow that he was existent. It was the most inexplicable and daring thing I have ever seen, as if he had relegated such a thing to the nonexistent.

Once he looked straight at him; but with the same eyes, unseeing. But it was the moment the other looked for. I gripped Wilkins, who in turn clutched the Blue Bird. The form had stiffened, then crouched and quivered with the alertness of a springing panther.

The Master did not move an eyelash. He calmly selected a piece of paper and went on with his reading. It was a tense moment. I was certain that something was about to happen. It did.

Exasperation drove the weird one into action. It sprang upon its feet. With a shrilling, piping snarl it ejaculated its snapping venom.

"They are mine! Mine! Mine!" it shouted. "You shall not have them! George Witherspoon, and Roselle—mine! Mine! All mine!"

With that it went tottering out of the room. The door of the north tower closed behind it.

Wilkins put down his automatic. He looked at me. His gray eyes were full of satisfaction as he nodded.

"End of round two," he said. "The Master coming strong; the other just a bit groggy."

That ended it for a time. In fact, after a little the Master arose and went down the stairs and out into the garden. From the window Wilkins and I could see him. He walked in and out among the lawns and roses, touching one now and then in a sort of tender abstraction. It is remarkable what gentleness such a one can have in his nature. There is an affinity between flowers and virtue. He was like a strolling meditation. Then he was out of sight; the last we saw of him was his black-robed figure turning off a driveway.

"Well, that ends that," said Wilkins. "These old boys take long intermissions, but when they get together they surely make the fuzz fly. It's sure some battle. Here's hoping it goes to a knock-out. Come, let's get a bite to eat."

Wilkins must have been an enthusiast on boxing. Down in the dining-room he enlarged on the spectacle we had just now witnessed. It took on to him a double meaning; he had a peculiar imagination and insisted on comparing the whole

weird affair to an event in the most brutal of sports. I listened in a sort of whirl to the laudations he bestowed upon the Master.

"Did you notice his haymaker, and that subtle defense, and the short arm? A corkscrew punch ain't in it with it! I have been a fan all my life; I miss none of them; but I never thought that I was some day to witness the highbrow championship of the world. And a ringside seat! I wouldn't sell it for a million!"

And so he went on.

It is really curious what a contrast there can be in the individuality of man's thinking. It was revolting to even speak so. It was impossible that I should connect the Master with anything so coarse and brutal. But for the sake of the respect that I had for the man's innate honesty I bore it until the meal was over. Then I, too, went into the garden.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### MORE MYSTERY

IT WAS good to be outside. Very often I would step out for a little walk along the pathways. Though somehow I never experienced any desire to leave the grounds, it was refreshing to be out in the sunlight, to see the water, the sky, and the white, modern city in the distance.

Just now I was seeking after the Master. It had come to me that the time was again opportune to question as to the future. I was afraid and had many and grave misgivings.

At last I located him. He was standing by the trim cypress-hedge that bordered the park. It seemed to me that he was talking; then that there was another, and that voices were softly commingled. But I could not distinguish. To come across him and not appear too insistent I took a bypath. I was too polite to intrude myself into a private conversation, but I considered that it was not at all but of good form to chance upon him accidentally.

My little detour led me about a clump of bushes. When I had passed them and was again in sight of the spot, he was gone. But of course this was nothing extraordinary. He had merely stepped down another bypath; to overtake him would take but a moment. But when I came to the hedge I halted.

I was curious, of a sudden, to discover

with whom the Master had been talking. The cypress barrier was just low enough for me to see over it. An old man working with a hoe and weeding in a bed of roses. It was a place of much beauty, and from the lawns and park and proportions must have been the grounds of a home of one of considerable wealth. The house visible through the trees was a mansion of the early eighties, a sedate affair with the affable, genial atmosphere of one comfortable and happy. Somehow it struck me as the home of a scholar. The man did not see me. At length I spoke.

"Hello!"

I do not think that I spoke unusually loud, or that there was anything abrupt in my intonation. I had meant to greet and not to startle. But I did just that. The man dropped his hoe and then recovered it in stumbling fright and stepped, almost leaped, sidewise.

"Now wha' the divil may ye be!"

He was evidently a gardener; some faithful old servitor of the mansion. He glanced at me-shrewdly.

"Excuse me," I said. "I was just saying how do you do."

There was something in his manner beyond mere startlement, something that bordered on fear. He was old and toothless and creased with wrinkles, his whole face, lips, and chin drawn up into a sort of pucker. He glared.

"How d' do, yourself," he answered, "an' wha' the divil be ye? And when ye be through with your how d' doing, be away with ye! Ye black h'athen."

Now, I had a black suit on, but my face is not at all black. Evidently the fellow could not see me, so I climbed up on a large stone to give him reassurance.

"Pardòn me, my dear man, but evidently you are mistaken. I was just seeking information."

He surveyed me curiously from head to foot, and drew a cautious step nearer.

"An' ye are in an 'ell of a place to be looking for information. What bay ye doin' there—and ye're no h'athen?"

"And I am not black, either," I said.

"Maybe so, maybe so, but there's many a one that be. It's a bad place for Christians and I'm thinking."

"Can you tell me anything about the place?" I asked him.

But he glared in answer. His wrinkled mouth clinched together as if he had already spoken more than was good. I repeated the question. His answer was addressed more to himself than to me.

"Na, na," he said, "it is no good to be talking to the divil."

The old fellow was no doubt an eccentric, or some old servant full of superstition. Perhaps, too, he had seen that which excused him. It seemed to grieve him sorely to think that he had even spoken at all; for he continued to shake his head, and to watch me with a sort of fearful anticipation.

Again I asked him my question.

His answer was to place some tobacco between his gums and to continue glaring. I had never been aware that I necessitated such inspection.

"Come, come," I said, "I am a man like yourself. Do I look like a devil?"

It encouraged him at least to answer:

"Sure, sure, an' maybe ye be; but how do I know? It would not be the first lie the divil has told."

There seemed to be no way in getting about him. After all, I was looking for the Master.

"Was there an old man down here a few minutes ago?" I asked.

To my surprise he answered.

"You mean an elderly gntleman, a saint, with a silver beard? One who makes ye talk all ye know and mades ye like it? He was here just a few minutes ago."

"Does he come here often?"

"Aye, he does, to talk to Dr. Holcomb. Sometimes he condescends to talk to me. He's a very fine gntleman."

"Who is Dr. Holcomb?"

He lifted his implement and pointed toward the mansion. But—

"I am Dr. Holcomb."

A man stepped out from behind the shrubbery and introduced himself. He was one who, at first sight, would rightly be taken for a gentleman of honor, and a scholar.

"I am Dr. Holcomb, and you, I presume, are Mr. Warren."

We shook hands over the green cypress.

"I heard Joyce talking," he explained; "he was giving you some of his superstition. Joyce, my man," he said to the other, "are you so sure that Mr. Warren looks like the devil?"

"Begging your pardon, doctor, and how do I know?" the other answered. "'E could look that way as well as any other, could 'e not? I ain't taking no chances."

The doctor laughed.

"That will do, Joyce. I think we may risk it. You may go now."

Whatever the old man's opinions he



The Thing of Evil was there to receive Roselle—as loathsome as a tarantula, and as terrible

did not stop to dispute further. He merely bestowed upon me a parting incredulous stare and toddled, mumbling, up the pathway.

“**P**OOOR old Joyce,” said the doctor, when the man was at last out of sight. “It is almost impossible to persuade him to work on the side of the garden.” He thought a minute. “Perhaps I should not insist. After all, I should have some consideration for his faithful service.”

“Who is he?” I asked.

“Our caretaker. He has taken care of these grounds ever since I can remember. I cannot recall when Joyce was not with my uncle.”

“Then the place is the property of your uncle?” I asked. “You do not live here?”

“Oh, yes!” he replied. “Yes, I reside here. It has been my home for the past few months. In fact, it has been in my possession for the last few years. I have been abroad.”

“I see, and Joyce has been the caretaker?”

“He lived here alone a number of years,” he answered.

“He does not seem to like this hedge?”

The doctor glanced up meaningly. His eyes were brown and clear and limpid with intelligence. He stroked his black beard with his finely manicured fingers.

“Do you blame him?” he asked.

“Then he has seen something?”

“I wouldn’t say as to that,” he returned, “but he has certainly some rather weird stories to relate. At first I laughed at him. He is growing rather old, is Joyce. At first I construed it as his feebleness and his natural superstition. But now—really—I don’t know.”

“Then you, too, have seen something?”

“No, not that,” he answered. “I have seen nothing, except perhaps the strange black servants. But I have seen the Master.”

“Oh!” I exclaimed. “You know him.”



"Yes," he returned, "I have known the Master for a great many years. I have admired him. I think that every man of learning or worth must bow, somehow, to the Master. He always impresses me as being something that all of us should strive to become."

"You were surprised to see him?"

"I was. And from then on I have ceased to ridicule the trepidations of my gardener. I was glad to be of assistance to the Master."

"Then there was something you could tell him?" I asked.

"Well, yes. You see, there was some sort of mystery. I happened to know the owner of the house and some of his history."

"The owner of the house!"

"Well, I will not say that. Let me amend it. I refer to the former owner—I am not sure that he is now living."

"And this one—"

"Is Professor Witherspoon."

I could only exclaim.

"Professor Witherspoon?" I exclaimed. "You mean—"

"Just that. Professor George Witherspoon, of Bondell University; formerly professor of mathematics and one of my old instructors. He was one of the greatest scholars of his day and perhaps the most eccentric, a great, good man; but with a wisdom almost uncanny. In his own department and in his day his name was almost one to conjure with. He retired just a few years after my graduation."

"And that was—"

"Just forty-six years ago. I am an old man. I shall always remember. I myself hold a chair of mathematics. I can appreciate the sweep of the man's genius; he had an ability I could never attain to."

"You mean George Witherspoon?"

"Professor George Witherspoon," he corrected.

It struck me still with thinking, it was much more than I could understand, and it was too surprising. There had been something cumulative about the whole thing from the beginning; one mystery heaped upon the other in everlasting succession until it seemed entirely beyond lucid explanation. I could not account for it.

"You have spoken with the Master?"

"I have. It appears that there is a mystery about this place; some black shadow that hangs over it. You know how mathematicians reject superstitions. I had

heard it all out of the silliness of Joyce's gabbling. He holds the place in a sort of terror. He swears it is haunted, and the abode of the devil. Imagine! Of course, I laughed at him. That is, until I met the Master. But now I do not know—"

"Then," I said, "the old gentleman has told you?"

"No. Not exactly. He asked me what I knew and I told him. Merely that. Among other things I spoke of the gibberings of my gardener. He advised me not to laugh."

"And what did you imply from that?"

"Well," he said, "I presume you know the Master. At least I do. He is not one to stoop to foolishness. In the face of his advice I would not deride all the fears of my servant. Still, you know, I am a mathematician, a profession so hard and practical that it is almost brittle."

Now, through all his conversation, I was thinking. The sudden news had thrown a new light on things entirely. I remembered suddenly, with a start that was almost an inspiration. A word flashed in my mind, a word almost historic in poetic fiction, but in this case lucidly analytic. The word was *Faust*.

I recalled the story. A scholar, old, very learned and come to the portals of death without having tasted of a single pleasure of youth. His despair, his summoning of *Mephisto*, the covenant, and his metamorphosis into a youth of splendid beauty. George Witherspoon! Professor Witherspoon! I had the Master's own assertion. Yes. I had, through Roselle's letter, received it from the Rebel Soul himself.

Professor Witherspoon?

Was it possible that this one was George Witherspoon? My imagination leaped into full gallop. It vaulted over all possibilities and tales of fact and fiction, it grasped but one thing only, the portentous and mystic application of *Faust*.

For a moment. And then my mind came back to reason. It was not in the line of logic. I was a man, a human being, a citizen of the twentieth century; I refused to believe it. Nevertheless, it left me in a study. I now had three George Witherspoods and no other explanation.

But that was not all that was to happen. The day was destined to be of still more purport. Though all days here were overflowing, this was to be the most crowded one of all. I returned to the

palace, passed over the portico, mounted the great stairway and entered the library.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### ROSELLE ONCE MORE

THERE was no one there. The mute librarian was mooning about among the unending maze of book-shelves. The Master's table was much as he had left it; covered with neatly arranged stacks of parchment, manuscripts, and old volumes. My mind was still pounding on the riddle of the professor, there was no one about and no way to arrive at any explanation. I would await the Master; I would sit down at his table until his arrival.

For once I found something to read that I could understand. I am well educated, but as a rule the literature of the Master is so much above me as to be almost cryptic. Perhaps if I had studied Assyrian, Coptic, or some other uncouth language, while at college, it might have been different. I had noticed the wide scope of his reading and his apparent effort to link into one cosmic whole the dimness of the past and the indistinctness of the future. What I picked up was a psychology pamphlet by Professor Crellen. It was interesting.

I sank in the easy-chair and commenced reading. I was tired, and it was wonderfully refreshing after the excitement of the day to sit there in relaxation. I perused several pages. It was interesting, but—well, it was rather deep. My mind was not fresh enough to grasp deep thinking. The words began to drift together and I began dozing. Did you ever notice what a bliss there is between waking rest and perfect slumber? Before I was aware of it I was sleeping.

I woke with a start. Something with a musical high note had disturbed me. I was wide awake, but in that state when one still looks back into his dream for an explanation. As near as I could remember it was music, like a child singing. I remember the voice in all its clearness—my playmate—George Witherspoon singing. I had had a dream, beautiful of sunshine, of my childhood. My heart thrilled to that strange exultation that comes to one only at the memory of one's boyhood.

But was it a dream? Somehow I felt that the air was still vibrating to the

chords of that crystal music. There was a strangeness, a tingling, an ecstatic thrill that had shattered the talisman of the house's grim stillness. It was as if some innocent beautiful force had broken down the charm of the mystic silence.

"Ah!"

Then it was not a dream!

It was laughter, clear, childish, innocent. It was musical, undiluted, the clear bell-like ebullition that only comes from childhood. I could hear it reverberating in the hall, and the patter of little feet. There was a hurry, and a rush and an enthusiasm that could be no other's.

My mind rushed back to the days long gone when George Witherspoon and I had been playmates. I could see him coming in a swirl of happiness, rushing through the hallways singing, laughing, and finally bursting into the room with a storm of gladness.

What was this!

The door swung open. It was like the coming of the sunshine. A shrill of childish laughter.

The sapient silence of the great library tingled into music. A child was standing in the doorway. Beautiful, laughing, radiant; blue-eyed, golden-haired, irresistible. I half rose from the chair. I held my hand to my forehead. I could not believe it. It was—yes, it could be no other—it was my playmate, the George Witherspoon of my childhood; George Witherspoon four years old!

I could not speak. I merely stood there—waiting and doubting what I saw. Then there was a scurry and rush and an enthusiastic swirl of arms, and laughter. A great storm of happiness rushed upon me. I had him back. I picked him up—whether he was real or not—and covered him with caresses. There was no doubt of his reality—he was flesh, blood, and action, my own little George Witherspoon!

But in the confusion of the moment another note came to me, a voice, feminine and of familiar sweetness, a voice too welcome to be true. It was like all my dreams and wishes coming to fruition. A swish of skirts and a blur of color and I saw—Roselle!

"Walter!"

"Roselle!"

We both stood still; I holding the little George, and she in the doorway. I noted that she was beautiful, even more so than when I had last seen her. She had grown

into the full maturity of a woman: and without losing a bit of her freshness. Her face had the color of a maiden's, plus the inexpressible tenderness of a mother. And yet she was the same—the shock of wavy black hair, the limpid beauty of her black, Spanish eyes, the red lips, the perfect features, the full bloom of her bosom. She rushed forward.

"Walter, Walter! What are you doing here?"

I think she wept a little. I could have done so myself, I was so happy. Perhaps I did, a tear of two at such a time is always welcome. She was all surprise and exclamation and wonder. She would scarce believe me real, she felt of my features, and ran her hands through my hair.

"Oh," she said, "it cannot be true. I have not seen you. You are not the real, true Walter. You are a dream, like all the rest; a shadow."

But I reassured her.

"There is nothing more alive in the world, Roselle, than I am. I am as material and as much of the flesh as you are, if indeed it is yourself."

She patted my cheek.

"Do not worry about that, Walter. It is I, true enough. But where is Georgie?"

**I**N THE excitement of our meeting he had slipped away. It was his inherited nature to plunge immediately into investigation. We could hear him talking. Then we both saw him. He had found the mute, and was plying the smiling black with questions. Even from where we stood I could see that he had quite overwhelmed him. There was an expression in the man's face that I had not noticed in all the days of our sojourn.

"He is like his father," I said. "Roselle, why did you not tell us? We never knew that you had a child."

"I wished to keep it, Walter, as a surprise for you and Clara. I never gave up hope of seeing you. The terrible thing must have an ending."

"You mean—"

"Oh, Walter, surely you know, you would not be here else—"

"I know nothing."

"The Master—the Master! Where is he? He must surely be here with you—and he knows."

"That I cannot tell you," I answered. "He has not told me. He brought me here some days ago, but has said nothing. It is all mystery."

She looked at me in a sort of wonder.

"Tell me," I said. "Do you know anything? Has he told you—has George Witherspoon spoken?"

She nodded. A strange fear came in her eyes, a fear that was a vengeance and a vengeance that was annihilation. The Spanish blood of her ancestors snapped warning.

"Yes," she said; "he has told me—all. It is here in this mansion"—she pointed to the door—"in the tower, the north tower—the Thing of Evil. I have come to kill him!"

She spoke dispassionately, as if beyond emotion, her words were icy. When a woman arrives at that stage there is not much that can thwart her. Nevertheless, I endeavored to caution.

"Have you seen the Master?" I asked.

But she shook her head. She answered calmly, and from her answer I knew that she knew what I meant to say.

"No, Walter, there is not time. There is not one minute to delay. I know I must save my husband. The time has come. Any minute it may be too late. It would be a million times worse than death!"

She turned her hand over suddenly. She was holding a tiny revolver. I grasped the fact and its meaning and I felt that it was my duty to restrain her. If she could only see the Master! He, and he only, knew how the thing was to be handled; and he would win, of that I was certain. I tried another tack. I would gain time until his coming.

"But, Roselle," I said, "would you kill, would you murder?"

Her answer was reproachful, almost scornful.

"Murder?" she exclaimed. "Murder? To kill a thing like that!"

"Then," I said, "if you have come on such a mission, why did you bring the child?"

She was a woman. The expression in her eyes showed that her calmness was, after all, hysteria. She dropped her hand and she shuddered.

"Walter," she said, "I do not know."

It was as I thought. I must above all things detain her until the coming of the Master.

And what held him? He was ever to be found here in the library; he had never been absent so long before. Should I not look for him? I could at least go to the door.

"Excuse me," I said, "perhaps I can

find him. He will be here in a minute."

And I did just the one thing I should not have done. I left her.

Perhaps I could not have held her. But I should have tried. I should never have given her any opportunity while she was laboring under that cold hysteria. Perhaps, too, she was drawn, drawn as to a magnet.

I had just reached the door when she leaped forward. I say leaped because it was just that; she sprang with the lithe-ness of a panther. In her state of mind there was nothing that could stay her determination. Her tense mind had grasped, with the alertness of one crazed, the opportunity.

With a cry I endeavored to intercept her. I ran forward to intervene before she had reached the door of the tower. She was hysterical with a deadliness that bordered insanity. I knew it. It would be death or destruction for her to come to the lure of that venomous human spider. But I was too late.

She seized the knob and threw the door open.

It was as I thought. The Thing of Evil was there to receive her, as loathsome as a tarantula, and as terrible. In the lair of the doorway, with its black-dotted eyes of hatred and its distorted proportions, it was like a great magnified spider. It was luring, hypnotic, fascinating; it had drawn her. As she raised her arm it sprang forward.

Timid as I am, I could not endure it. I loved Roselle. This Thing should not have her. I leaped between them. And I reached and caught and fastened on its throat like madness.

**O**F THE whole thing I cannot remember. It was too lurid. I can only recall the cold resolve I had of throttling this Thing in its tracks. In my ears was the scream of Roselle and a sound of gurgling. I was clinging with the tenacity of death. In my mind was only the red of murder—to kill! Kill! Kill!

But something intervened. I felt my fingers pried apart. I did not even know where they were, nor what I was clutching. I heard some one speaking. It was like a voice coming out of a far distance. Some one I knew. I opened my eyes. It was the Master—the Master and Wilkins.

The Thing had staggered backward, one bony hand fingering at its throat and its terrified eyes upon the Master. Its mouth was working and I could hear

its imprecations, a guttural snarl that was hellish and for all its fright, freighted with diabolic laughter.

At our feet lay the limp, inert figure of Roselle. It pointed with its lean, long, bony finger. Never shall I forget it—the "Ha! Ha! Ha!"—half whimpered and half triumph. Then it drew back, glowering at the Master. It trembled. It was gone. The Master closed the door. If only he had locked it!

Wilkins picked up Roselle. I assisted as much as I was able; but now that my unreasonable rage was gone, I was weak and trembling. When we had laid her on a couch the Master came over to us. He felt her pulse, placed a pillow under her head and crossed her hands over her bosom. She was still breathing, but hardly perceptibly; in a sort of coma. I spoke to the Master.

"Is she in danger?"

He eased her pillow.

"No, Walter. Not for the present. It is fortunate that you were here and made such a brave effort to save her. It was the only thing that you could do, and you did not hesitate. You diverted him by the fury of your onslaught, which from a man of your temperament was all the more unexpected."

Wilkins patted my shoulder and purred his congratulations.

"You don't know him, Master. He has the heart of a lion. He is the fly-weight champion of the world."

But I ignored him.

"Why, then," I asked, "did you not allow me to kill him? It would have ended all."

But the Master shook his head.

"No, Walter, it would not. To have killed him would have been a crime. It has been written by the Highest One of All that we shall not kill. We must save him. Even this one of evil. Most of all we must save George Witherspoon—yes, and the others, Roselle, and perhaps ourselves.

"Our mission is not selfish. We must do good even to the evil. And last of all, there is something which we would learn—a secret."

He spoke like the Master. After all it was not for me to doubt him. I was but a puppet in the inscrutable game that he was playing. Whatever the depths of his wisdom he was good and unselfish. One could ever have faith in the Master.

I had been impetuous and my very impetuosity had saved Roselle. But had he

been more prompt, it would never have gone to the lure. Did he know that she was coming? I asked him.

In answer he drew out a letter.

"Yes, Walter, I knew," he said. "She had written. I went out to meet her, and I missed her. It came very near being fatal."

"She is in no danger?"

He glanced at the beautiful form.

"Not at present. She will come to no harm unless I fail myself. And I cannot fail. It may be fortunate. It is a har-binger of the end."

"In what way?"

"In this," he answered. "It will bring George Witherspoon. George Witherspoon is more powerful than us all. And he knows. Perhaps he watched it. He will come with the speed of lightning. And God help the ones who have harmed his loved ones."

The plural noun made me suddenly remember. The little one—where was he? It was Wilkins who relieved me; he pointed out of the window. The boy was on the steps, playing.

"He did not see it?" I asked, relieved.

"I do not think so," answered the detective. "We met him on the stairway. He was toddling down when we entered. That is why we hurried. The Master knew."

It was good to hear it. Somehow that little figure made my heart grow warmer. He was an assurance of his father, the same child of laughter; he was innocent, he was proof, after all, that the other was but mortal and would come to redemption. But the Master was speaking.

"I wish just one word, Walter," he was saying, "with you and Wilkins. And I wish to commend you for your patience and to advise that you remain patient. It is a case that is not for violence. We have come to the crisis. It is to be either myself or this Thing of Evil, as you call it. George Witherspoon or destruction. I had not looked for a test so soon. I figured on time and endurance. But what must be, must be."

He pointed to Roselle.

"George Witherspoon is coming. She will bring him. She is to him of more meaning than all the forces of evil. When he does come this whole mystery, I hope, will be snapped asunder." He placed his hand upon my shoulder; his voice grew tender. "And I think, Walter, that we will have back the George Witherspoon of your childhood, the real George."

He spoke to the detective:

"And remember, Wilkins," he said. "No violence."

## CHAPTER XLIX

### THE ONE MAN

WHAT he said was good to hear. The excitement of the past few days, the dangers, the lurking sense of the occult, the unexpected sequence of events, together with their weird setting, had tautened my nerves almost to breaking. I could not have stood out much longer. I must know all, all; and the secret. Who was George Witherspoon? What was he? And what was this power of evil? I was strained to the endurance of expectancy.

And the next few hours perhaps would end it! You can imagine my feelings. I was thrilling with impatience, my heart clutching with varied fears. The end! What was it?

Nevertheless, I descended to the park with Wilkins. At the behest of the Master we went out and took the little George under our guidance. I was very glad to do so. To be near him, to see him, to hear him was like an omen out of my childhood. He was the child George Witherspoon come back again.

To have him with me was one of the strangest and most unexpected turns of the whole affair. It was like going down into the sunshine, back into the years to my boyhood. I quite forgot that he was the child of Roselle, and the other. The resemblance was so perfect that I could feel of him only that he was my play-mate.

And I was an old man! Rather, I was an old young man. What a difference there was between us! Even the father, the real George Witherspoon, was a lad beside me. He was young, perfect, splendid, not one muscle had been withered. Time had not touched him. He had found the blessing of the fountain of youth and the fortunes of *Fortunatus*.

Yet I did not envy him. I only wished him back into redemption. The mystery that surrounded his personality would be lifted. He had been taken to the Mountain. His own words. In his being lay some great and unknown secret, a man above all men, a being above all law who obeyed but self—the Only Man! He had said it. The only man on earth! He could not be lying, and yet I felt that it could not be so.

And this other; what was he? Clearly George Witherspoon was his master. They were so apart in their personalities that there might be a universe between them. And for all that, they were one. What was the thing that bound them? My answer told me—the one thing for which the Master was striving—the secret.

And last of all the musician. Ever I came down to that. It was the one thing that unbalanced the equation. How to account for him? The one fact that ever upset all my long-thought-out solutions. I could get nowhere. The mystery had grown so deep, so shuffled, so inextricable as to be unending. It was not a mystery at all, but an impossibility. So I spoke to Wilkins. It was natural that I sum up all on the eve of denouement. He listened in calm silence. Finally he spoke.

"Do you doubt, Mr. Warren?"

"I did not say that," I returned. "I said that I do not know."

He spat out a piece of his unending cigar.

"Well," he said, "I know. This George Witherspoon, Rebel Soul, *Mephisto*, king of thieves, baron, prince and what-not is getting into action. And the Master knows it. His wife is up yonder. His wife! And God pity the one who did it. Nothing would surprise me now; fire, earthquake, tempest, end of the earth, or doomsday. I have still got one safe bet: I've got my money on *Mephisto*."

But the child must be taken care of. He was hungry and wanted to see his mother.

"What shall we do?" I asked Wilkins.

"That'll be easy," he answered. "Take him down to the dining-room, fill him up, and turn him over to one of the fables."

But I would not do that.

"Well, let him eat, anyway. With his stomach full he will want to sleep. Then we can take him to his mother."

Which is what we did, and when the little head had dropped in sleep Wilkins bore him up the stairway and placed him tenderly, for all his roughness, beside the unconscious form of his mother. There was something about it impressive, even to the detective. He was all reverence; he could not resist their beauty.

"Warren," he said, "for that pair who would not fight the devil? I don't blame *Mephisto*. The Master was right. He is coming, and when he—hello, what is that?"

It was a hissing sound, low, strangled, tremulous, like one coming who was out of breath. It came from the rest-room, a sound of but one identification. There was but one being in the world who could so voice hatred. Wilkins' eyes went to slits as he listened to the sound, then he nodded.

"His nibs, getting in his licks on the Master. On a bet. Do you get it, Warren? It's the Waterloo of the occult. He's going to get the Master first; then he can tackle *Mephisto*."

He drew out his automatic.

"Come," he said.

I touched his shoulder.

"Wilkins," I whispered, "your gun; the Master's orders; remember—no violence."

He nodded.

"That's all right," he answered, "up to a certain point of endurance, but he's going to put nothing over on the Master. If he does he dies, even if he is the devil. But I shall not lose my head, so don't worry."

Again the sound. We stepped over cautiously, Wilkins leading. The door was open. From a point by the window we could get a full view of the strange scene being enacted—the great oak table, the carpet, the somberness of the walls and fixtures, and the two old, wise men.

They were, as usual, seated opposite each other. The table happened to be lengthwise from the door, so we could catch their profile; or rather the side view of the one and the full face of the Master. I crowded close to Wilkins, with a pulsed alertness. He pressed me to a chair beside a table.

There was not a word spoken, nor a whisper. It was a moment of culmination; a silent static climax of the occult. I sensed it and so did Wilkins. The whole scene—the silence, the two old men; the weirdness—was fraught with triumph or disaster. The final scene to a long, long drama: a great victory or a great defeat—the thing of evil or the Master. A battle. Good or evil, George Witherspoon, my own happiness, the life of Roselle, all at stake.

It was a conflict of tremendous forces, of two wills that had been trained to concentration, of two spirits, two contrasts. The air was charged and portent. I could feel its magnetic contact. I was not afraid, but my mind was tautened to the tremulous edge of hysteria.

To relieve myself I glanced out of the window. The far blue waters, tinted with

the golden sheen of the afternoon sun; the rim of beach with its surging lace foam; the green landscape, the leafy live-oaks, the ribbonlike stretch of highway, the park and the garden. Outside all the sunshine, light and brightness; inside somberness and mystic shadow.

Was there ever such a contrast! Between them was all the vast prosaic plain that reposes between reality and imagination; the unmeasured distance between the material objective and the illusive unknown subjective. It was like a vast dream from which I could look out upon plain, waking realistic daylight.

And out of the corner of my eye I could see the two antagonistic wise men, the two masters, the champions of sin and virtue. The one stooped over, black and ugly, distorted; his talon hands clenching and reclenching and his black eyes gleaming and scintillating with rising venom; the other calm, serene, with the settled repose of kindness. The one striving for wickedness, action, and for battle; the other unconscious, apparently, that such an evil one existed.

It was a conflict of forces, of the greater things in mankind, the last final strife of the two opposite primal elements of human thought. It was the ultimate conflict between love and hatred. They might be fighting for the world. It was symbolic.

I could take it all in at a glance. The broad highway, the park, the ocean; the room shadowed, mystic, surcharged with conflict of the two wise men. And to one side reposing the forms of the unconscious Roselle and the little George.

My heart was beating to tumultuous pulsings.

Just then Wilkins clutched me, his fingers, pressing with the thrill and feeling of one who had just heard a sound from heaven. I, too, heard it; and I held my breath, lest I desecrate by the slightest sound the sacredness of its music.

It was the musician!

It was weird and holy, like a soul coming out of the darkness, a chant of victory, a triumphant welling of melody that was like the voice of love itself; growing louder, coming out of the distance swinging with the cadence of all emotions—the greatest thing in all the world—purity itself!

**T**HE Master heard it. At least, he smiled. The assurance and confidence of his face redoubled. He went on about

his reading, selecting with nonchalance a leaf from the pile of parchment.

But it was, not thus with the other. The strains of music seemed to drive him into madness. Perhaps it was his last endeavor; the great climax of his desperation.

His whole form quivered now, then grew taut and rigid; he crouched and wriggled like a cat settling for a spring, the focus of his eyes condensed to pin-points, the unholy fire blazing to a white heat of anger.

I could not move. The music had died away. Never was hatred so centered into murder.

Then it seemed to me that he began to grow, his whole head magnified to eyes like fireballs. Perhaps it was my fancy, or the terror that was upon me; perhaps, too, I myself had been drawn into the maw of the hypnotic demon. I was trembling, inert, useless.

Just then I felt Wilkins' reassuring hand upon me. He, too, was tense, his hand gripping the automatic. But it brought me back to presence and to reason. It was good to have that spell broken. It was like the passing of terror. The form had risen.

Risen? I cannot quite describe it. It was lithe and noiseless, like the spirit of a cat. It raised from its chair and stood erect. It was terrible, black and distorted; unholy, evil. From beneath its black robe it had drawn a flamelike kris that gleamed with a thousand scintillations. It hesitated and glared with gloating intent on the nonchalant, serene form of the Master.

Hesitated? For but an instant. It gloated anticipatory murder. The Master did not move. It clutched the edge of the table with one hand and with the other talon closed about the kris stalked along the side. I could see the grim, cord-like fingers gripping the hilt tight as death. It was about the table and was directly behind the Master. The knife quivered with its deliberate elevation. Wilkins raised his automatic. I closed my eyes.

- It was too much. I dared not witness it.

I held my breath while I waited. It seemed an age. And at the moment there broke again the weird notes of the strange musician. Somehow it seemed to me that in those strains was all the goodness of the earth concentrated. It was not music, but inspiration; a soul melo-

died into sound. Now I opened my eyes.

I heard the heavy articulated breath of Wilkins.

"God!"

It was a tense moment. Wilkins had not fired, but he had seen that which had rocked him into emotion. The Thing had slouched backward. Whether it was the music or the aim of the detective I do not know. But it was quivering; the hand that gripped the weapon, so firm before, was now quivering as with a palsy. Its eyes were tremulous with hesitating terror.

For a moment. Then it sank into its chair. It turned about as if to get settled and once again resumed its glaring.

I looked at Wilkins. His gray eyes were cold as marble. He nodded.

But I looked still farther; the turning of my head brought into view the whole panorama of the landscape. I could have shouted. I clutched Wilkins by the arm and pointed.

"Look, look!" I called. "Look! Look! There, what is that upon the highway?"

And what was it? It was a sight to stir one's blood. What we had looked for.

The whole highway from hedge to hedge on either side was choked with people. A mob. And it was coming with a fury that only a mob can attain in its madness. It was pursuing, rushing, swirling, pellmelling in a thunderous incoherence. The rumbling of the thousand feet was like the approach of an earthquake. It was writhing, turning, rushing, a very storm of oncoming humanity.

What was it? What was it all about? What were they pursuing? Then I saw.

A lone figure far out in the lead. He was rushing up the highway with the speed of the wind. Never before had I seen a man run like that. He was bare-headed, his hair was golden. I would have known him in a million—George Witherspoon!

Never shall I forget it. I stood there by the window; Wilkins clutching me by the arm. I could hear him breathing. Behind me lay the unconscious form of Roselle, and the conflicting wise men; and over it all floated the flooding symphony of the weird musician. It was a



One George Witherspoon lay on the floor, inert as in death. The other was like him, yet he lacked the fire of the Rebel Soul we knew



crisis of many actors, vivid and indistinct—a blur of action.

The lone figure turned in at the gate. As he did so there was a roar and a rush of the throng behind him. It was like a great wild monster. There were screams and moans and shouts and clamor. It was alive and it was insistent; it was deadly.

And then—I heard it. The shrill of a siren and the roar of an unmuffled motor. The mob split open; and out of it plunged like a thing relentless a great car bearing an officer.

Witherspoon was in the driveway.

The car turned in between the pillars. There was no doubting the intention. The chauffeur turned straight upon him. He was going to run him down. The officer was standing erect and pumping with his automatic. George was still running. I could see the bullet splashes dusting into the pavement.

Would he make it? For once I breathed a prayer for George Witherspoon. He was coming to Roselle, to me, to the Master.

But just then something happened. The chauffeur was coming head on with relentless murder. It was done like lightning. George leaped sidewise, reached, caught and swung on to the running-board and in a second of thought had the officer by the collar.

It was incredible—a blur of action. The form of the policeman spun into the air and landed in a mass of shrubbery. It was too quick for thinking; before I had ceased watching the officer the body of the chauffeur was flying after him.

The car was still going. George grasped the wheel and fairly shot it to the steps of the castle.

I heard Wilkins' exclamation.

"Leave it to *Mephisto!*"

## CHAPTER L

### THE TWO GEORGE WITHERSPOONS

**W**HAT a moment! The mob was rushing across the grounds with a typhoon fury. A door swung open; and there was a rushing blur of nimble feet upon the stairway. Another door opened and George Witherspoon stood in the doorway.

Never shall I forget him. He had all the greatness of a god, and all the fluttering of dissolution. He was great, wonderful, beautiful; his form erect, defiant, with the grace of an Apollo. He was the

most nearly perfect man I had ever looked on. And yet—I could see it—he was coming to the end. I could sense it, could feel it; it was stamped in his eyes. Whatever he was or whoever he was, he was coming to the crisis of his existence.

There is nothing so impressive as this—a great oncoming to destruction. The fall of the mighty is ever tragic. He was power; something above man, coming to the end. And he was meeting it with the fitness of his station, battling, defiant, unconquerable. It was the quality of his spirit that he be to the end a rebel. He was the Rebel Soul!

He did not falter. Though he looked straight at myself and Wilkins he saw not. In his eyes was not a fleck of indecision. They were inspired, set, hardened. With quick, decided steps he crossed the intervening space of the library. He stood in the door before the two old men.

I could hear the mob rushing up the steps. It was like the bursting of an inferno; the clatter of feet, the falling of furniture, the deafening clamor and the roar.

Wilkins clutched me. But he had no need. I could see it all. It was the last act of madness, the last dark deed of a thing accursed. The Thing had sensed the moment. It was its last and final stroke. It was to be fatal. It had sprung upon the Master; its wicked eyes flaming with climaxed malignancy and the evil blade descending.

But the stroke never landed. The form of Witherspoon darted forward. It was like the lightning.

A scream!

The most unearthly screech of terror that ears have ever heard; inarticulate, but for all that vivid! I can hear it yet.

"George, George! Have mercy!"

But mercy there was not. Witherspoon had it by the shoulders, holding it above his head. It bit and spat and struggled; it fought and the foam flecked from its mouth in its fury. It was impotent; it had come to its destruction. By the hands of its creation it was being borne to a sudden death.

There was not a moment to be wasted. The mob was upon the stairway. Its fury was like the typhoon's striking. Its maw was agape for bloodshed—for the blood of George Witherspoon.

It was like his genius to go down so in defiance. He had lived alone in his greatness; he would be greatest of all in his death. What cared he for the mob

lust? He was titanic, alone, isolated—he would stampede them. It was the climax of his being.

In two strides he was across the library.

The door swung open. The multitude was swarming up the stairway. He defied them. In his arms was the wriggling, gnashing, snarling Thing of Evil. They were seeking bloodshed; but not the bloodshed of defiance. As of old he cowed them by the sheer daring and preponderance of his genius. They hesitated and hung back in wonder. And then—

It was like a catapult. He gave the Thing a turn about his head and sent it hurling. He threw it full into their faces. There was a roar and a streak of flying legs and bodies; curses, clamor, and shouts of terror. The body cut a narrow lane, struck against a curving banister, bounced sidewise and fell inert, a mass of broken bones and rags against a side wall.

It was the end of the Thing of Evil. And—it was the end of George Witherspoon.

I saw it and sprang forward.

With the very act, even while watching the hurtling body, his spirit seemed to wither. It was the last act of rebellion; the culmination. His eyes were dimmed of luster, his body shaking, his knees sank forward and he fell, face downward.

With a cry, I knelt beside him. I could not believe it. I could hear the Master speaking to the multitude; I could hear Wilkins swearing.

It was an end I would not have—to lose George in such a death. Was this to be the reward that I had looked for—the end of all our labors? We were to have solution. I prayed, from the days of my manhood, for his redemption, and now it had come to this, to the grim, terrible solution.

With a sob I turned him over. His face was still beautiful, but his mouth was set. His form was limber. I straightened out his limbs and opened his shirt-front. I was frantic for the least faint sign of animation. My mind was full of antagonism and determination. I—I would not have it; he could not be dead. I would force him, bring him back out of the shadow. I listened—at his breast—and I heard—

A hand touched me. A hand soft and light as velvet. It was upon my shoulder, I could hear the Master speaking in his calm, cool manner to the throng upon the stairway. And I could hear Wilkins:

“Well, I’ll be—”

From the tone of the detective’s voice there was something that he could not comprehend. He ever spoke thus when some new phrase of the impossible confronted in this case of mystery. What new thing had happened?

The hand upon my shoulder pressed lightly, then gently but firmly, as one will when in question.

It distracted me for a moment even from the one before me. There was something about it insistent; an interrogation. I glanced up and over my shoulder. And I sprang backward!

It was George Witherspoon!

Impossible?

But it was so. There were two of him. Two! One upon the floor, supine and helpless; the other standing by the body, beautiful, hallowed like a spirit risen. Each was even as the other; only one was dead and the other living. It was too impossible for believing and too spectral. But it was so.

It was natural that I should recall and should watch this strange one.

In his hand was a violin. He was the musician. His face was tender and his eyes mellowed with the strange softness that is inspiration. He was not like others, but more like one stepped from the clouds. There was a noble loftiness in his manner, and a sympathy and tenderness that was childlike.

He was watching with undisguised curiosity the scene upon the stairway; the strange, puzzled throng, the shifting expression of the faces as each one, under the calm, kind words of the Master, returned to sanity and to reason. His eyes flitted, first to the stairs, and then to the old man speaking. His hand was upon his violin, his brow puckered with interrogation. I remember his words; they were soft and mellow.

“Pray, gentlemen,” he was saying, “what is this all about?”

JUST then a man emerged from the throng; he was evidently a new arrival. From the manner in which it opened to allow for his passage it was evident that he was a personage of some distinction. Then I saw. He was the officer who had escorted us to our hotel on the day of our peril in the city. And, strangest of all, he had behind him another who claimed my still older acquaintance—Simpson.

The lieutenant spoke to the Master,

shook hands and at a nod from the old man turned to the others. It was evident that he had their respect, for a few words finished the work begun by the Master and they began to file out of the building.

He turned about.

"Some day," he commented, "I am going to take up the psychology of the crowd. It is the most remarkable trait of human nature. It is half monkey and all brute, a sort of game of 'Follow the Leader.' It is most interesting and of wonderful possibilities, if we but stop to think. I have often said 'that, give me the psychological moment and I could overturn an empire with a dog-fight.'

"Take these fellows for instance"—he waved his hand—"they do not know one thing they are after; merely a fight, and Witherspoon fleeing through the city. But what is this? Ah!"

For the first time his eyes encountered the two Witherspoons; the one standing erect and handsome, alive; the other lying prone, inert as in death. A puzzled look swept over the features of the lieutenant.

"Well, what is this? I was well acquainted with George Witherspoon, but I am sure there was but one."

And even Simpson stepped forward, stooped over the prostrate form, and then looked up and gazed at the other. The look that he turned to me was incredulous. He shook his head.

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Warren?"

I looked at the Master.

He alone, of all of us, was unperturbed. The calmness and quietness of his look betrayed his satisfaction. He nodded kindly and stooped to the form upon the carpet. He spoke to Wilkins.

"If you will give me a hand we will place him on a couch. There, gentlemen. He is rather heavy."

Which he was.

The four of us—Wilkins, Simpson, the live George Witherspoon, and myself—picked him up. He was a well-knit man; and we were solicitous not to hurt him.

I remember how strange it was to see the live George Witherspoon assist in lifting the other. But I could sense, too, that however alike in appearance there were worlds between them. This one was peace; there was placidness and composure in his eyes, a strange quietness, the serenity of the student. He had not the fire of the other, the virility, the electric personality, nor the vigor, half-

devil. They were alike, but antithetic.

We placed him on a couch. The Master lifted up his head and pushed a pillow under it. Then he turned and, with a calm step, crossed over the library to the inert, beautiful form of Roselle.

He said nothing; and it was very strange to see it. He merely touched her, and she had awakened. She looked up in a sort of wonder; but for all that expectant. There was no surprise. She gazed up at the Master and arose quietly. It seemed to me like one waking out of peaceful slumber. Which no doubt it was.

The Master selected a chair, but she refused it. She stooped down before the couch and threw her arms about her husband. She did not sob. A tremor ran through her body, but that was all. Then she kissed him, tenderly on the lips, with all the love of a woman. She turned to the Master.

"Master," she asked, "you say it; it is well?"

He patted her on the shoulder.

"It is well, Roselle, it could not be better. In a moment you shall have your husband."

So there were two. That moment sealed it. It was the instinct of a woman; she had gone straight to the body. The other she had not deigned to notice.

But what was to be the explanation? We were soon to have it. The Master spoke.

"Gentlemen, if you will be seated I will explain the whole mystery."

## CHAPTER LI

### THE MASTER EXPLAINS

"IT IS a strange tale," he began, "but one which, if I keep out of technicalities and abstruse terms, can be explained very briefly. And I shall endeavor to tell it simply.

"To begin with, it had its conception in a man; and its derivation in the most abstruse of all our sciences; the science of metaphysics.

"The man himself was Professor George Witherspoon, at one time the professor of mathematics at Bondell University and in his day one of the greatest and most honored scholars of the world.

"Primarily he was a mathematician; that was the chair he held; and the science through which he attained his renown and standing. As a man he was a splendid type, and respected and re-

vered by all who knew him. He was considered a good man and kindly, and there is no doubt but that, at the time, he well merited the esteem.

"But he was not only a mathematician. Like Descartes and a great many other giants of the most exact science, he had a leaning as well to the speculations of philosophy. Perhaps this may be explained by the fact that metaphysics is first of all a problem. It is the one great thing which has never yet been explained; the problem which has never yet had a definite solution.

"It is natural with some men to chafe when there is no answer. It was so with Descartes, so with the great men who came after, and it was so with Professor Witherspoon.

"It may be well for me to go a bit into philosophy.

"To begin with, the whole science has almost from the beginning been divided into two separate, distinct channels. They are the two conflicting schools of speculation. The first, which is designated as the sensational, rests everlastingly and without stint upon materialism as its bulwark. The second is idealism, and the name speaks for itself: it teaches if not boldly, at least by its spirit, the mystery of man.

"Sensationalism can be classified by its name and defined. It is heartless in its contention, and withal almost irresistible in its logic. Its name is its definition—sensation. That man is nothing more than material and that mind is nothing but a fleshy mirror for experience, is the doctrine on which it stands. We know nothing except through our sensations: our five senses are the five molten streams that run into the crucible of mind. We are fleshy, earthy, nothing else; even as the tree and the mushroom. When we are dead we are—dead.

"One school is the antitheses of the other. Even as the first stands on the material, so the other bulwarks itself with spiritual and the ideal. It looks higher. It refuses to believe that man is a mere block even as wood or stone; but something higher; that in him is the secret of animation and that this secret is man himself and would make him live forever.

"The two schools are ever in conflict. It is the old struggle of Bacon and Descartes, with a million alterations, come down to us, still with the same essentials.

"Nevertheless, there have been some

concessions. It is of the idealist that we are speaking. They have granted the groundwork of the other—which indeed they cannot deny—that mind is sensation. But they have done so with certain reservations. To the brutal mushroom philosophy of the others they have opposed a line of thought which has now come to be almost universally accepted, even by psychologists and physiologists.

"Every man, they say, has two separate and distinct minds—the objective and the subjective. The objective has to do with sensation, experience of life. The subjective with the inner being, consciousness, reflection, *et cetera*. In other words, that, although the objective furnishes the material and experience for thought, the subjective makes the classification. It is the finer distinctive essence, the greater thing in man, which makes for individuality, character and, in the last and final sense, his spirit.

"Of the two minds it is much the stronger; but, although stronger, it is, strange as it may seem, hardly at all under control of the individual. We might classify it as impulse; it is that great hidden thing which we might call inspiration, genius, the real spirit itself.

"We see it flashingly illustrated in the exploits of our great men. In the exact ratio as a man can control his subjective mind he becomes greater than his fellows. It is self, greatness, and the future of mankind. Which brings us back to Witherspoon.

"Professor Witherspoon was an idealist; and he was a man of wonderful ability. Every moment that he could spare was given to speculation. There was a great, great unsolved problem—and he would solve it.

"But he would not work toward it as had the others. The immense library of sophistry and words through which he waded filled him with disgust. He believed in solving, not talking. He was a scientist, and believed in being exact. If a man had such a thing as a spirit he would find it; talking would get him nowhere.

"He was a man of great wealth. He resigned his chair and set out on the quest that has but just reached its queer culmination. He would solve the subjective and get down into the inner secret of mankind. It was a secret of God; but not forbidden for man to seek for. He would find it.

"His quests took him to many and far places. Years went by. He visited strange

corners and queer people. He was forgotten, he became an old man. But at last he found it.

"In a far-off corner of northwest China, he ran across the remains of a civilization that had been old, old, and gone to decay even before the Chinese, ancient as they are, had been thought of. He found his secret. When he came back to America he was perhaps the most learned and potentially the most powerful man, that the world has ever known.

"Naturally, he was happy. He was elated and in high spirits to think that all his labors and persistence were at last come to such a splendid culmination. He was bearing back to mankind the great secret which would make the world great, hopeful, and an infinitely better place to live in. He was bringing to philosophy the real truth that it sought for.

"He was going to take a man and throw him into the infinite. By a certain power of hypnosis which he had acquired he would throw a man a million years ahead in his evolution. That is, in the evolution of his mind. The unknown subjective, which was lying inert and almost useless to a man of today, would come under his control. Such a man would be all genius. It would be a hope and a glory for the future of mankind. With such a proof he would enable the philosophers to bridge over the million years of the future.

"He hastened eagerly to the Society for Metaphysical Research.

"He was an old man. For years he had sacrificed everything for one idea. It had become himself, his very being; it was himself, his all. His life had come to a wonderful fruition.

"But alas for Professor Witherspoon!

"He was laughed at. He was old, so old, that he seemed a hundred. The men of his generation had died and gone and withered by the wayside. He was forgotten. A few of his auditors remembered a certain Witherspoon who had held a chair of mathematics, but he had not been a metaphysician.

"This quack was an impostor. It was spiritualism and reeked of the medium. Whoever heard of metaphysics getting down to concrete illustration? It might do for puerile chemistry, but for lofty speculative philosophy—never. Besides, what would become of all their literature, of Bacon, Plato, Descartes, Hobbs, Hume, Kant, Cousin, Mills and all the rest who had told the truth?

"If what this man told was the truth, there would no longer be need for speculation.

"IT WAS almost brutal. The old man had given all his life. He had sacrificed everything, and now that he came with his pearls he was casting them before swine.

"It turned him. His whole individuality shriveled. The very unexpectedness and ingratitude distorted his reason. He had asked nothing for himself, only a hearing.

"They had laughed, called him a fake, an impostor, a medium. He went to madness.

"But his madness was peculiar. It was hatred. All the goodness was warped out of his being; the virtue that was his was perverted into rancor. The man who would be a blessing to humanity would be its curse.

"He had come out of his long pilgrimage with his secret and had laid it at the feet of the wise men. They had laughed. They were fools. He would show them. The power that was his was unabated. With his hatred and rancor, his madness went to cunning. He was a thousand times more powerful than any man living and more dangerous.

"He retired to his home. With uncanny shrewdness he laid his plans. He hated man, hated himself, was hatred itself personified. He had the craftiness of a madman and the total lack of mercy. He would have revenge that was total. He would destroy the race entirely.

"How would he do it?

"He had his secret. He would take one man and throw him into the infinite. He would create such a power for evil that not a thing could stand against it. Such a man would be irresistible; he would be genius and a genius of evil. There would be two of them; himself, with all his power, and his creation.

"Against such a combination of forces a world of men still in the process of evolution and still tied down to objective materiality would be as nothing. It was with secret gloating evil that he went about his purpose.

"He had a grandson, a young man of splendid attainments and a musician. As his heir he had been carefully educated. It was to be expected that a Witherspoon would be a scholar. Had the old man been normal he would have derived an inestimable gratification in

the genius of his grandson. As it was, he saw in him but an instrument.

"It was easy. He soon had the young man in his power and for the first time had the satisfaction of beholding an actual living proof of his wisdom. But it was not all gratification. He had hoped for vigor, living fire, and action: a being who in his very intensity and swing of his genius would be half-devil. And he got—a saint.

"The young man was a musician. Though the professor could throw him into the infinite, he could only develop the inward quality of his mind. Instead of a being, flaming and consuming, he had before him a musician—the greatest the world has known, almost beyond conception, and whose music was like a note from heaven.

"It was wonderful and interesting, but it was not what he had hoped for. Such a one could never assist him. He was disappointed.

"But he would not desist. He was more positive than ever that if he had the right one, a man with the proper virility and genius, he could work his fell purpose. And this brought him to our own George Witherspoon.

"They were distant relatives. By a coincidence he was in appearance somewhat like the professor's grandson. He had life, vigor, genius, fire, and action.

"The youth loved pleasure; and he had a recklessness that ever goes with warm, vigorous blood and the spring-time. He made an appointment and they soon came to an understanding. And with his marvelous powers, Professor Witherspoon was able to so change his expression—yes, his body—that he and the other George Witherspoon were like twins.

"In the language of George Witherspoon himself, he was taken to the mountain. And though it was a figurative expression it was almost so. It was an uncanny compact. The young man was to have everything—life, youth, splendor, genius; he was to have the wealth of all the world—wine, woman, song. It was characteristic of him that he chose everything. He was to have one wish, but he chose—all.

"The old compact of *Faust* and *Mephisto*.

"The result was the superlative even of the old man's wildest dreaming. I doubt whether such a one will appear again on the earth for a million years. He was genius—and inspiration. He had

perfect control of his mind and body. He was conscious of his spirit. He used his brain as he wished it, likewise his body. He was subjective.

"To him the outside world was but a place to live in. The objective realities about him were but means for his pleasure. He brought circumstances to his will and wishes; he ruled the objective. He had powers that were almost spirit.

"He has taught us and proved it. Man is greater than all. He is the ruler of his own destiny; a being who goes onward.

"Such a one was the creation of Professor Witherspoon.

"In a way it was like *Frankenstein* and his monster. He was the product and the conception of a genius. And it had the same sequel.

"The old man was evil. He took good care that his evil permeated the genius of his pupil. He would have him as himself—an avenger.

"And George Witherspoon did not care, he was busy enjoying himself and trying out his powers. We all know what he did in the beginning to Walter Warren. He discovered his control of spirit, and was so uncanny as to be almost impossible.

"He undoubtedly had many strange adventures, and with his power almost worked miracles. There are many things that he could do that we with our practical present day knowledge find difficult of credence. He was as much above us as we are above the ape-man of our ancestors. He was a forecast and a promise of the future of mankind.

"I will not say that we are to evolve into Witherspoons. We may be something very different. But it is certain that we are but started on the pathway of evolution.

"The compact that they made, promised to come to its dreadful fulfillment. George did not care. The other was all evil. Both had an infinite contempt for feeble mankind. Both were selfish; they were the entire compass of all that is wicked. Never was such a pair upon the earth for man's destruction.

"But strong as it was, and all comprehending, the philosophy of Professor Witherspoon was built upon the sand.

"George Witherspoon was still a man; for all of his scintillating genius, for all of the facts of his evolution he could not get away from the irrevocable laws of nature and of God. There is nothing that can transcend them. The love that is instilled in man cannot be killed. It is

the secret and magnet of all his thinking. It is the pivot-wheel of all existence.

"It was here that the evil, designing professor made his one mistake. Like all wise men grown old and past the youth of passion, he was prone to regard it lightly. It was but an exhilarating form of selfishness, a foolishness that deserved but the contempt of the learned. He was evil; he would meet this little thing by affording his creation every form of wantonness. He would wear him down until he was surfeited into reason.

"Which shows that he knew not love.

"The time came when George sought the love of a noble woman. It is a blessing which comes to every man at least once in his lifetime. And George Witherspoon was a man, for all of his evolution. He found Roselle.

**T**HE beginning of George Witherspoon's love was the beginning of the end. Even as his spirit had been intensified and magnified by his evolution, so was his love concentered a million. His love was all. It was a flaming thing that was the very climax of sacrifice and denial. No man could love as he; from henceforth he could not be evil. He was the Rebel Soul no longer, but a soul repentant.

"The battle came. It was inevitable. It was to be one or the other. The professor beheld all his edifice of destruction smashed into a huddle. All his plans and dreamings and plottings of evil had been wrecked by a frail, beautiful girl. His mind was crazed. He would have revenge; he would rain his wrath on his own creation, destroy the woman and begin all over.

"But he was hopeless. Like *Frankenstein*, he had made too well. George Witherspoon was a million times more powerful than his creator. He was out of the infinite; and the professor, whatever his powers, was after all, no more than a twentieth century man. He could not even release him. George battered down his defense and held him powerless.

"Nevertheless, he would not give up. If he could not touch the man he would destroy the woman. The battle raged. Which is where we ourselves came in.

"Our task was simple. We must save George Witherspoon; and we must destroy the other. But neither one, in this case, must come to violence until we had reached the end. To have killed the professor would have left George Wither-

## INTO THE INFINITE

spoon still the Rebel Soul. Had the latter been brought to an end it would have been plain and downright murder. We must overcome the one to free the other. Which is what we did.

"It was a long, hard battle. It came to an end in a crisis. The one of evil overreached himself as we thought for. He struck at Roselle. The end came quickly. It brought George Witherspoon. The power of the other shattered. At the moment when the Thing of Evil filtered out of life at the foot of yonder stairway the Rebel Soul departed from George Witherspoon. The spell was ended."

"Then—" I began.

But the Master held up a warning finger.

The form quivered, turned over as if sleeping. Then a querulous, hesitating hand was raised to his forehead. And I saw it; his eyes were open.

I am afraid that I gave a cry in my emotion. It was a great truth coming to fulfilment. It was the old George, my George; the George of my childhood!

I shall never forget his hesitation nor his look of wonder.

He looked up at me queerly.

"I have been sleeping," he said. Then: "Why, how old you are, Walter! You should be a boy, even as I am. What is it? Your hair is gray. Have I not been sleeping? What has happened?"

I grasped his meaning. The years of his intervening evolution had been blanked; he was even as he had been on the night of his metamorphosis.

"Tell me, George," I asked. "You remember nothing? You have had no dream?"

"A dream? Yes, yes, I have had a dream. A wonderful one, and a long one. And I dreamed of a woman. A beautiful girl who saved me from some strange and terrible evil. She was my wife. I would that I could have her. I can almost see her. Ah—what is this?"

He looked down at the one kneeling by the couch. His wondering hand touched her. What was it?"

The form of Roselle nestled and quivered. A beautiful arm stole about his neck. And her face was lifted.

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on,  
And our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

THE END