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«Public Domain»

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TO

HELEN

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Katherine West.

Dr. David West, her father.

Arnold Bruce, editor of the *Express*.

Harrison Blake, ex-lieutenant-governor.

Mrs. Blake, his mother.

“Blind Charlie” Peck, a political boss.

Hosea Hollingsworth, an old attorney.

Billy Harper, reporter on the *Express*.

The Reverend Dr. Sherman, of the Wabash Avenue Church.

Mrs. Sherman, his wife.

Mrs. Rachel Gray, Katherine’s aunt.

Roger Kennedy, prosecuting attorney.

Judge Kellog.

Mr. Brown, of the National Electric & Water Company.

Mr. Manning, a detective.

Elijah Stone, a detective.

CHAPTER I

WESTVILLE PREPARES TO CELEBRATE

The room was thick with dust and draped with ancient cobwebs. In one corner dismally reposed a literary junk heap – old magazines, broken-backed works of reference, novels once unanimously read but now unanimously forgotten. The desk was a helter-skelter of papers. One of the two chairs had its burst cane seat mended by an atlas of the world; and wherever any of the floor peered dimly through the general débris it showed a complexion of dark and ineradicable greasiness. Altogether, it was a room hopelessly unfit for human habitation; which is perhaps but an indirect manner of stating that it was the office of the editor of a successful newspaper.

Before a typewriter at a small table sat a bare-armed, solitary man. He was twenty-eight or thirty, abundantly endowed with bone and muscle, and with a face – But not to soil this early page with abusive terms, it will be sufficient to remark that whatever the Divine Sculptor had carved his countenance to portray, plainly there had been no thought of re-beautifying the earth with an Apollo. He was constructed not for grace, but powerful, tireless action; and there was something absurdly disproportionate between the small machine and the broad and hairy hands which so heavily belaboured its ladylike keys.

It was a custom with Bruce to write the big local news story of the day himself, a feature that had proved a stimulant to his paper's circulation and prestige. To-morrow was to be one of the proudest days of Westville's history, for to-morrow was the formal opening of the city's greatest municipal enterprise, its thoroughly modern water-works; and it was an extensive and vivid account of the next day's programme that the editor was pounding so rapidly out of his machine for that afternoon's issue of the *Express*. Now and then, as he paused an instant to shape an effective sentence in his mind, he glanced through the open window beside him across Main Street to where, against the front of the old Court House, a group of shirt-sleeved workmen were hanging their country's colours about a speakers' stand; then his big, blunt fingers thumped swiftly on.

He had jerked out the final sheet, and had begun to revise his story, making corrections with a very black pencil and in a very large hand, when there sauntered in from the general editorial room a pale, slight young man of twenty-five. The newcomer had a reckless air, a humorous twist to the left corner of his mouth, and a negligent smartness in his dress which plainly had its origin elsewhere than in Westville.

The editor did not raise his eyes.

"In a minute, Billy," he said shortly.

"Nothing to hurry about, Arn," drawled the other.

The young fellow drew forward the atlas-bottomed chair, leisurely enthroned himself upon the nations of the earth, crossed his feet upon the window-sill, and lit a cigarette. About his lounging form there was a latent energy like that of a relaxed cat. He gazed rather languidly over at the Square, its sides abustle with excited preparation. Across the fronts of stores bunting was being tacked; from upper windows crisp cotton flags were being unscrolled. As for the Court House yard itself, to-day its elm-shaded spaces were lifeless save for the workmen about the stand, a litigant or two going up the walk, and an occasional frock-coated lawyer, his vest democratically unbuttoned to the warm May air. But to-morrow —

The young fellow had turned his head slowly toward the editor's copy, and, as though reading, he began in an emotional, declamatory voice:

"To-morrow the classic shades of Court House Square will teem with a tumultuous throng. In the emblazoned speakers' stand the Westville Brass Band, in their new uniforms, glittering like so

many grand marshals of the empire, will trumpet forth triumphant music fit to burst; and aloft from this breeze-fluttered throne of oratory – ”

“Go to hell!” interrupted Bruce, eyes still racing through his copy.

“And down from this breeze-fluttered throne of oratory,” continued Billy, with a rising quaver in his voice, “Mr. Harrison Blake, Westville’s favourite son; the Reverend Doctor Sherman, president of the Voters’ Union, and the Honourable Hiram Cogshell, Calloway County’s able-bodiest orator, will pour forth prodigal and perfervid eloquence upon the populace below. And Dr. David West, he who has directed this magnificent work from its birth unto the present, he who has laid upon the sacred altar of his city’s welfare a matchless devotion and a lifetime’s store of scientific knowledge, he who – ”

“See here, young fellow!” The editor slammed down the last sheet of his revised story, and turned upon his assistant a square, bony, aggressive face that gave a sense of having been modelled by a clinched fist, and of still glowering at the blow. He had gray eyes that gleamed dogmatically from behind thick glasses, and hair that brush could not subdue. “See here, Billy Harper, will you please go to hell!”

“Sure; follow you anywhere, Arn,” returned Billy pleasantly, holding out his cigarette case.

“You little Chicago alley cat, you!” growled Bruce. He took a cigarette, broke it open and poured the tobacco into a black pipe, which he lit. “Well – turn up anything?”

“Governor can’t come,” replied the reporter, lighting a fresh cigarette.

“Hard luck. But we’ll have the crowd anyhow. Blake tell you anything else?”

“He didn’t tell me that. His stenographer did; she’d opened the Governor’s telegram. Blake’s in Indianapolis to-day – looking after his chances for the Senate, I suppose.”

“See Doctor West?”

“Went to his house first. But as usual he wouldn’t say a thing. That old boy is certainly the mildest mannered hero of the day I ever went up against. The way he does dodge the spot-light! – it’s enough to make one of your prima donna politicians die of heart failure. To do a great piece of work, and then be as modest about it as he is – well, Arn, I sure am for that old doc!”

“Huh!” grunted the editor.

“When it comes time to hang the laurel wreath upon his brow to-morrow I’ll bet you and your spavined old Arrangements Committee will have to push him on to the stand by the scruff of his neck.”

“Did you get him to promise to sit for a new picture?”

“Yes. And you ought to raise me ten a week for doing it. He didn’t want his picture printed; and if we did print it, he thought that prehistoric thing of the eighties we’ve got was good enough.”

“Well, be sure you get that photo, if you have to use chloroform. I saw him go into the Court House a little while ago. Better catch him as he comes out and lead him over to Dodson’s gallery.”

“All right.” The young fellow recrossed his feet upon the window-sill. “But, Arn,” he drawled, “this certainly is a slow old burg you’ve dragged me down into. If one of your leading citizens wants to catch the seven-thirty to Indianapolis to-morrow morning, I suppose he sets his alarm to go off day before yesterday.”

“What’s soured on your stomach now?” demanded the editor.

“Oh, the way it took this suburb of Nowhere thirty years to wake up to Doctor West! Every time I see him I feel sore for hours afterward at how this darned place has treated the old boy. If your six-cylinder, sixty-horse power, seven-passenger tongues hadn’t remembered that his grandfather had founded Westville, I bet you’d have talked him out of the town long ago.”

“The town didn’t understand him.”

“I should say it didn’t!” agreed the reporter.

“And I guess you don’t understand the town,” said the editor, a little sharply. “Young man, you’ve never lived in a small place.”

“Till this, Chicago was my smallest – the gods be praised!”

“Well, it’s the same in your old smokestack of the universe as it is here!” retorted Bruce. “If you go after the dollar, you’re sane. If you don’t, you’re cracked. Doctor West started off like a winner, so they say; looked like he was going to get a corner on all the patients of Westville. Then, when he stopped practising – ”

“You never told me what made him stop.”

“His wife’s death – from typhoid; I barely remember that. When he stopped practising and began his scientific work, the town thought he’d lost his head.”

“And yet two years ago the town was glad enough to get him to take charge of installing its new water system!”

“That’s how it discovered he was somebody. When the city began to look around for an expert, it found no one they could get had a tenth of his knowledge of water supply.”

“That’s the way with your self-worshipping cross-roads towns! You raise a genius – laugh at him, pity his family – till you learn how the outside world respects him. Then – hurrah! Strike up the band, boys! When I think how that old party has been quietly studying typhoid fever and water supply all these years, with you bunch of hayseeds looking down on him as a crank – I get so blamed sore at the place that I wish I’d chucked your letter into the waste-basket when you wrote me to come!”

“It may have been a dub of a town, Billy, but it’ll be the best place in Indiana before we get through with it,” returned the editor confidently. “But whom else did you see?”

“Ran into the Honourable Hiram Cogshell on Main Street, and he slipped me this precious gem.” Billy handed Bruce a packet of typewritten sheets. “Carbon of his to-morrow’s speech. He gave it to me, he said, to save us the trouble of taking it down. The Honourable Hiram is certainly one citizen who’ll never go broke buying himself a bushel to hide his light under!”

The editor glanced at a page or two of it with wearied irritation, then tossed it back.

“Guess we’ll have to print it. But weed out some of his flowers of rhetoric.”

“Pressed flowers,” amended Billy. “Swipe the Honourable Hiram’s copy of ‘Bartlett’s Quotations’ and that tremendous orator would have nothing left but his gestures.”

“How about the grand jury, Billy?” pursued the editor. “Anything doing there?”

“Farmer down in Buck Creek Township indicted for kidnapping his neighbour’s pigs,” drawled the reporter. “Infants snatched away while fond mother slept. Very pathetic. Also that second-story man was indicted that stole Alderman Big Bill Perkins’s clothes. Remember it, don’t you? Big Bill’s clothes had so much diameter that the poor, hard-working thief couldn’t sell the fruits of his industry. Pathos there also. Guess I can spin the two out for a column.”

“Spin ’em out for about three lines,” returned Bruce in his abrupt manner. “No room for your funny stuff to-day, Billy; the celebration crowds everything else out. Write that about the Governor, and then help Stevens with the telegraph – and see that it’s carved down to the bone.” He picked up the typewritten sheets he had finished revising, and let out a sharp growl of “Copy!”

“That’s your celebration story, isn’t it?” asked the reporter.

“Yes.” And Bruce held it out to the “devil” who had appeared through the doorway from the depths below.

“Wait a bit with it, Arn. The prosecuting attorney stopped me as I was leaving, and asked me to have you step over to the Court House for a minute.”

“What’s Kennedy want?”

“Something about the celebration, he said. I guess he wants to talk with you about some further details of the programme.”

“Why the deuce didn’t he come over here then?” growled Bruce. “I’m as busy as he is!”

“He said he couldn’t leave.”

“Couldn’t leave?” said Bruce, with a snap of his heavy jaw. “Well, neither can I!”

“You mean you won’t go?”

“That’s what I mean! I’ll go to the very gates of hell to get a good piece of news, but when it comes to general affairs the politicians, business men, and the etceteras of this town have got to understand that there’s just as much reason for their coming to me as for my going to them. I’m as important as any of them.”

“So-ho, we’re on our high horse, are we?”

“You bet we are, my son! And that’s where you’ve got to be if you want this town to respect you.”

“All right. She’s a great nag, if you can keep your saddle. But I guess I’d better tell Kennedy you’re not coming.”

Without rising, Billy leaned back and took up Bruce’s desk telephone, and soon was talking to the prosecuting attorney. After a moment he held out the instrument to the editor.

“Kennedy wants to speak with you,” he said.

Bruce took the ’phone.

“Hello, that you Kennedy?.. No, I can’t come – too busy. Suppose you run over here... Got some people there? Well, bring ’em along... Why can’t they come? Who are they?.. Can’t you tell me what the situation is?.. All right, then; in a couple of minutes.”

Bruce hung up the receiver and arose.

“So you’re going after all?” asked Billy.

“Guess I’d better,” returned the editor, putting on his coat and hat. “Kennedy says something big has just broken loose. Sounds queer. Wonder what the dickens it can be.” And he started out.

“But how about your celebration story?” queried Billy. “Want it to go down?”

Bruce looked at his watch.

“Two hours till press time; I guess it can wait.” And taking the story back from the boy he tossed it upon his desk.

He stepped out into the local room, which showed the same kindly tolerance of dirt as did his private office. At a long table two young men sat before typewriters, and in a corner a third young man was taking the clicking dictation of a telegraph sounder.

“Remember, boys, keep everything but the celebration down to bones!” Bruce called out. And with that he passed out of the office and down the stairway to the street.

CHAPTER II

THE BUBBLE REPUTATION

Despite its thirty thousand population – “Forty thousand, and growing, sir!” loyally declared those disinterested citizens engaged in the sale of remote fields of ragweed as building lots – Westville was still but half-evolved from its earlier state of an overgrown country town. It was as yet semi-pastoral, semi-urban. Automobiles and farm wagons locked hubs in brotherly embrace upon its highways; cowhide boots and patent leather shared its sidewalks. There was a stockbroker’s office that was thoroughly metropolitan in the facilities it afforded the élite for relieving themselves of the tribulation of riches; and adjoining it was Simpson Brothers & Company, wherein hick’ry-shirted gentlemen bartered for threshing machines, hayrakes, axle grease, and such like baubles of Arcadian pastime.

There were three topics on which one could always start an argument in Westville – politics, religion, and the editor of the *Express*. A year before Arnold Bruce, who had left Westville at eighteen and whom the town had vaguely heard of as a newspaper man in Chicago and New York but whom it had not seen since, had returned home and taken charge of the *Express*, which had been willed him by the late editor, his uncle. The *Express*, which had been a slippered, dozing, senile sheet under old Jimmie Bruce, burst suddenly into a volcanic youth. The new editor used huge, vociferous headlines instead of the mere whispering, timorous types of his uncle; he wrote a rousing, rough-and-ready English; occasionally he placed an important editorial, set up in heavy-faced type and enclosed in a black border, in the very centre of his first page; and from the very start he had had the hardihood to attack the “established order” at several points and to preach unorthodox political doctrines. The wealthiest citizens were outraged, and hotly denounced Bruce as a “yellow journalist” and a “red-mouthed demagogue.” It was commonly held by the better element that his ultra-democracy was merely a mask, a pose, an advertising scheme, to gather in the gullible subscriber and to force himself sensationally into the public eye.

But despite all hostile criticism of the paper, people read the *Express*— many staid ones surreptitiously – for it had a snap, a go, a tang, that at times almost took the breath. And despite the estimate of its editor as a charlatan, the people had yielded to that aggressive personage a rank of high importance in their midst.

Bruce stepped forth from his stairway, crossed Main Street, and strode up the shady Court House walk. On the left side of the walk, a-tiptoe in an arid fountain, was poised a gracious nymph of cast-iron, so chastely garbed as to bring to the cheek of elderly innocence no faintest flush. On the walk’s right side stood a rigid statue, suggesting tetanus in the model, of the city’s founder, Col. Davy West, wearing a coonskin cap and leaning with conscious dignity upon a long deer rifle.

Bruce entered the dingy Court House, mounted a foot-worn wooden stairway, browned with the ambrosial extract of two generations of tobacco-chewing litigants, and passed into a damp and gloomy chamber. This room was the office of the prosecuting attorney of Calloway County. That the incumbent might not become too depressed by his environment, the walls were cheered up by a steel engraving of Daniel Webster, frowning with multitudinous thought, and by a crackled map of Indiana – the latter dotted by industrious flies with myriad nameless cities.

Three men arose from about the flat-topped desk in the centre of the room, the prosecutor, the Reverend Doctor Sherman, and a rather smartly dressed man whom Bruce remembered to have seen once or twice but whom he did not know. With the first two the editor shook hands, and the third was introduced to him as Mr. Marcy, the agent of the Acme Filter Company, which had installed the filtering plant of the new water-works.

Bruce turned in his brusque manner to the prosecuting attorney.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“Suppose we all sit down first,” suggested the prosecutor.

They did so, and Kennedy regarded Bruce with a solemn, weighty stare. He was a lank, lantern-jawed, frock-coated gentleman of thirty-five, with an upward rolling forelock and an Adam’s-apple that throbbed in his throat like a petrified pulse. He was climbing the political ladder, and he was carefully schooling himself into that dignity and poise and appearance of importance which should distinguish the deportment of the public man.

“Well, what is it?” demanded Bruce shortly. “About the water-works?”

“Yes,” responded Kennedy. “The water-works, Mr. Bruce, is, I hardly need say, a source of pride to us all. To you especially it has had a large significance. You have made it a theme for a continuous agitation in your paper. You have argued and urged that, since the city’s new water-works promised to be such a great success, Westville should not halt with this one municipal enterprise, but should refuse the new franchise the street railway company is going to apply for, take over the railway, run it as a municipal – ”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Bruce impatiently. “But who’s dead? Who wants the line of march changed to go by his grocery store?”

“What I was saying was merely to recall how very important the water-works has been to us,” the prosecutor returned, with increased solemnity. He paused, and having gained that heightened stage effect of a well-managed silence, he continued: “Mr. Bruce, something very serious has occurred.”

For all its ostentation the prosecutor’s manner was genuinely impressive. Bruce looked quickly at the other two men. The agent was ill at ease, the minister pale and agitated.

“Come,” cried Bruce, “out with what you’ve got to tell me!”

“It is a matter of the very first importance,” returned the prosecutor, who was posing for a prominent place in the *Express*’s account of this affair – for however much the public men of Westville affected to look down upon the *Express*, they secretly preferred its superior presentment of their doings. “Doctor Sherman, in his capacity of president of the Voters’ Union, has just brought before me some most distressing, most astounding evidence. It is evidence upon which I must act both as a public official and as a member of the Arrangements Committee, and evidence which concerns you both as a committeeman and as an editor. It is painful to me to break – ”

“Let’s have it from first hands,” interrupted Bruce, irritated by the verbal excelsior which the prosecutor so deliberately unwrapped from about his fact.

He turned to the minister, a slender man of hardly more than thirty, with a high brow, the wide, sensitive mouth of the born orator, fervently bright eyes, and the pallor of the devoted student – a face that instantly explained why, though so young, he was Westville’s most popular divine.

“What’s it about, Doctor Sherman?” the editor asked. “Who’s the man?”

There was no posing here for Bruce’s typewriter. The minister’s concern was deep and sincere.

“About the water-works, as Mr. Kennedy has said,” he answered in a voice that trembled with agitation. “There has been some – some crooked work.”

“Crooked work?” ejaculated the editor, staring at the minister. “Crooked work?”

“Yes.”

“You are certain of what you say?”

“Yes.”

“Then you have evidence?”

“I am sorry – but – but I have.”

The editor was leaning forward, his nostrils dilated, his eyes gleaming sharply behind their thick glasses.

“Who’s mixed up in it? Who’s the man?”

The minister’s hands were tightly interlocked. For an instant he seemed unable to speak.

“Who’s the man?” repeated Bruce.

The minister swallowed.

“Doctor West,” he said.

Bruce sprang up.

“Doctor West?” he cried. “The superintendent of the water-works?”

“Yes.”

If the editor’s concern for the city’s welfare was merely a political and business pose, if he was merely an actor, at least he acted his part well. “My God!” he breathed, and stood with eyes fixed upon the young minister. Then suddenly he sat down again, his thick brows drew together, and his heavy jaws set.

“Let’s have the whole story,” he snapped out. “From the very beginning.”

“I cannot tell you how distressed I am by what I have just been forced to do,” began the young clergyman. “I have always esteemed Doctor West most highly, and my wife and his daughter have been the closest friends since girlhood. To make my part in this affair clear, I must recall to you that of late the chief attention of the Voters’ Union has naturally been devoted to the water-works. I never imagined that anything was wrong. But, speaking frankly, after the event, I must say that Doctor West’s position was such as made it a simple matter for him to defraud the city should he so desire.”

“You mean because the council invested him with so much authority?” demanded Bruce.

“Yes. As I have said, I regarded Doctor West above all suspicion. But a short time ago some matters – I need not detail them – aroused in me the fear that Doctor West was using his office for – for – ”

“For graft?” supplied Bruce.

The minister inclined his head.

“Later, only a few weeks ago, a more definite fear came to me,” he continued in his low, pained voice. “It happens that I have known Mr. Marcy here for years; we were friends in college, though we had lost track of one another till his business brought him here. A few small circumstances – my suspicion was already on the alert – made me guess that Mr. Marcy was about to give Doctor West a bribe for having awarded the filter contract to his company. I got Mr. Marcy alone – taxed him with his intention – worked upon his conscience – ”

“Mr. Marcy has stated,” the prosecutor interrupted to explain, “that Doctor Sherman always had great influence over him.”

Mr. Marcy corroborated this with a nod.

“At length Mr. Marcy confessed,” Doctor Sherman went on. “He had arranged to give Doctor West a certain sum of money immediately after the filtering plant had been approved and payment had been made to the company. After this confession I hesitated long upon what I should do. On the one hand, I shrank from disgracing Doctor West. On the other, I had a duty to the city. After a long struggle I decided that my responsibility to the people of Westville should overbalance any feeling I might have for any single individual.”

“That was the only decision,” said Bruce. “Go on!”

“But at the same time, to protect Doctor West’s reputation, I decided to take no one into my plan; should his integrity reassert itself at the last moment and cause him to refuse the bribe, the whole matter would then remain locked up in my heart. I arranged with Mr. Marcy that he should carry out his agreement with Doctor West. Day before yesterday, as you know, the council, on Doctor West’s recommendation, formally approved the filtering plant, and yesterday a draft was sent to the company. Mr. Marcy was to call at Doctor West’s home this morning to conclude their secret bargain. Just before the appointed hour I dropped in on Doctor West, and was there when Mr. Marcy called. I said I would wait to finish my talk with Doctor West till they were through their business, took a book, and went into an adjoining room. I could see the two men through the partly opened door. After some talk, Mr. Marcy drew an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Doctor West, saying in a low voice, ‘Here is that money we spoke about.’”

“And he took it?” Bruce interrupted.

“Doctor West slipped the envelope unopened into his pocket, and replied, ‘Thank you very much; it will come in very handy just now.’”

“My God!” breathed the editor.

“Though I had suspected Doctor West, I sat there stunned,” the minister continued. “But after a minute or two I slipped out by another door. I returned with a policeman, and found Doctor West still with Mr. Marcy. The policeman arrested Doctor West, and found the envelope upon his person. In it was two thousand dollars.”

“Now, what do you think of that?” Kennedy demanded of the editor. “Won’t the town be thunderstruck!”

Bruce turned to the agent, who had sat through the recital, a mere corroborative presence.

“And this is all true?”

“That is exactly the way it happened,” replied Mr. Marcy.

Bruce looked back at the minister.

“But didn’t he have anything to say for himself?”

“I can answer that,” put in Kennedy. “I had him in here before I sent him over to the jail. He admits practically every point that Doctor Sherman has made. The only thing he says for himself is that he never thought the money Mr. Marcy gave him was intended for a bribe.”

Bruce stood up, his face hard and glowering, and his fist crashed explosively down upon the table.

“Of all the damned flimsy defenses that ever a man made, that’s the limit!”

“It certainly won’t go down with the people of Westville,” commented the prosecutor. “And I can see the smile of the jury when he produces that defense in court.”

“I should say they would smile!” cried Bruce. “But what was his motive?”

“That’s plain enough,” answered the prosecutor. “We both know, Mr. Bruce, that he has earned hardly anything from the practice of medicine since we were boys. His salary as superintendent of the water-works was much less than he has been spending. His property is mortgaged practically to its full value. Everything has gone on those experiments of his. It’s simply a case of a man being in a tight fix for money.”

Bruce was striding up and down the room, scowling and staring fiercely at the worn linoleum that carpeted the prosecutor’s office.

“I thought you’d take it rather hard,” said Kennedy, a little slyly. “It sort of puts a spoke in that general municipal ownership scheme of yours – eh?”

Bruce paused belligerently before the prosecutor.

“See here, Kennedy,” he snapped out. “Because a man you’ve banked on is a crook, does that prove a principle is wrong?”

“Oh, I guess not,” Kennedy had to admit.

“Well, suppose you cut out that kind of talk then. But what are you going to do about the doctor?”

“The grand jury is in session. I’m going straight before it with the evidence. An hour from now and Doctor West will be indicted.”

“And what about to-morrow’s show?”

“What do you think we ought to do?”

“What ought we to do!” Again the editor’s fist crashed upon the desk. “The celebration was half in Doctor West’s honour. Do we want to meet and hurrah for the man that sold us out? As for the water-works, it looks as if, for all we know, he might have bought us a lot of old junk. Do we want to hold a jubilee over a junk pile? You ask what we ought to do. God, man, there’s only one thing to do, and that’s to call the whole damned performance off!”

“That’s my opinion,” said the prosecutor. “What do you think, Doctor Sherman?”

The young minister wiped his pale face.

“It’s a most miserable affair. I’m sick because of the part I’ve been forced to play – I’m sorry for Doctor West – and I’m particularly sorry for his daughter – but I do not see that any other course would be possible.”

“I suppose we ought to consult Mr. Blake,” said Kennedy.

“He’s not in town,” returned Bruce. “And we don’t need to consult him. We three are a majority of the committee. The matter has to be settled at once. And it’s settled all right!”

The editor jerked out his watch, glanced at it, then reached for his hat.

“I’ll have this on the street in an hour – and if this town doesn’t go wild, then I don’t know Westville!”

He was making for the door, when the newspaper man in him recalled a new detail of his story. He turned back.

“How about this daughter of Doctor West?” he asked.

The prosecutor looked at the minister.

“Was she coming home for the celebration, do you know?”

“Yes. She wrote Mrs. Sherman she was leaving New York this morning and would get in here to-morrow on the Limited.”

“What’s she like?” asked Bruce.

“Haven’t you seen her?” asked Kennedy.

“She hasn’t been home since I came back to Westville. When I left here she was a tomboy – mostly legs and freckles.”

The prosecutor’s lean face crinkled with a smile.

“I guess you’ll find she’s grown right smart since then. She went to one of those colleges back East; Vassar, I think it was. She got hold of some of those new-fangled ideas the women in the East are crazy over now – about going out in the world for themselves, and – ”

“Idiots – all of them!” snapped Bruce.

“After she graduated, she studied law. When she was back home two years ago she asked me what chance a woman would have to practise law in Westville. A woman lawyer in Westville – oh, Lord!”

The prosecutor leaned back and laughed at the excruciating humour of the idea.

“Oh, I know the kind!” Bruce’s lips curled with contempt. “Loud-voiced – aggressive – bony – perfect frights.”

“Let me suggest,” put in Doctor Sherman, “that Miss West does not belong in that classification.”

“Yes, I guess you’re a little wrong about Katherine West,” smiled Kennedy.

Bruce waved his hand peremptorily. “They’re all the same! But what’s she doing in New York? Practising law?”

“No. She’s working for an organization something like Doctor Sherman’s – The Municipal League, I think she called it.”

“Huh!” grunted Bruce. “Well, whatever she’s like, it’s a pretty mess she’s coming back into!”

With that the editor pulled his hat tightly down upon his forehead and strode out of the Court House and past the speakers’ stand, across whose front twin flags were being leisurely festooned. Back in his own office he picked up the story he had finished an hour before. With a sneer he tore it across and trampled it under foot. Then, jerking a chair forward to his typewriter, his brow dark, his jaw set, he began to thump fiercely upon the keys.

CHAPTER III

KATHERINE COMES HOME

Next morning when the Limited slowed down beside the old frame station – a new one of brick was rising across the tracks – a young woman descended from a Pullman at the front of the train. She was lithe and graceful, rather tall and slender, and was dressed with effective simplicity in a blue tailored suit and a tan straw hat with a single blue quill. Her face was flushed, and there glowed an expectant brightness in her brown eyes, as though happiness and affection were upon the point of bubbling over.

Standing beside her suit-case, she eagerly scanned the figures about the station. Three or four swagger young drummers had scrambled off the smoker, and these ambassadors of fashion as many hotel bus drivers were inviting with importunate hospitality to honour their respective board and bed. There was the shirt-sleeved figure of Jim Ludlow, ticket agent and tenor of the Presbyterian choir. And leaning cross-legged beneath the station eaves, giving the effect of supporting the low roof, were half a dozen slowly masticating, soberly contemplative gentlemen – loose-jointed caryatides, whose lank sculpture forms the sole and invariable ornamentation of the façades of all Western stations. But nowhere did the young woman's expectant eyes alight upon the person whom they sought.

The joyous response to welcome, which had plainly trembled at the tips of her being, subsided, and in disappointment she picked up her bag and was starting for a street car, when up the long, broad platform there came hurrying a short-legged little man, with a bloodshot, watery eye. He paused hesitant at a couple of yards, smiled tentatively, and the remnant of an old glove fumbled the brim of a rumpled, semi-bald object that in its distant youth had probably been a silk hat.

The young woman smiled back and held out her hand.

“How do you do, Mr. Huggins.”

“How de do, Miss Katherine,” he stammered.

“Have you seen father anywhere?” she asked anxiously.

“No. Your aunt just sent me word I was to meet you and fetch you home. She couldn't leave Doctor West.”

“Is father ill?” she cried.

The old cabman fumbled his ancient headgear.

“No – he ain't – he ain't exactly sick. He's just porely. I guess it's only – only a bad headache.”

He hastily picked up her suit-case and led her past the sidling admiration of the drummers, those sovereign critics of Western femininity, to the back of the station where stood a tottering surrey and a dingy gray nag, far gone in years, that leaned upon its shafts as though on crutches. Katherine clambered in, and the drooping animal doddered along a street thickly overhung with the exuberant May-green of maples.

She gazed with ardent eyes at the familiar frame cottages, in some of which had lived school and high-school friends, sitting comfortably back amid their little squares of close-cropped lawn. She liked New York with that adoptive liking one acquires for the place one chooses from among all others for the passing of one's life; but her affection remained warm and steadfast with this old town of her girlhood.

“Oh, but it feels good to be back in Westville again!” she cried to the cabman.

“I reckon it must. I guess it's all of two years sence you been home.”

“Two years, yes. It's going to be a great celebration this afternoon, isn't it?”

“Yes'm – very big” – and he hastily struck the ancient steed. “Get-ep there, Jenny!”

Mr. Huggins's mare turned off Station Avenue, and Katharine excitedly stared ahead beneath the wide-boughed maples for the first glimpse of her home. At length it came into view – one of

those big, square, old-fashioned wooden houses, built with no perceptible architectural idea beyond commodious shelter. She had thought her father might possibly stumble out to greet her, but no one stood waiting at the paling gate.

She sprang lightly from the carriage as it drew up beside the curb, and leaving Mr. Huggins to follow with her bag she hurried up the brick-paved path to the house. As she crossed the porch, a slight, gray, Quakerish little lady, with a white kerchief folded across her breast, pushed open the screen door. Her Katherine gathered into her arms and kissed repeatedly.

“I’m so glad to see you, auntie!” she cried. “How are you?”

“Very well,” the old woman answered in a thin, tremulous voice. “How is thee?”

“Me? Oh, you know nothing’s ever wrong with me!” She laughed in her buoyant young strength. “But you, auntie?” She grew serious. “You look very tired – and very, very worn and worried. But I suppose it’s the strain of father’s headache – poor father! How is he?”

“I – I think he’s feeling some better,” the old woman faltered. “He’s still lying down.”

They had entered the big, airy sitting-room. Katherine’s hat and coat went flying upon the couch.

“Now, before I so much as ask you a question, or tell you a thing, Aunt Rachel, I’m going up to see dear old father.”

She made for the stairway, but her aunt caught her arm in consternation.

“Wait, Katherine! Thee musn’t see him yet.”

“Why, what’s the matter?” Katherine asked in surprise.

“It – it would be better for him if thee didn’t disturb him.”

“But, auntie – you know no one can soothe him as I can when he has a headache!”

“But he’s asleep just now. He didn’t sleep a minute all night.”

“Then of course I’ll wait.” Katherine turned back. “Has he suffered much – ”

She broke off. Her aunt was gazing at her in wide-eyed, helpless misery.

“Why – why – what’s the matter, auntie?”

Her aunt did not answer her.

“Tell me! What is it? What’s wrong?”

Still the old woman did not speak.

“Something has happened to father!” cried Katherine. She clutched her aunt’s thin shoulders. “Has something happened to father?”

The old woman trembled all over, and tears started from her mild eyes.

“Yes,” she quavered.

“But what is it?” Katherine asked frantically. “Is he very sick?”

“It’s – it’s worse than that.”

“Please! What is it then?”

“I haven’t the heart to tell thee,” she said piteously, and she sank into a chair and covered her face.

Katherine caught her arm and fairly shook her in the intensity of her demand.

“Tell me! I can’t stand this another instant!”

“There – there isn’t going to be any celebration.”

“No celebration?”

“Yesterday – thy father – was arrested.”

“Arrested!”

“And indicted for accepting a bribe.”

Katherine shrank back.

“Oh!” she whispered. “Oh!” Then her slender body tensed, and her dark eyes flashed fire. “Father accept a bribe! It’s a lie! A lie!”

“It hardly seems true to me, either.”

“It’s a lie!” repeated Katherine. “But is he – is he locked up?”

“They let me go his bail.”

Again Katherine caught her aunt’s arm.

“Come – tell me all about it!”

“Please don’t make me. I – I can’t.”

“But I must know!”

“It’s in the newspapers – they’re on the centre-table.”

Katherine turned to the table and seized a paper. At sight of the sheet she had picked up, the old woman hurried across to her in dismay.

“Don’t read that *Express*!” she cried, and she sought to draw the paper from Katherine’s hands. “Read the *Clarion*. It’s ever so much kinder.”

But Katherine had already seen the headline that ran across the top of the *Express*. It staggered her. She gasped at the blow, but she held on to the paper.

“I’ll read the worst they have to say,” she said.

Her aunt dropped into a chair and covered her eyes to avoid sight of the girl’s suffering. The story, in its elements, was a commonplace to Katherine; in her work with the Municipal League she had every few days met with just such a tale as this. But that which is a commonplace when strangers are involved, becomes a tragedy when loved ones are its actors. So, as she read the old, old story, Katherine trembled as with mortal pain.

But sickening as was the story in itself, it was made even more agonizing to her by the manner of the *Express*’s telling. Bruce’s typewriter had never been more impassioned. The story was in heavy-faced type, the lines two columns wide; and in a “box” in the very centre of the first page was an editorial denouncing Doctor West and demanding for him such severe punishment as would make future traitors forever fear to sell their city. Article and editorial were rousing and vivid, brilliant and bitter – as mercilessly stinging as a salted whip-lash cutting into bare flesh.

Katherine writhed with the pain of it. “Oh!” she cried. “It’s brutal! Brutal! Who could have had the heart to write like that about father?”

“The editor, Arnold Bruce,” answered her aunt.

“Oh, he’s a brute! If I could tell him to his face – ” Her whole slender being flamed with anger and hatred, and she crushed the paper in a fierce hand and flung it to the floor.

Then, slowly, her face faded to an ashen gray. She steadied herself on the back of a chair and stared in desperate, fearful supplication at the bowed figure of the older woman.

“Auntie?” she breathed.

“Yes?”

“Auntie” – eyes and voice were pleading – “auntie, the – the things – this paper says – they never happened, did they?”

The old head nodded.

“Oh! oh!” she gasped. She wavered, sank stricken into a chair, and buried her face in her arms. “Poor father!” she moaned brokenly. “Poor father!”

There was silence for a moment, then the old woman rose and gently put a hand upon the quivering young shoulder.

“Don’t, dear! Even if it did happen, I can’t believe it. Thy father – ”

At that moment, overhead, there was a soft noise, as of feet placed upon the floor. Katherine sprang up.

“Father!” she breathed. There began a restless, slipped pacing. “Father!” she repeated, and sprang for the stairway and rapidly ran up.

At her father’s door she paused, hand over her heart. She feared to enter to her father – feared lest she should find his head bowed in acknowledged shame. But she summoned her strength and noiselessly opened the door. It was a large room, a hybrid of bedroom and study, whose drawn shades

had dimmed the brilliant morning into twilight. An open side door gave a glimpse of glass jars, bellying retorts and other paraphernalia of the laboratory.

Walking down the room was a tall, stooping, white-haired figure in a quilted dressing-gown. He reached the end of the room, turned about, then sighted her in the doorway.

“Katherine!” he cried with quavering joy, and started toward her; but he came abruptly to a pause, hesitating, accused man that he was, to make advances.

Her sickening fear was for the instant swept away by a rising flood of love. She sprang forward and threw her arms about his neck.

“Father!” she sobbed. “Oh, father!”

She felt his tears upon her forehead, felt his body quiver, and felt his hand gently stroke her back.

“You’ve heard – then?” he asked, at length.

“Yes – from the papers.”

He held her close, but for a moment did not speak.

“It isn’t a – a very happy celebration – I’ve prepared for you.”

She could only cry convulsively, “Poor father!”

“You never dreamt,” he quavered, “your old father – could do a thing like this – did you?”

She did not answer. She trembled a moment longer on his shoulder; then, slowly and with fear, she lifted her head and gazed into his face. The face was worn – she thrilled with pain to see how sadly worn it was! – but though tear-wet and working with emotion, it met her look with steadiness. It was the same simple, kindly, open face that she had known since childhood.

There was a sudden wild leaping within her. She clutched his shoulders, and her voice rang out in joyous conviction:

“Father – you are not guilty!”

“You believe in me, then?”

“You are not guilty!” she cried with mounting joy.

He smiled faintly.

“Why, of course not, my child.”

“Oh, father!” And again she caught him in a close embrace.

After a moment she leaned back in his arms.

“I’m so happy – so happy! Forgive me, daddy dear, that I could doubt you even for a minute.”

“How could you help it? They say the evidence against me is very strong.”

“I should have believed you innocent against all the evidence in the world! And I do, and shall – no matter what they may say!”

“Bless you, Katherine!”

“But come – tell me how it all came about. But, first, let’s brighten up the room a little.”

So great was her relief that her spirits had risen as though some positive blessing had befallen her. She crossed lightly to the big bay window, raised the shades and threw up the sashes. The sunlight slanted down into the room and lay in a dazzling yellow square upon the floor. The soft breeze sighed through the two tall pines without and bore into them the perfumed freshness of the spring.

“There now, isn’t that better?” she said, smiling brightly.

“That’s just what your home-coming has done for me,” he said gratefully – “let in the sunlight.”

“Come, come – don’t try to turn the head of your offspring with flattery! Now, sir, sit down,” and she pointed to a chair at his desk, which stood within the bay window.

“First,” – with his gentle smile – “if I may, I’d like to take a look at my daughter.”

“I suppose a father’s wish is a daughter’s command,” she complained. “So go ahead.”

He moved to the window, so that the light fell full upon her, and for a long moment gazed into her face. The brow was low and broad. Over the white temples the heavy dark hair waved softly down, to be fastened in a simple knot low upon the neck, showing in its full beauty the rare modelling of her head. The eyes were a rich, warm, luminous brown, fringed with long lashes, and in them lurked

all manner of fathomless mysteries. The mouth was soft, yet full and firm – a real mouth, such as Nature bestows upon her real women. It was a face of freshness and youth and humour, and now was tremulous with a smiling, tear-wet tenderness.

“I think,” said her father, slowly and softly, “that my daughter is very beautiful.”

“There – enough of your blarney!” She flushed with pleasure, and pressed her fresh cheek against his withered one. “You dear old father, you!”

She drew him to his desk, which was strewn with a half-finished manuscript on the typhoid bacillus, and upon which stood a faded photograph of a young woman, near Katherine’s years and made in her image, dressed in the tight-fitting “basque” of the early eighties. Westville knew that Doctor West had loved his wife dearly, but the town had never surmised a tenth of the grief that had closed darkly in upon him when typhoid fever had carried her away while her young womanhood was in its freshest bloom.

Katherine pressed him down into his chair at the desk, sat down in one beside it, and took his hand.

“Now, father, tell me just how things stand.”

“You know everything already,” said he.

“Not everything. I know the charges of the other side, and I know your innocence. But I do not know your explanation of the affair.”

He ran his free hand through his silver hair, and his face grew troubled.

“My explanation agrees with what you have read, except that I did not know I was being bribed.”

“H’m!” Her brow wrinkled thoughtfully and she was silent for a moment. “Suppose we go back to the very beginning, father, and run over the whole affair. Try to remember. In the early stages of negotiations, did the agent say anything to you about money?”

He did not speak for a minute or more.

“Now that I think it over, he did say something about its being worth my while if his filter was accepted.”

“That was an overture to bribe you. And what did you say to him?”

“I don’t remember. You see, at the time, his offer, if it was one, did not make any impression on me. I believe I didn’t say anything to him at all.”

“But you approved his filter?”

“Yes.”

“Mr. Marcy says in the *Express*, and you admit it, that he offered you a bribe. You approved his filter. On the face of it, speaking legally, that looks bad, father.”

“But how could I honestly keep from approving his filter, when it was the very best on the market for our water?” demanded Doctor West.

“Then how did you come to accept that money?”

The old man’s face cleared.

“I can explain that easily. Some time ago the agent said something about the Acme Filter Company wishing to make a little donation to our hospital. I’m one of the directors, you know. So, when he handed me that envelope, I supposed it was the contribution to the hospital – perhaps twenty-five or fifty dollars.”

“And that is all?”

“That’s the whole truth. But when I explained the matter to the prosecuting attorney, he just smiled.”

“I know it’s the truth, because you say it.” She affectionately patted the hand that she held. “But, again speaking legally, it wouldn’t sound very plausible to an outsider. But how do you explain the situation?”

“I think the whole affair must be just a mistake.”

“Possibly. But if so, you’ll have to be able to prove it.” She thought a space. “Could it be that this is a manufactured charge?”

Doctor West’s eyes widened with amazement.

“Why, of course not! You have forgotten that the man who makes the charge is Mr. Sherman. You surely do not think he would let himself be involved in anything that he did not believe to be in the highest degree honourable?”

“I do not know him very well. During the four years he has been here, I have met him only a few times.”

“But you know what your dearest friend thinks of him.”

“Yes, I know Elsie considers her husband to be an ecclesiastical Sir Galahad. And I must admit that he has seemed to me the highest type of the modern young minister.”

“Then you agree with me, that Mr. Sherman is thoroughly honest in this affair? That his only motive is a sense of public duty?”

“Yes. I cannot conceive of him knowingly doing a wrong.”

“That’s what has forced me to think it’s only just a mistake,” said her father.

“You may be right.” She considered the idea. “But what does your lawyer say?”

His pale cheeks flushed.

“I have no lawyer,” he said slowly.

“I see. You were waiting to consult me about whom to retain.”

He shook his head.

“Then you have approached some one?”

“I have spoken to Hopkins, and Williams, and Freeman. They all – ” He hesitated.

“Yes?”

“They all said they could not take my case.”

“Could not take your case!” she cried. “Why not?”

“They made different excuses. But their excuses were not their real reason.”

“And what was that?”

The old man flushed yet more painfully.

“I guess you do not fully realize the situation, Katherine. I don’t need to tell you that a wave of popular feeling against political corruption is sweeping across the country. This is the first big case that has come out in Westville, and the city is stirred up over this as it hasn’t been stirred in years. The way the *Express*— You saw the *Express*?”

Her hands instinctively clenched.

“It was awful! Awful!”

“The way the *Express* has handled it has especially – well, you see – ”

“You mean those lawyers are afraid to take the case?”

Doctor West nodded.

Katherine’s dark eyes glowed with wrath.

“Did you try any one else?”

“Mr. Green came to see me. But – ”

“Of course not! It would kill your case to have a shyster represent you.” She gripped his hand, and her voice rang out: “Father, I’m glad those men refused you. We’re going to get for you the biggest man, the biggest lawyer, in Westville.”

“You mean Mr. Blake?”

“Yes, Mr. Blake.”

“I thought of him at first, of course. But I – well, I hesitated to approach him.”

“Hesitated? Why?”

“Well, you see,” he stammered, “I remembered about your refusing him, and I felt – ”

“That would never make any difference to him,” she cried. “He’s too much of a gentleman. Besides, that was five years ago, and he has forgotten it.”

“Then you think he’ll take the case?”

“Of course, he’ll take it! He’ll take it because he’s a big man, and because you need him, and because he’s no coward. And with the biggest man in Westville on your side, you’ll see how public opinion will right-about face!”

She sprang up, aglow with energy. “I’m going to see him this minute! With his help, we’ll have this matter cleared up before you know it, and” – smiling lightly – “just you see, daddy, all Westville will be out there in the front yard, tramping over Aunt Rachel’s sweet williams, begging to be allowed to come and kiss your hand!”

He kissed her own. He rose, and a smile broke through the clouds of his face.

“You’ve been home only an hour, and I feel that a thousand years have been lifted off me.”

“That’s right – and just keep on feeling a thousand years younger.” She smiled caressingly, and began to twist a finger in a buttonhole of his coat. “U’m – don’t you think, daddy, that such a very young gentleman as you are, such a regular roaring young blade, might – u’m – might – ”

“Might what, my dear?”

“Might – ” She leaned forward and whispered in his ear.

A hand went to his throat.

“Eh, why, is this one – ”

“I’m afraid it is, daddy – very!”

“We’ve been so upset I guess your aunt must have forgotten to put out a clean one for me.”

“And I suppose it never occurred to the profound scientific intellect that it was possible for one to pull out a drawer and take out a collar for one’s self.” She crossed to the bureau and came back with a clean collar. “Now, sir – up with your chin!” With quick hands she replaced the offending collar with the fresh one, tied the tie and gave it a perfecting little pat. “There – that’s better! And now I must be off. I’ll send around a few policemen to keep the crowds off Aunt Rachel’s flower-beds.”

And pressing on his pale cheek another kiss, and smiling at him from the door, she hurried out.

CHAPTER IV

DOCTOR WEST'S LAWYER

Katherine's refusal of Harrison Blake's unforeseen proposal, during the summer she had graduated from Vassar, had, until the present hour, been the most painful experience of her life.

Ever since that far-away autumn of her fourteenth year when Blake had led an at-first forlorn crusade against "Blind Charlie" Peck and swept that apparently unconquerable autocrat and his corrupt machine from power, she had admired Blake as the ideal public man. He had seemed so fine, so big already, and loomed so large in promise – it was the fall following his proposal that he was elected lieutenant-governor – that it had been a humiliation to her that she, so insignificant, so unworthy, could not give him that intractable passion, love. But though he had gone very pale at her stammered answer, he had borne his disappointment like a gallant gentleman; and in the years since then he had acquitted himself to perfection in that most difficult of rôles, the lover who must be content to be mere friend.

Katherine still retained her girlish admiration of Mr. Blake. Despite his having been so conspicuous at the forefront of public affairs, no scandal had ever soiled his name. His rectitude, so said people whose memories ran back a generation, was due mainly to fine qualities inherited from his mother, for his father had been a good-natured, hearty, popular politician with no discoverable bias toward over-scrupulosity. In fact, twenty years ago there had been a great to-do touching the voting, through a plan of the elder Blake's devising, of a gang of negroes half a dozen times down in a river-front ward. But his party had rushed loyally to his rescue, and had vindicated him by sending him to Congress; and his sudden death on the day after taking his seat had at the time abashed all accusation, and had suffused his memory with a romantic afterglow of sentiment.

Blake lived alone with his mother in a house adjoining the Wests', and a few moments after Katherine had left her father she turned into the Blakes' yard. The house stood far back in a spacious lawn, shady with broad maples and aspiring pines, and set here and there with shrubs and flower-beds and a fountain whose misty spray hung a golden aureole upon the sunlight. It was quite worthy of Westville's most distinguished citizen – a big, roomy house of brick, its sterner lines all softened with cool ivy, and with a wide piazza crossing its entire front and embracing its two sides.

The hour was that at which Westville arose from its accustomed mid-day dinner – which was the reason Katherine was calling at Blake's home instead of going downtown to his office. She was informed that he was in. Telling the maid she would await him in his library, where she knew he received all clients who called on business at his home, she ascended the well-remembered stairway and entered a large, light room with walls booked to the ceiling.

Despite her declaration to her father that that old love episode had been long forgotten by Mr. Blake, at this moment it was not forgotten by her. She could not subdue a fluttering agitation over the circumstance that she was about to appeal for succour to a man she had once refused.

She had but a moment to wait. Blake's tall, straight figure entered and strode rapidly across the room, his right hand outstretched.

"What – you, Katherine! I'm so glad to see you!"

She had risen. "And I to see you, Mr. Blake." For all he had once vowed himself her lover, she had never overcome her girlhood awe of him sufficiently to use the more familiar "Harrison."

"I knew you were coming home, but I had not expected to see you so soon. Please sit down again."

She resumed her soft leather-covered chair, and he took the swivel chair at his great flat-topped library desk. His manner was most cordial, but lurking beneath it Katherine sensed a certain constraint – due perhaps, to their old relationship – perhaps due to meeting a friend involved in a family disgrace.

Blake was close upon forty, with a dark, strong, handsome face, penetrating but pleasant eyes, and black hair slightly marked with gray. He was well dressed but not too well dressed, as became a public man whose following was largely of the country. His person gave an immediate impression of a polished but not over-polished gentleman – of a man who in acquiring a large grace of manner, has lost nothing of virility and bigness and purpose.

“It seems quite natural,” Katherine began, smiling, and trying to speak lightly, “that each time I come home it is to congratulate you upon some new honour.”

“New honour?” queried he.

“Oh, your name reaches even to New York! We hear that you are spoken of to succeed Senator Grayson when he retires next year.”

“Oh, that!” He smiled – still with some constraint. “I won’t try to make you believe that I’m indifferent about the matter. But I don’t need to tell you that there’s many a slip betwixt being ‘spoken of’ and actually being chosen.”

There was an instant of awkward silence. Then Katherine went straight to the business of her visit.

“Of course you know about father.”

He nodded. “And I do not need to say, Katherine, how very, very sorry I am.”

“I was certain of your sympathy. Things look black on the surface for him, but I want you to know that he is innocent.”

“I am relieved to be assured of that,” he said, hesitatingly. “For, frankly, as you say, things do look black.”

She leaned forward and spoke rapidly, her hands tightly clasped.

“I have come to see you, Mr. Blake, because you have always been our friend – my friend, and a kinder friend than a young girl had any right to expect – because I know you have the ability to bring out the truth no matter how dark the circumstantial evidence may seem. I have come, Mr. Blake, to ask you, to beg you, to be my father’s lawyer.”

He stared at her, and his face grew pale.

“To be your father’s lawyer?” he repeated.

“Yes, yes – to be my father’s lawyer.”

He turned in his chair and looked out to where the fountain was flinging its iridescent drapery to the wind. She gazed at his strong, clean-cut profile in breathless expectation.

“I again assure you he is innocent,” she urged pleadingly. “I know you can clear him.”

“You have evidence to prove his innocence?” asked Blake.

“That you can easily uncover.”

He slowly swung about. Though with all his powerful will he strove to control himself, he was profoundly agitated, and he spoke with a very great effort.

“You have put me in a most embarrassing situation, Katherine.”

She caught her breath.

“You mean?”

“I mean that I should like to help you, but – but – ”

“Yes? Yes?”

“But I cannot.”

“Cannot! You mean – you refuse his case?”

“It pains me, but I must.”

She grew as white as death.

“Oh!” she breathed. “Oh!” She gazed at him, lips wide, in utter dismay.

Suddenly she seized his arm. “But you have not yet thought it over – you have not considered,” she cried rapidly. “I cannot take no for your answer. I beg you, I implore you, to take the case.”

He seemed to be struggling between two desires. A slender, well-knit hand stretched out and clutched a ruler; his brow was moist; but he kept silent.

“Mr. Blake, I beg you, I implore you, to reconsider,” she feverishly pursued. “Do you not see what it will mean to my father? If you take the case, he is as good as cleared!”

His voice came forth low and husky. “It is because it is beyond my power to clear him that I refuse.”

“Beyond your power?”

“Listen, Katherine,” he answered. “I am glad you believe your father innocent. The faith you have is the faith a daughter ought to have. I do not want to hurt you, but I must tell you the truth – I do not share your faith.”

“You refuse, then, because you think him guilty?”

He inclined his head. “The evidence is conclusive. It is beyond my power, beyond the power of any lawyer, to clear him.”

This sudden failure of the aid she had so confidently counted as already hers, was a blow that for the moment completely stunned her. She sank back in her chair and her head dropped down into her hands.

Blake wiped his face with his handkerchief. After a moment, he went on in an agitated, persuasive voice:

“I do not want you to think, because I refuse, that I am any less your friend. If I took the case, and did my best, your father would be convicted just the same. I am going to open my heart to you, Katherine. I should like very much to be chosen for that senatorship. Naturally, I do not wish to do any useless thing that will impair my chances. Now for me, an aspirant for public favour, to champion against the aroused public the case of a man who has – forgive me the word – who has betrayed that public, and in the end to lose that case, as I most certainly should – it would be nothing less than political suicide. Your father would gain nothing. I would lose – perhaps everything. Don’t you see?”

“I follow your reasons,” she said brokenly into her hands, “I do not blame you – I accept your answer – but I still believe my father innocent.”

“And for that faith, as I told you, I admire and honour you.”

She slowly rose. He likewise stood up.

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

“I do not know,” she answered dully. “I was so confident of your aid, that I had thought of no alternative.”

“Your father has tried other lawyers?”

“Yes. They have all refused. You can guess their reason.”

He was silent for an instant.

“Why not take the case yourself?”

“I take the case!” cried Katherine, amazed.

“Yes. You are a lawyer.”

“But I have never handled a case in court! I am not even admitted to the bar of the state. And, besides, a woman lawyer in Westville – No, it’s quite out of the question.”

“I was only suggesting it, you know,” he said apologetically.

“Oh, I realized you did not mean it seriously.”

Her face grew ashen as her failure came to her afresh. She gazed at him with a final desperation.

“Then your answer – it is final?”

“I am sorry, but it is final,” said he.

Her head dropped.

“Thank you,” she said dully. “Good-by.” And she started away.

“Wait, Katherine.”

She paused, and he came to her side. His features were gray-hued and were twitching strangely; for an instant she had the wild impression that his old love for her still lived.

“I am sorry that – that the first time you asked aid of me – I should fail you. But but – ”

“I understand.”

“One word more.” But he let several moments pass before he spoke it, and he wet his lips continually. “Remember, I am still your friend. Though I cannot take the case, I shall be glad, in a private way, to advise you upon any matters you may care to lay before me.”

“You are very good.”

“Then you accept?”

“How can I refuse? Thank you.”

He accompanied her down the stairway and to the door. Heavy-hearted, she returned home. This was sad news to bring her father, whom but half an hour before she had so confidently cheered; and she knew not in what fresh direction to turn for aid.

She went straight up to her father’s room. With him she found a stranger, who had a vague, far-distant familiarity.

The two men rose.

“This is my daughter,” said Doctor West.

The stranger bowed slightly.

“I have heard of Miss West,” he said, and in his manner Katherine’s quick instinct read strong preconceived disapprobation.

“And, Katherine,” continued her father, “this is Mr. Bruce.”

She stopped short.

“Mr. Bruce of the *Express*?”

“Of the *Express*,” Bruce calmly repeated.

Her dejected figure grew suddenly tense, and her cheeks glowed with hot colour. She moved up before the editor and gazed with flashing eyes into his square-jawed face.

“So you are the man who wrote those brutal things about father?”

He bristled at her hostile tone and manner, and there was a quick snapping behind the heavy glasses.

“I am the man who wrote those true things about your father,” he said with cold emphasis.

“And after that you dare come into this house!”

“Pardon me, Miss West, but a newspaper man dares go wherever his business takes him.”

She was trembling all over.

“Then let me inform you that you have no business here. Neither my father nor myself has anything whatever to say to yellow journalists!”

“Katherine! Katherine!” interjected her father.

Bruce bowed, his face a dull red.

“I shall leave, Miss West, just as soon as Doctor West answers my last question. I called to see if he wished to make any statement, and I was asking him about his lawyer. He told me he had as yet secured none, but that you were applying to Mr. Blake.”

Doctor West stepped toward her eagerly.

“Yes, Katherine, what did he say? Will he take the case?”

She turned from Bruce, and as she looked into the white, worn face of her father, the fire of her anger went out.

“He said – he said – ”

“Yes – yes?”

She put her arms about him.

“Don’t you mind, father dear, what he said.”

Doctor West grew yet more pale.

“Then – he said – the same as the others?”

She held him tight.

“Dear daddy!”

“Then – he refused?”

“Yes – but don’t you mind it,” she tried to say bravely.

Without a sound, the old man’s head dropped upon his chest. He held to Katherine a moment; then he moved waveringly to an old haircloth sofa, sank down upon it and bowed his face into his hands.

Bruce broke the silence.

“I am to understand, then, that your father has no lawyer?”

Katherine wheeled from the bowed figure, and her anger leaped instantly to a white heat.

“And why has he no lawyer?” she cried. “Because of the inhuman things you wrote about him!”

“You forget, Miss West, that I am running a newspaper, and it is my business to print the news.”

“The news, yes; but not a malignant, ferocious distortion of the news! Look at my father there. Does it not fill your soul with shame to think of the black injustice you have done him?”

“Mere sentiment! Understand, I do not let conventional sentiment stand between me and my duty.”

“Your duty!” There was a world of scorn in her voice. “And, pray, what is your duty?”

“Part of it is to establish, and maintain, decent standards of public service in this town.”

“Don’t hide behind that hypocritical pretence! I’ve heard about you. I know the sort of man you are. You saw a safe chance for a yellow story for your yellow newspaper, a safe chance to gain prominence by yelping at the head of the pack. If he had been a rich man, if he had had a strong political party behind him, would you have dared assail him as you have? Never! Oh, it was brutal – infamous – cowardly!”

There was an angry fire behind the editor’s thick glasses, and his square chin thrust itself out. He took a step nearer.

“Listen to me!” he commanded in a slow, defiant voice. “Your opinion is to me a matter of complete indifference. I tell you that a man who betrays his city is a traitor, and that I would treat an old traitor exactly as I would treat a young traitor, I tell you that I take it as a sign of an awakening public conscience when reputable lawyers refuse to defend a man who has done what your father has done. And, finally, I predict that, try as you may, you will not be able to find a decent lawyer who will dare to take his case. And I glory in it, and consider it the result of my work!” He bowed to her. “And now, Miss West, I wish you good afternoon.”

She stood quivering, gasping, while he crossed to the door. As his hand fell upon the knob she sprang forward.

“Wait!” she cried. “Wait! He has a lawyer!”

He paused.

“Indeed! And whom?”

“One who is going to make you take back every cowardly word you have printed!”

“Who is it, Katherine?” It was her father who spoke.

She turned. Doctor West had raised his head, and in his eyes was an eager, hopeful light. She bent over him and slipped an arm about his shoulders.

“Father dear,” she quavered, “since we can get no one else, will you take me?”

“Take you?” he exclaimed.

“Because,” she quavered on, “whether you will or not, I’m going to stay in Westville and be your lawyer.”

CHAPTER V

KATHERINE PREPARES FOR BATTLE

For a long space after Bruce had gone Katherine sat quiveringly upon the old haircloth sofa beside her father, holding his hands tightly, caressingly. Her words tumbled hotly from her lips – words of love of him – of resentment of the injustice which he suffered – and, fiercest of all, of wrath against Editor Bruce, who had so ruthlessly, and for such selfish ends, incited the popular feeling against him. She would make such a fight as Westville had never seen! She would show those lawyers who had been reduced to cowards by Bruce’s demagoguery! She would bring the town humiliated to her father’s feet!

But emotion has not only peaks, but plains, and dark valleys. As she cooled and her passion descended to a less exalted level, she began to see the difficulties of, and her unfitness for, the rôle she had so impulsively accepted. An uneasiness for the future crept upon her. As she had told Mr. Blake, she had never handled a case in court. True, she had been a member of the bar for two years, but her duties with the Municipal League had consisted almost entirely in working up evidence in cases of municipal corruption for the use of her legal superiors. An untried lawyer, and a woman lawyer at that – surely a weak reed for her father to lean upon!

But she had thrown down the gage of battle; she had to fight, since there was no other champion; and even in this hour of emotion, when tears were so plenteous and every word was accompanied by a caress, she began to plan the preliminaries of her struggle.

“I shall write to-night to the league for a leave of absence,” she said. “One of the things I must see to at once is to get admitted to the state bar. Do you know when your case is to come up?”

“It has been put over to the September term of court.”

“That gives me four months.”

She was silently thoughtful for a space. “I’ve got to work hard, hard! upon your case. As I see it now, I am inclined to agree with you that the situation has arisen from a misunderstanding – that the agent thought you expected a bribe, and that you thought the bribe a small donation to the hospital.”

“I’m certain that’s how it is,” said her father.

“Then the thing to do is to see Doctor Sherman, and if possible the agent, have them repeat their testimony and try to search out in it the clue to the mistake. And that I shall see to at once.”

Five minutes later Katherine left the house. After walking ten minutes through the quiet, maple-shaded back streets she reached the Wabash Avenue Church, whose rather ponderous pile of Bedford stone was the most ambitious and most frequented place of worship in Westville, and whose bulk was being added to by a lecture room now rising against its side.

Katherine went up a gravelled walk toward a cottage that stood beneath the church’s shadow. The house’s front was covered with a wide-spreading rose vine, a tapestry of rich green which June would gorgeously embroider with sprays of heart-red roses. The cottage looked what Katherine knew it was, a bower of lovers.

Her ring was answered by a fair, fragile young woman whose eyes were the colour of faith and loyalty. A faint colour crept into the young woman’s pale cheeks.

“Why – Katherine – why – why – I don’t know what you think of us, but – but – ” She could stammer out no more, but stood in the doorway in distressed uncertainty.

Katherine’s answer was to stretch out her arms. “Elsie!” Instantly the two old friends were in a close embrace.

“I haven’t slept, Katherine,” sobbed Mrs. Sherman, “for thinking of what you would think – ”

“I think that, whatever has happened, I love you just the same.”

“Thank you for saying it, Katherine.” Mrs. Sherman gazed at her in tearful gratitude. “I can’t tell you how we have suffered over this – this affair. Oh, if you only knew!”

It was instinctive with Katherine to soothe the pain of others, though suffering herself. “I am certain Doctor Sherman acted from the highest motives,” she assured the young wife. “So say no more about it.”

They had entered the little sitting-room, hung with soft white muslin curtains. “But at the same time, Elsie, I cannot believe my father guilty,” Katherine went on. “And though I honour your husband, why, even the noblest man can be mistaken. My hope of proving my father’s innocence is based on the belief that Doctor Sherman may somehow have made a mistake. At any rate, I’d like to talk over his evidence with him.”

“He’s trying to work on his sermon, though he’s too worn to think. I’ll bring him right in.”

She passed through a door into the study, and a moment later reentered with Doctor Sherman. The present meeting would have been painful to an ordinary person; doubly so was it to such a hypersensitive nature. The young clergyman stood hesitant just within the doorway, his usual pallor greatly deepened, his thin fingers intertwined – in doubt how to greet Katherine till she stretched out her hand to him.

“I want you to understand, Katherine dear,” little Mrs. Sherman put in quickly, with a look of adoration at her husband, “that Edgar reached the decision to take the action he did only after days of agony. You know, Katherine, Doctor West was always as kind to me as another father, and I loved him almost like one. At first I begged Edgar not to do anything. Edgar walked the floor for nights – suffering! – oh, how you suffered, Edgar!”

“Isn’t it a little incongruous,” said Doctor Sherman, smiling wanly at her, “for the instrument that struck the blow to complain, in the presence of the victim, of *his* suffering?”

“But I want her to know it!” persisted the wife. “She must know it to do you justice, dear! It seemed at first disloyal – but finally Edgar decided that his duty to the city – ”

“Please say no more, Elsie.” Katherine turned to the pale young minister. “Doctor Sherman, I have not come to utter one single word of recrimination. I have come merely to ask you to tell me all you know about the case.”

“I shall be glad to do so.”

“And could I also talk with Mr. Marcy, the agent?”

“He has left the city, and will not return till the trial.”

Katherine was disappointed by this news. Doctor Sherman, though obviously pained by the task, rehearsed in minutest detail the charges he had made against Doctor West, which charges he would later have to repeat upon the witness stand. Also he recounted Mr. Marcy’s story. Katherine scrutinized every point in these two stories for the loose end, the loop-hole, the flaw, she had thought to find. But flaw there was none. The stories were perfectly straightforward.

Katherine walked slowly away, still going over and over Doctor Sherman’s testimony. Doctor Sherman was telling the indubitable truth – yet her father was indubitably innocent. It was a puzzling case, this her first case – a puzzling, most puzzling case.

When she reached home she was told by her aunt that a gentleman was waiting to see her. She entered the big, old-fashioned parlour, fresh and tasteful despite the stiff black walnut that, in the days of her mother’s marriage, had been spread throughout the land as beauty by the gentlemen who dealt conjointly in furniture and coffins.

From a chair there rose a youthful and somewhat corpulent presence, with a chubby and very serious pink face that sat in a glossy high collar as in a cup. He smiled with a blushful but ingratiating dignity.

“Don’t you remember me? I’m Charlie Horn.”

“Oh!” And instinctively, as if to identify him by Charlie Horn’s well-remembered strawberry-marks, Katherine glanced at his hands. But they were clean, and the warts were gone. She looked at him in doubt. “You can’t be Nellie Horn’s little brother?”

“I’m not so little,” he said, with some resentment. “Since you knew me,” he added a little grandiloquently, “I’ve graduated from Bloomington.”

“Please pardon me! It was kind of you to call, and so soon.”

“Well, you see I came on business. I suppose you have seen this afternoon’s *Express*?”

She instinctively stiffened.

“I have not.”

He drew out a copy of the *Express*, opened it, and pointed a plump, pinkish forefinger at the beginning of an article on the first page.

“You see the *Express* says you are going to be your father’s lawyer.”

Katharine read the indicated paragraphs. Her colour heightened. The statement was blunt and bare, but between the lines she read the contemptuous disapproval of the “new woman” that a few hours since Bruce had displayed before her. Again her anger toward Bruce flared up.

“I am a reporter for the *Clarion*,” young Charlie Horn announced, striving not to appear too proud. “And I’ve come to interview you.”

“Interview me?” she cried in dismay. “What about?”

“Well, you see,” said he, with his benign smile, “you’re the first woman lawyer that’s ever been in Westville. It’s almost a bigger sensation than your fath – you see, it’s a big story.”

He drew from his pocket a bunch of copy paper. “I want you to tell me about how you are going to handle the case. And about what you think a woman lawyer’s prospects are in Westville. And about what you think will be woman’s status in future society. And you might tell me,” concluded young Charlie Horn, “who your favourite author is, and what you think of golf. That last will interest our readers, for our country club is very popular.”

It had been the experience of Nellie Horn’s brother that the good people of Westville were quite willing – nay, even had a subdued eagerness – to discourse about themselves, and whom they had visited over Sunday, and who was “Sundaying” with them, and what beauties had impressed them most at Niagara Falls; and so that confident young ambassador from the *Clarion* was somewhat dazed when, a moment later, he found himself standing alone on the West doorstep with a dim sense of having been politely and decisively wished good afternoon.

But behind him amid the stiff, dark, solemn-visaged furniture (Calvinists, every chair of them!) he left a person far more dazed than himself. Charlie Horn’s call had brought sharply home to Katherine a question that, in the press of affairs, she hardly had as yet considered – how was Westville going to take to a woman lawyer being in its midst? She realized, with a chill of apprehension, how profoundly this question concerned her next few months. Dear, bustling, respectable Westville, she well knew, clung to its own idea of woman’s sphere as to a thing divinely ordered, and to seek to leave which was scarcely less than rebellion against high God. In patriarchal days, when heaven’s justice had been prompter, such a disobedient one would suddenly have found herself rebuked into a bit of saline statuary.

Katherine vividly recalled, when she had announced her intention to study law, what a raising of hands there was, what a loud regretting that she had not a mother. But since she had not settled in Westville, and since she had not been actively practising in New York, the town had become partially reconciled. But this step of hers was new, without a precedent. How would Westville take it?

Her brain burned with this and other matters all afternoon, all evening, and till the dawn began to edge in and crowd the shadows from her room. But when she met her father at the breakfast table her face was fresh and smiling.

“Well, how is my client this morning?” she asked gaily. “Do you realize, daddy, that you are my first really, truly client?”

“And I suppose you’ll be charging me something outrageous as a fee!”

“Something like this” – kissing him on the ear. “But how do you feel?”

“Certain that my lawyer will win my case.” He smiled. “And how are you?”

“Brimful of ideas.”

“Yes? About the – ”

“Yes. And about you. First, answer a few of your counsel’s questions. Have you been doing much at your scientific work of late?”

“The last two months, since the water-works has been practically completed, I have spent almost my whole time at it.”

“And your work was interesting?”

“Very. You see, I think I am on the verge of discovering that the typhoid bacillus – ”

“You’ll tell me all about that later. Now the first order of your attorney is, just as soon as you have finished your coffee and folded your napkin, back you go to your laboratory.”

“But, Katherine, with this affair – ”

“This affair, worry and all, has been shifted off upon your eminent counsel. Work will keep you from worry, so back you go to your darling germs.”

“You’re mighty good, dear, but – ”

“No argument! You’ve got to do just what your lawyer tells you. And now,” she added “as I may have to be seeing a lot of people, and as having people about the house may interrupt your work, I’m going to take an office.”

He stared at her.

“Take an office?”

“Yes. Who knows – I may pick up a few other cases. If I do, I know who can use the money.”

“But open an office in Westville! Why, the people – Won’t it be a little more unpleasant – ” He paused doubtfully. “Did you see what the *Express* had to say about you?”

She flushed, but smiled sweetly.

“What the *Express* said is one reason why I’m going to open an office.”

“Yes?”

“I’m not going to let fear of that Mr. Bruce dictate my life. And since I’m going to be a lawyer, I’m going to be the whole thing. And what’s more, I’m going to act as though I were doing the most ordinary thing in the world. And if Mr. Bruce and the town want to talk, why, we’ll just let ’em talk!”

“But – but – aren’t you afraid?”

“Of course I’m afraid,” she answered promptly. “But when I realize that I’m afraid to do a thing, I’m certain that that is just exactly the thing for me to do. Oh, don’t look so worried, dear” – she leaned across and kissed him – “for I’m going to be the perfectest, properest, politest lady that ever scuttled a convention. And nothing is going to happen to me – nothing at all.”

Breakfast finished, Katherine despotically led her father up to his laboratory. A little later she set out for downtown, looking very fresh in a blue summer dress that had the rare qualities of simplicity and grace. Her colour was perhaps a little warmer than was usual, but she walked along beneath the maples with tranquil mien, seemingly unconscious of some people she passed, giving others a clear, direct glance, smiling and speaking to friends and acquaintances in her most easy manner.

As she turned into Main Street the intelligence that she was coming seemed in some mysterious way to speed before her. Those exemplars of male fashion, the dry goods clerks, craned furtively about front doors. Bare-armed and aproned proprietors of grocery stores and their hirelings appeared beneath the awnings and displayed an unprecedented concern in trying to resuscitate, with aid of sprinkling-cans, bunches of expiring radishes and young onions. Owners of amiable steeds that dozed beside the curb hurried out of cavernous doors, the fear of run-away writ large upon their countenances, to see if a buckle was not loose or a tug perchance unfastened. Behind her, as she

passed, Main Street stood stoned in mid-action, strap in motionless hand, sprinkling-can tilting its entire contents of restorative over a box of clothes-pins, and gaped and stared. This was epochal for Westville. Never before had a real, live, practising woman lawyer trod the cement walk of Main Street.

When Katherine came to Court House Square, she crossed to the south side, passed the *Express* Building, and made for the Hollingsworth Block, whose first floor was occupied by the New York Store's "glittering array of vast and profuse fashion." Above this alluring pageant were two floors of offices; and up the narrow stairway leading thereunto Katherine mounted. She entered a door marked "Hosea Hollingsworth. Attorney-at-Law. Mortgages. Loans. Farms." In the room were a table, three chairs, a case of law books, a desk, on the top of the desk a "plug" hat, so venerable that it looked a very great-grandsire of hats, and two cuspidors marked with chromatic evidence that they were not present for ornament alone.

From the desk there rose a man, perhaps seventy, lean, tall, smooth-shaven, slightly stooped, dressed in a rusty and wrinkled "Prince Albert" coat, and with a countenance that looked a rank plagiarism of the mask of Voltaire. In one corner of his thin mouth, half chewed away, was an unlighted cigar.

"I believe this is Mr. Hollingsworth?" said Katherine. The question was purely formal, for his lank figure was one of her earliest memories.

"Yes. Come right in," he returned in a high, nasal voice.

She drew a chair away from the environs of the cuspidors and sat down. He resumed his place at his desk and peered at her through his spectacles, and a dry, almost imperceptible smile played among the fine wrinkles of his leathery face.

"And I believe this is Katherine West – our lady lawyer," he remarked. "I read in the *Express* how you – "

Bruce was on her nerves. She could not restrain a sudden flare of temper. "The editor of that paper is a cad!"

"Well, he ain't exactly what you might call a hand-raised gentleman," the old lawyer admitted. "At least, I never heard of his exerting himself so hard to be polite that he strained any tendons."

"You know him, then?"

"A little. He's my nephew."

"Oh! I remember."

"And we live together," the old man loquaciously drawled on, eyeing her closely with a smile that might have been either good-natured or satirical. "Batch it – with a nigger who saves us work by stealing things we'd otherwise have to take care of. We scrap most of the time. I make fun of him, and he gets sore. The trouble with the editor of the *Express* is, he had a doting ma. He should have had an almighty lot of thrashing when a boy, and instead he never tasted beech limb once. He's suffering from the spared rod."

Katherine had a shrinking from this old man; an aversion which in her mature years she had had no occasion to examine, but which she had inherited unanalyzed from her childhood, when old Hosie Hollingsworth had been the chief scandal of the town – an infidel, who had dared challenge the creation of the earth in seven days, and yet was not stricken down by a fiery bolt from heaven! She did not pursue the subject of Bruce, but went directly to her business.

"I understand that you have an office to rent."

"So I have. Like to see it?"

"That is what I called for."

"Just come along with me."

He rose, and Katherine followed him to the floor above and into a room furnished much as the one she had just left.

"This office was last used," commented old Hosie, "by a young fellow who taught school down in Buck Creek Township and got money to study law with. He tried law for a while." The old man's

thin prehensile lips shifted his cigar to the other side of his mouth. “He’s down in Buck Creek Township teaching school to get money to pay his back office rent.”

“How about the furniture?” asked Katherine.

“That was his. He left it in part payment. You can use it if you want to.”

“But I don’t want those things about” – pointing gingerly to a pair of cuspidors.

“All right. Though I don’t see how you expect to run a law office in Westville without ’em.” He bent over and took them in his hands. “I’ll take ’em along. I need a few more, for my business is picking up.”

“I suppose I can have possession at once.”

“Whenever you please.”

Standing with the cuspidors in his two hands the old lawyer looked her over. He slowly grinned, and a dry cackle came out of his lean throat.

“I was born out there in Buck Creek Township myself,” he said. “Folks all Quakers, same as your ma’s and your Aunt Rachel’s. I was brought up on plowing, husking corn and going to meeting. Never smiled till after I was twenty; wore a halo, size too large, that slipped down and made my ears stick out. My grandfather’s name was Elijah, my father’s Elisha. My father had twelve sons, and beginning with me, Hosea, he named ’em all in order after the minor prophets. Being brought up in a houseful of prophets, naturally a lot of the gift of prophecy sort of got rubbed off on me.”

“Well?” said Katherine impatiently, not seeing the pertinence of this autobiography.

Again he shifted his cigar. “Well, when I prophesy, it’s inspired,” he went on. “And you can take it as the word that came unto Hosea, that a woman lawyer settling in Westville is going to raise the very dickens in this old town!”

CHAPTER VI

THE LADY LAWYER

When old Hosie had withdrawn with his expectorative plunder, Katherine sat down at the desk and gazed thoughtfully out of her window, taking in the tarnished dome of the Court House that rose lustreless above the elm tops and the heavy-boned farmhorses that stood about the iron hitch-racks of the Square, stamping and switching their tails in dozing warfare against the flies.

Once more, she began to go over the case. Having decided to test all possible theories, she for the moment pigeon-holed the idea of a mistake, and began to seek for other explanations. For a space she vacantly watched the workmen tearing down the speakers' stand. But presently her eyes began to glow, and she sprang up and excitedly paced the little office.

Perhaps her father had unwittingly and innocently become involved in some large system of corruption! Perhaps this case was the first symptom of the existence of some deep-hidden municipal disease!

It seemed possible – very possible. Her two years with the Municipal League had taught her how common were astute dishonest practices. The idea filled her. She began to burn with a feverish hope. But from the first moment she was sufficiently cool-headed to realize that to follow up the idea she required intimate knowledge of Westville political conditions.

Here she felt herself greatly handicapped. Owing to her long residence away from Westville she was practically in ignorance of public affairs – and she faced the further difficulty of having no one to whom she could turn for information. Her father she knew could be of little service; expert though he was in his specialty, he was blind to evil in men. As for Blake, she did not care to ask aid from him so soon after his refusal of assistance. And as for others, she felt that all who could give her information were either hostile to her father or critical of herself.

For days the idea possessed her mind. She kept it to herself, and, her suspicious eyes sweeping in all directions, she studied as best she could to find some evidence or clue to evidence, that would corroborate her conjecture. In her excited hope, she strove, while she thought and worked, to be indifferent to what the town might think about her. But she was well aware that Old Hosie's prophecy was swift in coming true – that a storm was raging, a storm of her own sex. It should be explained, however, in justice to them, that they forgot the fact, or never really knew it, that she had been forced to take her father's case. To be sure, there was no open insult, no direct attack, no face-to-face denunciation; but piazzas buzzed indignantly with her name, and at the meeting of the Ladies' Aid the poor were forgotten, as at the Missionary Society were the unbibled heathen upon the foreign shore.

Fragments of her sisters' pronouncements were wafted to Katherine's ears. "No self-respecting, womanly woman would ever think of wanting to be a lawyer" – "A forward, brazen, unwomanly young person" – "A disgrace to the town, a disgrace to our sex" – "Think of the example she sets to impressionable young girls; they'll want to break away and do all sorts of unwomanly things" – "Everybody knows her reason for being a lawyer is only that it gives her a greater chance to be with the men."

Katherine heard, her mouth hardened, a certain defiance came into her manner. But she went straight ahead seeking evidence to support her suspicion.

Every day made her feel more keenly her need of intimate knowledge about the city's political affairs; then, unexpectedly, and from an unexpected quarter, an informant stepped out upon her stage. Several times Old Hosie Hollingsworth had spoken casually when they had chanced to pass in the building or on the street. One day his lean, stooped figure appeared in her office and helped itself to a chair.

“I see you haven’t exactly made what Charlie Horn, in his dramatic criticisms, calls an uproarious and unprecedented success,” he remarked, after a few preliminaries.

“I have not been sufficiently interested to notice,” was her crisp response.

“That’s right; keep your back up,” said he. “I’ve been agin about everything that’s popular, and for everything that’s unpopular, that ever happened in this town. I’ve been an ‘agin-er’ for fifty years. They’d have tarred and feathered me long ago if there’d been any leading citizen unstingy enough to have donated the tar. Then, too, I’ve had a little money, and going through the needle’s eye is easy business compared to losing the respect of Westville so long as you’ve got money – unless, of course,” he added, “you’re a female lawyer. I tell you, there’s no more fun than stirring up the animals in this old town. Any one unpopular in Westville is worth being friends with, and so if you’re willing – ”

He held out his thin, bony hand. Katherine, with no very marked enthusiasm, took it. Then her eyes gleamed with a new light; and obeying an impulse she asked:

“Are you acquainted with political conditions in Westville?”

“Me acquainted with – ” He cackled. “Why, I’ve been setting at my office window looking down on the political circus of this town ever since Noah run aground on Mount Ararat.”

She leaned forward eagerly.

“Then you know how things stand?”

“To a T.”

“Tell me, is there any rotten politics, any graft or corruption going on?” She flushed. “Of course, I mean except what’s charged against my father.”

“When Blind Charlie Peck was in power, there was more graft and dirty – ”

“Not then, but now?” she interrupted.

“Now? Well, of course you know that since Blake run Blind Charlie out of business ten years ago, Blake has been the big gun in this town.”

“Yes, I know.”

“Then you must know that in the last ten years Westville has been text, sermon, and doxology for all the reformers in the state.”

“But could not corruption be going on without Mr. Blake knowing it? Could not Mr. Peck be secretly carrying out some scheme?”

“Blind Charlie? Blind Charlie ain’t dead yet, not by a long sight – and as long as there’s a breath in his carcass, that good-natured old blackguard is likely to be a dangerous customer. But though Charlie’s still the boss of his party, he controls no offices, and has got no real power. He’s as helpless as Satan was after he’d been kicked out of heaven and before he’d landed that big job he holds on the floor below. Nowadays, Charlie just sits in his side office over at the Tippecanoe House playing seven-up from breakfast till bedtime.”

“Then you think there’s no corrupt politics in Westville?” she asked in a sinking voice.

“Not an ounce of ’em!” said Old Hosie with decision.

This agreed with the conviction that had been growing upon Katherine during the last few days. While she had entertained suspicion of there being corruption, she had several times considered the advisability of putting a detective on the case. But this idea she now abandoned.

After this talk with the old lawyer, Katherine was forced back again upon misunderstanding. She went carefully over the records of her father’s department, on file in the Court House, seeking some item that would cast light upon the puzzle. She went over and over the indictment, seeking some loose end, some overlooked inconsistency, that would yield her at least a clue.

For days she kept doggedly at this work, steeling herself against the disapprobation of the town. But she found nothing. Then, in a flash, an overlooked point recurred to her. The trouble, so went her theory, was all due to a confusion of the bribe with the donation to the hospital. Where was that donation?

Here was a matter that might at last lead to a solution of the difficulty. Again on fire with hope, she interviewed her father. He was certain that a donation had been promised, he had thought the envelope handed him by Mr. Marcy contained the gift – but of the donation itself he knew no more. She interviewed Doctor Sherman; he had heard Mr. Marcy refer to a donation but knew nothing about the matter. She tried to get in communication with Mr. Marcy, only to learn that he was in England studying some new filtering plants recently installed in that country. Undiscouraged, she one day stepped off the train in St. Louis, the home of the Acme Filter, and appeared in the office of the company.

The general manager, a gentleman who ran to portliness in his figure, his jewellery and his courtesy, seemed perfectly acquainted with the case. In exculpation of himself and his company, he said that they were constantly being held up by every variety of official from a county commissioner to a mayor, and they were simply forced to give “presents” in order to do business.

“But my father’s defense,” put in Katherine, “was that he thought this ‘present’ was in reality a donation to the hospital. Was anything said to my father about a donation?”

“I believe there was.”

“That corroborates my father!” Katherine exclaimed eagerly. “Would you make that statement at the trial – or at least give me an affidavit to that effect?”

“I’ll be glad to give you an affidavit. But I should explain that the ‘present’ and the donation were two distinctly separate affairs.”

“Then what became of the donation?” Katherine cried triumphantly.

“It was sent,” said the manager.

“Sent?”

“I sent it myself,” was the reply.

Katherine left St. Louis more puzzled than before. What had become of the check, if it had really been sent? Home again, she ransacked her father’s desk with his aid, and in a bottom drawer they found a heap of long-neglected mail.

Doctor West at first scratched his head in perplexity. “I remember now,” he said. “I never was much of a hand to keep up with my letters, and for the few days before that celebration I was so excited that I just threw everything –”

But Katherine had torn open an envelope and was holding in her hands a fifty dollar check from the Acme Filter Company.

“What was the date of your arrest?” she asked sharply. “The date Mr. Marcy gave you that money?”

“The fifteenth of May.”

“This check is dated the twelfth of May. The envelope shows it was received in Westville on the thirteenth.”

“Well, what of that?”

“Only this,” said Katherine slowly, and with a chill at her heart, “that the prosecution can charge, and we cannot disprove the charge, that the real donation was already in your possession at the time you accepted what you say you believed was the donation.”

Then, with a rush, a great temptation assailed Katherine – to destroy this piece of evidence unfavourable to her father which she held in her hands. For several moments the struggle continued fiercely. But she had made a vow with herself when she had entered law that she was going to keep free from the trickery and dishonourable practices so common in her profession. She was going to be an honest lawyer, or be no lawyer at all. And so, at length, she laid the check before her father.

“Just indorse it, and we’ll send it in to the hospital,” she said.

Afterward it occurred to her that to have destroyed the check would at the best have helped but little, for the prosecution, if it so desired, could introduce witnesses to prove that the donation

had been sent. Suspicion of having destroyed or suppressed the check would then inevitably have rested upon her father.

This discovery of the check was a heavy blow, but Katherine went doggedly back to the first beginnings; and as the weeks crept slowly by she continued without remission her desperate search for a clue which, followed up, would make clear to every one that the whole affair was merely a mistake. But the only development of the summer which bore at all upon the case – and that bearing seemed to Katherine indirect – was that, since early June, the service of the water-works had steadily been deteriorating. There was frequently a shortage in the supply, and the filtering plant, the direct cause of Doctor West's disgrace, had proved so complete a failure that its use had been discontinued. The water was often murky and unpleasant to the taste. Moreover, all kinds of other faults began to develop in the plant. The city complained loudly of the quality of the water and the failure of the system. It was like one of these new-fangled toys, averred the street corners, that runs like a miracle while the paint is on it and then with a whiz and a whir goes all to thunder.

But to this mere by-product of the case Katherine gave little thought. She had to keep desperately upon the case itself. At times, feeling herself so alone, making no inch of headway, her spirits sank very low indeed. What made the case so wearing on the soul was that she was groping in the dark. She was fighting an invisible enemy, even though it was no more than a misunderstanding – an enemy whom, strive as she would, she could not clutch, with whom she could not grapple. Again and again she prayed for a foe in the open. Had there been a fight, no matter how bitter, her part would have been far, far easier – for in fight there is action and excitement and the lifting hope of victory.

It took courage to work as she did, weary week upon weary week, and discover nothing. It took courage not to slink away at the town's disapprobation. At times, in the bitterness of her heart, she wished she were out of it all, and could just rest, and be friends with every one. In such moods it would creep coldly in upon her that there could be but one solution to the case – that after all her father must be guilty. But when she would go home and look into his thoughtful, unworldly old face, that solution would instantly become impossible; and she would cast out doubt and despair and renew her determination.

The weeks dragged heavily on – hot and dusty after the first of July, and so dry that out in the country the caked earth was a fine network of zigzagging fissures, and the farmers, gazing despondently upon their shrivelling corn, watched with vain hope for a rescuing cloud to darken the clear, hard, brilliant heavens. At length the summer burned to its close; the opening day of the September term of court was close at hand. But still the case stood just as on the day Katherine had stepped so joyously from the Limited. The evidence of Sherman was unshaken. The charges of Bruce had no answer.

One afternoon – her father's case was set for two days later – as Katherine left her office, desperate, not knowing which way to turn, her nerves worn fine and thin by the long strain, she saw her father's name on the front page of the *Express*. She bought a copy. In the centre of the first page, in a "box" and set in heavy-faced type, was an editorial in Bruce's most rousing style, trying her father in advance, declaring him flagrantly guilty, and demanding for him the law's extremest penalty.

That editorial unloosed her long-collected wrath – wrath that had many a reason. In Bruce's person Katherine had from the first seen the summing up, the leader, of the bitterness against her father. All summer he had continued his sharp attacks, and the virulence of these had helped keep the town wrought up against Doctor West. Moreover, Katherine despised Bruce as a powerful, ruthless, demagogic hypocrite. And to her hostility against him in her father's behalf and to her contempt for his quack radicalism, was added the bitter implacability of the woman who feels herself scorned. The town's attitude toward her she resented. But Bruce she hated, and him she prayed with all her soul that she might humble.

She crushed the *Express*, flung it from her into the gutter, and walked home all a-tremble. Her aunt met her in the hall as she was laying off her hat. A spot burned faintly in either withered cheek of the old woman.

“Who does thee think is here?” she asked.

“Who?” Katherine repeated mechanically, her wrath too high for interest in anything else.

“Mr. Bruce. Upstairs with thy father.”

“What!” cried Katherine.

Her hat missed the hook and fell to the floor, and she went springing up the stairway. The next instant she flung open her father’s door, and walked straight up to Bruce, before whom she paused, bosom heaving, eyes on fire.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded.

His powerful figure rose, and his square-hewn face looked directly into her own.

“Interviewing your father,” he returned with his aggressive calm.

“He was asking me to confess,” explained Doctor West.

“Confess?” cried Katherine.

“Just so,” replied Bruce. “His guilt is undoubted, so he might as well confess.”

Scorn flamed at him.

“I see! You are trying to get a confession out of him, in advance of the trial, as a big feature for your terrible paper!”

She moved a pace nearer him. All the suppressed anger, all the hidden anguish, of the last three months burst up volcanically.

“Oh! oh!” she cried breathlessly. “I never dreamt till I met you that a man could be so low, so heartless, as to hound an old man as you have hounded my father – and all for the sake of a yellow newspaper sensation. But he’s a safe man for you to attack. Yes, he’s safe – old, unpopular, helpless!”

Bruce’s heavy brows lowered. He did not give back a step before her ireful figure.

“And because he’s old and unpopular I should not attack him, eh?” he demanded. “Because he’s down, I should not hit him? That’s your woman’s reasoning, is it? Well, let me tell you,” and his gray eyes flashed, and his voice had a crunching tone – “that I believe when you’ve got an enemy of society down, don’t, because you pity him, let him up to go and do the same thing again. While you’ve got him down, keep on hitting him till you’ve got him finished!”

“Like the brute that you are!” she cried. “But, like the coward you are, you first very carefully choose your ‘enemy of society.’ You were careful to choose one who could not hit back!”

“I did not choose your father. He thrust himself upon the town’s attention. And I consider neither his weakness nor his strength. I consider only the fact that your father has done the city a greater injury than any man who ever lived in Westville.”

“It’s a lie! I tell you it’s a lie!”

“It’s the truth!” he declared harshly, dominantly. “His swindling Westville by giving us a worthless filtering-plant in return for a bribe – why, that is the smallest evil he has done the town. Before that time, Westville was on the verge of making great municipal advances – on the verge of becoming a model and a leader for the small cities of the Middle West. And now all that grand development is ruined – and ruined by that man, your father!” He excitedly jerked a paper from his pocket and held it out to her. “If you want to see what he has brought us to, read that editorial in the *Clarion*!”

She fixed him with glittering eyes.

“I have read one cowardly editorial to-day in a Westville paper. That is enough.”

“Read that, I say!” he commanded.

For answer she took the *Clarion* and tossed it into the waste-basket. She glared at him, quivering all over, in her hands a convulsive itch for physical vengeance.

“If I thought that in all your fine talk about the city there was one single word of sincerity, I might respect you,” she said with slow and scathing contempt. “But your words are the words of a mere poseur – of a man who twists the truth to fit his desires – of a man who deals in the ideas that seem to him most profitable – of a man who cares not how poor, how innocent, is the body he uses as a stepping stone for his clambering greed and ambition. Oh, I know you – I have watched you – I have read you. You are a mere self-seeker! You are a demagogue! You are a liar! And, on top of that, you are a coward!”

Whatever Arnold Bruce was, he was a man with a temper. Fury was blazing behind his heavy spectacles.

“Go on! I care *that* for the words of a woman who has so little taste, so little sense, so little modesty, as to leave the sphere – ”

“You boor!” gasped Katharine.

“Perhaps I am. At least I am not afraid to speak the truth straight out even to a woman. You are all wrong. You are unwomanly. You are unsexed. Your pretensions as a lawyer are utterly preposterous, as the trial on Thursday will show you. And the condemnation of the town is not half as severe a rebuke – ”

“Stop!” gasped Katherine. A wild defiance surged up and overmastered her, her nerves broke, and her hot words tumbled out hysterically. “You think you are a God-anointed critic of humanity, but you are only a heartless, conceited cad! Just wait – I’ll show you what your judgment of me is worth! I am going to clear my father! I am going to make this Westville that condemns me kneel at my feet! and as for you – you can think what you please! But don’t you ever dare to speak to my father again – don’t you ever dare speak to me again – don’t you ever dare enter this house again! Now go! Go! I say. Go! Go! Go!”

His face had grown purple; he seemed to be choking. For a space he gazed at her. Then without answering he bowed slightly and was gone.

She glared a moment at the door. Then suddenly she collapsed upon the floor, her head and arms on the old haircloth sofa, and her whole body shook with silent sobs. Doctor West, first gazing at her a little helplessly, sat down upon the sofa, and softly stroked her hair. For a time there were no words – only her convulsive breathing, her choking sobs.

Presently he said gently:

“I’m sure you’ll do everything you said.”

“No – that’s the trouble,” she moaned. “What I said – was – was just a big bluff. I won’t do any – of those things. Your trial is two days off – and, father, I haven’t one bit of evidence – I don’t know what we’re going to do – and the jury will have to – oh, father, father, that man was right; I’m just – just a great big failure!”

Again she shook with sobs. The old man continued to sit beside her, softly stroking her thick brown hair.

CHAPTER VII

THE MASK FALLS

But presently the sobs subsided, as though shut off by main force, and Katherine rose to her feet. She wiped her eyes and looked at her father, a wan smile on her reddened, still tremulous face.

“What a hope-inspiring lawyer you have, father!”

“I would not want a truer,” said he loyally.

“We won’t have one of these cloud-bursts again, I promise you. But when you have been under a strain for months, and things are stretched tighter and tighter, and at last something makes things snap, why you just can’t help – well,” she ended, “a man would have done something else, I suppose, but it might have been just as bad.”

“Worse!” avowed her father.

“Anyhow, it’s all over. I’ll just repair some of the worst ravages of the storm, and then we’ll talk about our programme for the trial.”

As she was arranging her hair before her father’s mirror, she saw, in the glass, the old man stoop and take something from the waste-basket. Turning his back to her, he cautiously examined the object.

She left the mirror and came up behind him.

“What are you looking at, dear?”

He started, and glanced up.

“Oh – er – that editorial Mr. Bruce referred to.” He rubbed his head dazedly. “If that should happen, with me even indirectly the cause of it – why, Katherine, it really would be pretty bad!” He held out the *Clarion*. “Perhaps, after all, you had better read it.”

She took the paper. The *Clarion* had from the first opposed the city’s owning the water-works, and the editorial declared that the present situation gave the paper, and all those who had held a similar opinion, their long-awaited triumph and vindication. “This failure is only what invariably happens whenever a city tries municipal ownership,” declared the editorial. “The situation has grown so unbearably acute that the city’s only hope of good water lies in the sale of the system to some private concern, which will give us that superior service which is always afforded by private capital. Westville is upon the eve of a city election, and we most emphatically urge upon both parties that they make the chief plank of their platforms the immediate sale of our utterly discredited water-works to some private company.”

The editorial did not stir Katherine as it had appeared to stir Bruce, nor even in the milder degree it had stirred Doctor West. She was interested in the water-works only in so far as it concerned her father, and the *Clarion*’s proposal had no apparent bearing on his guilt or innocence.

She laid the *Clarion* on the table, without comment, and proceeded to discuss the coming trial. The only course she had to suggest was that they plead for a postponement on the ground that they needed more time in which to prepare their defense. If that plea were denied, then before them seemed certain conviction. On that plea, then, they decided to place all their hope.

When this matter had been talked out Doctor West took the *Clarion* from the table and again read the editorial with troubled face, while Katherine walked to and fro across the floor, her mind all on the trial.

“If the town does sell, it will be too bad!” he sighed.

“I suppose so,” said Katherine mechanically.

“It has reached me that people are saying that the system isn’t worth anything like what we paid for it.”

“Is that so?” she asked absently.

Doctor West drew himself up and his faded cheeks flushed indignantly.

“No, it is not so. I don’t know what’s wrong, but it’s the very best system of its size in the Middle West!”

She paused.

“Forgive me – I wasn’t paying any attention to what I was saying. I’m sure it is.”

She resumed her pacing.

“But if they sell out to some company,” Doctor West continued, “the company will probably get it for a third, or less, of what it is actually worth.”

“So, if some corporation has been secretly wanting to buy it,” commented Katherine, “things could not have worked out better for the corporation if they had been planned.”

She came to a sudden pause, and stood gazing at her father, her lips slowly parting.

“It could not have worked out better for the corporation if it had been planned,” she repeated.

“No,” said Doctor West.

She picked up the *Clarion*, quickly read the editorial, and laid the paper aside.

“Father!” Her voice was a low, startled cry.

“Yes?”

She moved slowly toward him, in her face a breathless look, and caught his shoulders with tense hands.

“*Perhaps it was planned!*”

“What?”

Her voice rang out more loudly:

“*Perhaps it was planned!*”

“But Katherine – what do you mean?”

“Let me think. Let me think.” She began feverishly to pace the room. “Oh, why did I not think of this before!” she cried to herself. “I thought of graft – political corruption – everything else. But it never occurred to me that there might be a plan, a subtle, deep-laid plan, to steal the water-works!”

Doctor West watched her rather dazedly as she went up and down the floor, her brows knit, her lips moving in self-communion. Her connection with the Municipal League in New York had given her an intimate knowledge of the devious means by which public service corporations sometimes gain their end. Her mind flashed over all the situation’s possibilities.

Suddenly she paused before her father, face flushed, triumph in her eyes.

“Father, *it was planned!*”

“Eh?” said he.

“Father,” she demanded excitedly, “do you know what the great public service corporations are doing now?” Her words rushed on, not waiting for an answer. “They have got hold of almost all the valuable public utilities in the great cities, and now they are turning to a fresh field – the small cities. Westville is a rich chance in a small way. It has only thirty thousand inhabitants now. But it is growing. Some day it will have fifty thousand – a hundred thousand.”

“That’s what people say.”

“If a private company could get hold of the water-works, the system would not only be richly profitable at once, but it would be worth a fortune as the city grows. Now if a company, a clever company, wanted to buy in the water-works, what would be their first move?”

“To make an offer, I suppose.”

“Never! Their first step would be to try to make the people want to sell. And how would they try to make the people want to sell?”

“Why – why – ”

“By making the water-works fail!” Her excitement was mounting; she caught his shoulders. “Fail so badly that the people would be disgusted, just as they now are, and willing to sell at any price.”

And now, father – and now, father – ” he could feel her quivering all over – “listen to me! We’re coming to the point! How would they make the water-works fail?”

He could only blink at her.

“They’d make it fail by removing from office, and so disgracing him that everything he had done would be discredited, the one incorruptible man whose care and knowledge had made it a success! Don’t you see, father? Don’t you see?”

“Bless me,” said the old man, “if I know what you’re talking about!”

“With you out of the way, whom they knew they could not corrupt, they could buy under officials to attend to the details of making the water bad and the plant itself a failure – just exactly what has been done. You are not the real victim. You are just an obstruction – something that they had to get out of the way. The real victim is Westville! It’s a plan to rob the city!”

His gray eyes were catching the light that blazed from hers.

“I begin to see,” he said. “It hardly seems possible people would do such things. But perhaps you’re right. What are you going to do?”

“Fight!”

“Fight?” He looked admiringly at her glowing figure. “But if there is a strong company behind all this, for you to fight it alone – it will be an awful big fight!”

“I don’t care how big the fight is!” she cried exultantly. “What has almost broken my heart till now is that there has been no one to fight!”

A shadow fell on the old man’s face.

“But after all, Katherine, it is all only a guess.”

“Of course it is only a guess!” she cried. “But I have tested every other possible solution. This is the only one left, and it fits every known circumstance of the case. It is only a guess – but I’ll stake my life on its being the right guess!” Her voice rose. “Oh, father, we’re on the right track at last! We’re going to clear you! Don’t you ever doubt that. We’re going to clear you!”

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