

He was overwrought in revolt against justice. When he turned up the lights in his study his face showed ghastly pale. He helped himself to whisky and soda, then unable to keep still, walked to and fro restlessly. Yet, let come what may, he had had his day—and to-night he was drinking the dregs of humiliation! He had staked all—and lost! He was well groomed, well fed, civilised society had given him room. For the rest——? He was as lonely as the little office boy who, years ago, had no place in a crowded world. Frank had been to him absolutely dead—his thought only had lived. It was the conception and not the man who had previously existed. Now the man had become reality to be reckoned with—a trust had been submitted to him which he had betrayed.

He held on to the thought that he had never meant to rob the man—only to use a dead man's shoes. And not to win any woman's trust—not that! but to satisfy his own lust of fame. He crossed to his desk, unlocked a drawer, and brought out Frank's MS.

"Yes," he said, "I did covet it. I do now!"

He laid his head down on his arm, and his tired thought went out to Caroline, innocent of his crime, unapprehensive of his disgrace, unacquainted with the unreasoning greed that had prompted him to theft. Granted she might listen to his plea, could she condone the wrong he had done to the brother for whom it had been possible to give her life? (He did not say easy: sacrifice was incomprehensible to him.) Minutes of tormenting remorse, tragic hopelessness passed, then out of the pain mist one wish formed, that to one soul on earth he had been elect, to whom he might take his sin, who would absolve him and set him free.

Caroline?

God defend him when Caroline's honesty sat in judgment on his dishonesty!

He did not understand that purity has perfect pardon. So he sat alone with a shadow that deepened and broadened, and

set his teeth in a defiance that asked no favour.

Caroline, by her fire, pondered, first in anger, then in dismay, her husband's attitude towards her. She sought for every apology. Nothing could excuse his coldness. Oh! he must know—he must—what to-night had meant for her! The infinite relief, the infinite gladness! Under his cynicism and silence she had attributed sympathy and understanding—she was all at sea! Was her estimate of her husband wrong? Was he after all affected by mere outward seeming? Did he resent the re-appearance of her brother with his painful associations? Had success sullied that honest simplicity which had made it possible for him to ask the ex-convict's sister for wife?

She rose in a sudden agitation of shame. Was this the barrier that had always been between? Had pity for her forlornness, her helplessness, prompted him to kindness?

The thought stung her beyond endurance! Rather the desertion, the loneliness, the death in life that had been hers, than this! Then suddenly all her pride gave way, every consideration fell before the strength of her passion.

"Oh! I want him! I want *him!*" she cried, "not any other! Not joy, not anything at all, save him!"

Big tears fell; her breast heaved with convulsive sobbing. To-night of all nights when her brother had been given her again, when all her past hope had become reality, when nothing seemed left to ask, all her strong young womanhood awoke, a tide of emotion which she could not stem broke up her reserve. She fell upon her knees, her face hidden in her hands.

"Drive me," she said, challenging the unknown God, "drive me through flame and flood, ask any price—I will pay! Oh, I *will* pay, so only he loves me! I am alone and weak; he is more alone and weaker than I! I would suffer shame—I will not quail—try me. If there is any help that he may need to set him free—is there any other who could give him more than I? I do not ask his love for my case—I ask *him*, himself.