

'And he spoke English, too,' Mrs. Warren added in an injured tone. 'I suppose he heard me say that perhaps he was drunk; but how could I know? I thought he was of course one of the—er—peones, don't you call them?'

'He is probably an American,' Miss Sylvester said, 'and he looks very ill; so I am going after him to apologize, and—and see if I cannot do something for him.'

'Oh, Margaret!' Mrs. Warren remonstrated, 'I—I really don't think I would.'

Margaret gave her a significant glance. 'I daresay you wouldn't,' she replied, 'so you and Mr. Harkeson-Smythe can get something to drink while I go.'

She moved away, her graceful head lifted, her clear eyes very bright, and followed the path of the man who had stumbled across the plaza to the shade of the portales. Perhaps he glanced back, as the darkness cleared away from his vision, and saw her coming; and perhaps the sight lent him fresh strength. At all events, when she reached the arcade he was gone. She looked around, and meeting the eyes of a Mexican woman seated by a pile of beans, her lips formed a stammering but sufficiently direct inquiry.

'The senor—Americano? Where has he gone?'

'A su casa, senorita,' the woman replied, divining the question, though she did not understand the words.

'Ah, to his house,' Miss Sylvester quickly translated. 'And where—endonde esta la casa?'

The woman lifted her hand and pointed to a house distant a few paces down a street opening from the plaza. The door was closed. It had shut quickly behind a shaking, flying form as Margaret Sylvester crossed the plaza to the portales. Perhaps she divined this, but she went on, down the sunlit street to the one-storey dwelling, and knocked at the door.

There was no answer. Again she knocked, and again there was no answer; but it seemed to her that she heard something like the panting of a trapped animal within. But the latch yielded to her touch, the door opened under her hand, and she found herself entering a room which, after the blinding glare of sunlight outside, seemed of an almost cave-like gloom and coolness. Drawing in her breath sharply, she looked around the meagre, poverty-stricken interior, saw the flat, hard bed, the plain pine table with its few books and writing materials, and the chair in which the figure of the man she had followed sat, or rather lay, with head thrown back, in an attitude of spent exhaustion. She moved across the floor and stood, her hand on her heart, immediately before him. He opened his eyes—eyes wonderfully large and bright in the white, sunken face—and looked up at her. Then she advanced a step.

'John!' she cried with a thrilling and exultant note in her voice. 'John Graham, it is you! You are—alive! John'—she made another step nearer—'why have you left the world—why have you let me think for two years that you were dead?'

He could not resist the imperative challenge of her tone. It forced him to rise to his feet and meet her gaze fully. But he did not offer to touch her hand; and they stood looking at each other as spirit and flesh might look across the gulf which divided them.

'Margaret,' he said, 'you must know why I have allowed the world to believe that I am dead. It seemed—the shortest way. And it was only anticipating the truth. You see that I shall soon be dead.'

'But I see that you are not dead yet,' she replied, with the exultant note still in her voice. 'You are alive, and the first thing I have to tell you is that I never for one instant believed that you had died in the manner it was said you had.'

'You—didn't believe it?'

'No; I never believed that John Graham—the John Graham whom I—knew, had been coward enough to kill himself to escape anything.'

A vivid light leaped into the eyes of the John Graham whom she—knew. And then died out as quickly.

'Yet,' he reminded her, 'men have often killed themselves to escape disgrace.'

'Yes,' she returned, 'men capable of doing disgraceful things have often proved incapable of facing the consequences of their acts. But I am sure that if you had ever done a disgraceful thing you would not have escaped the consequences by the coward's road of suicide.'

'Margaret!'—the man grasped tightly the edge of the table by which he stood—'you say, if I had done a disgraceful thing. Surely you know—'

Her brilliant glance met and held his.

'Shall I repeat my words?' she asked. 'The whole matter is a mystery to me—no deeper mystery now, when I find you hiding here, than when you disappeared two years ago; but through all the mystery I have held fast to my belief that you would never shirk the consequences of any act of yours, and therefore it has been to me unthinkable that to escape disgrace you had either absconded or committed suicide.'

He put his hand to his eyes for a moment, as if overcome by the greatness of her faith—or, perhaps, by the weight of his own unworthiness. Then, lowering it, he looked at her again with a gaze as direct as it was clear and sad.

'But now,' he urged, 'now you must believe it, when you find me here—hiding, as you have said.'

She threw back her head, smiling at him superbly. 'Now that I see you again, I believe it less than ever!' she declared. 'And by my faith in you, a faith that has never faltered, I demand that you tell me why you have done this thing.'

He made a gesture of protest, while he sank back, as if overcome by weakness, into the chair from which he had risen. His head dropped on his breast, his eyelids fell.

'Surely it is plain,' he said. 'Would a man give up his life, his ambitions, his friends—above all, would he give up the privilege of sometimes at least seeing you—to go away secretly to a country where certain offences are not extraditable, unless he had been guilty of one of those offences?'

'It would hardly seem so,' she admitted; 'yet what I have said holds good. Tell me why you have done this?'

'Have you not heard?'

'I have heard many things,' she answered. 'I know it is said that you used money which did not belong to you, and that when you were confronted with exposure you gave up your fortune to replace what you had taken, and then—disappeared.'

He nodded gravely. 'That statement seems to cover the case,' he told her, 'and therefore what can you say to me, except good-bye?'

Her eyes suddenly blazed on him.

'I can say just this,' she replied, 'that I refuse to believe one word of that statement unless you tell me on your honor—on your honor, John Graham!—that you truly did those things.'

'On my honor!' he repeated as if to himself. 'She asks me to tell her—on my honor!'

'Yes,' the inflexible voice said. 'I demand it—on your honor!'

'Oh, but this is absurd,' he remonstrated. 'A man who has fallen into the class in which I am, is not supposed to have any honor left.'

Then Margaret Sylvester laughed, and as the clear music rang out, the man started and let his glance pass swiftly around the walls of the room, which since he first entered it had heard many sighs, but never before such a laugh.

'How you betray yourself!' she cried. 'And how foolish—oh, John Graham; how foolish you are, to think you can deceive me! Haven't I known you since we were children; and haven't I always known that honor was to you an idol, a fetish, to which you were willing to sacrifice yourself and everybody else? Do you think I am a fool to believe that you could change sufficiently even to consider the doing of a dishonorable act? I might believe it possible of myself, or of anybody else that I ever knew, but never, never of you.'

John Graham regarded the speaker with a glance, in which something like a flicker of amusement, brought from the depths of past memories, shone. 'Yes,' he said, 'I remember. You have prophesied it—often.'

'But although I prophesied that you would some day sacrifice yourself,' Margaret continued, 'I did not expect you to sacrifice me.'

He looked at her now with mingled amazement and apprehension. 'How have I sacrificed you?' he asked.

Her proud, bright gaze met his unwaveringly. 'Do you think,' she said, 'although you never acknowledged it in words, that I didn't know that you loved me? And did it never occur to you that I might—love you?'

'Margaret!' he cried in a voice in which rapture and agony blent. 'And then in a lower tone: 'My God, why have I not died?'

The passionate bitterness of the last words made the girl fling herself on her knees beside him.

'You have not died,' she said, seizing his thin, cold hand in the warm, strong clasp of hers, 'because God meant to give me the happiness of seeing you again, and ending the anguish of doubt and anxiety about your fate—which I have endured. Oh, how could you—her voice rose in keen reproach—'how could you have been so forgetful of me, so careless of my sufferings? For you surely knew what I felt for you, and what I must suffer!'

'No,' he answered quickly. 'If I had known, if I had for an instant dreamed of it, I could never have done what I did. There was a time when I fancied that you might care for me; but then Laidlaw came, with his boundless assurance and his great wealth, and seemed to—absorb your attention.'

'And you never guessed that he absorbed my attention because I wanted to give a lesson to another man who angered me by his stupidity?' she asked in a tone which seemed still scornful of that stupidity. 'It was the woman's old, foolish device; but if it deceived you, it did not mislead him—at least not for long. Before you went away I had refused him.'

Graham stared at her incredulously. 'You refused him before I went away!' he repeated. 'Are you sure of that?'

'I am sure,' she replied. 'I not only refused him, but I told him the truth—told him that I had never cared for anyone but you.'

The veins stood out like whipcord on the man's forehead now as he leaned toward her. 'You told him that?' he queried again hoarsely.

'Yes,' she answered, 'for I felt that I owed him