

'And where did you meet before that? At another ball, she told me. And before that?' He paused. Hesketh, imperturbable, again made no sign. At another ball.

Hesketh's eyes came back to him from the bronze figure. 'Forgive me for interrupting; but you evidently like to be accurate. It was at a theatre supper given by the Crawleys.'

Balamaine waved his hand in acknowledgment of the correction. 'What I want to point out is the fact that never once have you and she met when either was at a disadvantage. You have both been on your very best behaviour, well dressed, pleased with your company, surrounded by all the glamor of wealth and beauty. What can you know of my daughter? She, apparently, has the most exalted notions of your worth.'

He glanced across to Hesketh. His last words had brought a glow to the young man's eyes; but still he made no comment.

'Balls, theatre suppers, dinners, concerts'—each word touched upon gained a firmer note of scorn—all very well for women, perhaps, but as a man's chief object in life—bah!

He pushed away the bronze, then grasped it again, using it as an object lesson with which to point his words. 'I'll give my girl to no wastrel of life! No man shall have her who can't do an honest day's work, whatever it may be, mental or physical! Amusements are all very well; but as the chief aim of existence they lead to nothing but disaster. There are too many of your kind going, Mr. Hesketh.'

He thrust between himself and his listener the bronze figure of the man with the pickaxe. The light fell clearly on the seamed face and hard, sinewy hands.

Hesketh made no movement. He sat with folded arms, his eyes alternately on the bronze figure that personified labor, and on its living exponent opposite. There was a dominating magnetism about Balamaine that attracted him. He had never met a man in the least like him, and some undeveloped force in his own nature responded to that which Balamaine exemplified. The latter had risen now and was pacing the floor in slow, ponderous strides which made no sound on the carpet.

A marble presentation clock on the mantel shelf ticked off the moments, and from the street outside came the dull roar of traffic. All his life the ironmaster had worked in turmoil. When he spoke again, his voice held another note. The jarring strife of it had died out. With an instinctive desire to respect his emotion, Hesketh fixed his eyes on the bronze figure of Labor.

'After seven days' acquaintance, Mr. Hesketh, you come easily enough to ask me for my only child. I have watched over her and guarded her for nineteen years. We have hardly ever been separated. Her birth cost me my wife, and at first I refused to see the child. I went away from it all with a burning sense of resentment to mourn my loss sullenly alone. And one night—his voice grew hoarse—'across the awful loneliness I seemed to hear the baby, hers and mine, crying to me—and I came back. We have been all in all to each other for nineteen years, until,' his strongly marked features contracted and hardened again—'until you came—you who haven't a notion of what life really means, who have just skated airily over the surface, blind to all that lies beneath, who have never done a day's work in your life, or taken an interest in those who work. I hoped she had enough of her father in her to care for a man with some ideas beyond sport and entertainments.' He pulled up short in front of Hesketh and eyed him up and down with grudging glance. 'And the pity of it is that you're strong, well built, manly, with the looks that women set store by. And you're nothing but a well-bred loafer, after all!'

Hesketh had reached the end of his tether. He sprang up, passionately angry, his control flying to the winds. 'You have had your say, in all conscience, and for Nan's sake I've borne it. Now it is my turn! I know you to be a hard man—it's the outcome, I suppose, of your life—but I looked for some kind of tolerance at least from one who has an army of men under him. But no, you are narrow, like many of your kind. You've risen to power by trampling on other people! you have set up Labor as a god, and those who won't fall down and worship with you, you have no call for. You have the great incentive, need, to spurn you on. There's nothing like it for nerving a man—he's got to work, or he's got to go under. If you'd been a rich man's son, you might have been different, probably much pleasanter to deal with. You grind your people, you interfere with the existence of those under you. You want to spoil the happiness of the daughter you profess to love. She takes a secondary place. This, with a passionate forefinger he indicated the bronze figure, 'this is your fetish, not Nan!'

Taken out of himself, Hesketh walked over to the hearth. He had momentarily forgotten his errand. Now the face of the girl he loved rose before him and checked his words—her eyes, the soft curve of the lips his own had touched last night. He had failed her! Balamaine was not the man to forgive such plain speaking. He ought to have tried diplomatic means. He stood erect and went over to the chair that held his hat and stick. His face looked suddenly older, more determined. He hated the inflexible adversary with whom he had just measured steel. He would have Nan in spite of him!

Balamaine, from his big leather revolving chair, watched him. Suddenly he leaned nearer, his eyes gleam-

ing under shaggy brows. 'That's the plainest speaking I've heard for many a day,' he remarked, and there was that in his deep voice which made Hesketh pause. 'You've a temper of your own, young man, that's certain. Now you've worked it off, you're probably ready to apologise.'

Hesketh gave a short laugh. 'Apologise? Why should I? There's not a word of it I want to take back. In spite of your whole hearted denunciation, you don't know me yet.'

He turned on his heel again. At that moment, before Marshall Balamaine's eyes rose Nan's face, pleading, tremulous, happy. He, too, in the joy of fight had forgotten Nan. He brought his great fist on the table with an energy that made the contents rattle. Then suddenly it shot out toward Hesketh.

'Shake!' he said abruptly. 'I like your spirit, young man, and your worst enemy couldn't accuse you of inconsistency. If you'd taken all I said lying down, just to curry favor on account of my little girl, I shouldn't have wanted to exchange another word with you. So shake and sit down! We must have the thing right out here and now.'

And after a momentary pause Hesketh shook hands.

Balamaine drew a long breath. Nan, after all, occupied a wide territory in his heart, and Nan would have been hard to face if Hesketh there and then had walked out of the office. Instead, he sat down again. In the eyes of both the fire of argument had died out; yet each looked determined.

Balamaine had always wished for a son. His glance rested on the younger man, and then ruminatively shook his head.

'The pity of it!' he said half aloud. 'You'll have to prove your mettle for work before you marry my little girl. You've got your good points, I allow; but no wastrel of time shall have Nan!'

Hesketh squared his shoulders and his mouth twitched. 'You seem mightily determined that I am a wastrel. Why, I wonder? Because I am careful in matter of dress? So are you, in spite of your sledge hammer theories on labor. Because I go to an occasional ball, or concert, or theatre, and because in my travels I have brought down my share of big game?' Then, as Balamaine made no reply, he went on with apparent irrelevance, 'Do you recollect that some-time ago Verrameed's Bank stopped payment? It was a one-man show, if you remember, and the high rate of interest paid had attracted a number of small depositors—those of us with more to lose are wavier.'

Balamaine nodded. His attention was arrested by something in the speaker's bearing. Hesketh's face had altered, he looked suddenly alert, capable, a man with a purpose.

'After the announcement and the panic that ensued, the depositors were told that they would be paid in full.'

He paused. Balamaine nodded again, and filled up the pause.

'Many of my workmen had money in Verrameed's. Interest was too high. Some misguided fool came to the rescue, they say, and took over the whole of the liabilities. They were discharged, sure enough, to the tune of considerably over a million, and, what's more, the depositors had the fatuous folly to put their money back into Verrameed's, instead of thanking their stars for a lucky-escape from ruin.'

Hesketh shrugged his shoulders. 'After all, the misguided fool stood to lose very little. He knew Verrameed. It was all a chapter of accidents—a run on the bank, money tied up, no cheating of any kind. The misguided fool happened to hear some pathetic tales of the depositors and went into affairs with Verrameed, and knew what he was about—and, anyhow, it was worth while risking something to send those poor creatures to bed with easy minds. The fool stood to lose very little. He had been looking about him for an opportunity, and he got it—at Verrameed's. Verrameed's is going stronger than ever, and though the interest is not so high, there will be greater security. Verrameed's has a good, hard-working staff, too. It was just that misguided fool's opportunity, and he hung on to it for all he was worth.'

Hesketh ceased speaking and reached over for his hat and stick again. Then as he turned to go, he met the older man's glance.

'It was misguided,' Balamaine's voice was slower than usual; 'but it was a fine thing to do. Quixotic, I grant you, but fine.'

Hesketh shrugged his shoulders again. 'It was nothing of the kind. The fool wanted to do something practical; he was a bit tired of mooning around without a definite object in life. He ran no risks; he just found himself and his own possibilities—at Verrameed's. Bank hours, fortunately, are not long; though at Verrameed's, as in other places, we occasionally work overtime.'

He glanced at the clock and then at Balamaine, who stood motionless beside the table, the little bronze figure overturned near at hand.

'Nan has been waiting a long time,' Hesketh said in a moment. 'I promised to go to her when I had seen you, Mr. Balamaine. May I tell her that I—that you—' In his eyes was an anxiety that had not been there on his entrance.

Balamaine strode forward and held out his hand. This time it was the close grip of men standing on an even plane. 'Tell her,' he began, and his deep voice was a degree hoarse—'tell her—' he broke off abruptly and gave a short laugh—'why tell her just what every woman likes best to hear from the man she loves!'—Exchange.