THOMAS DIXON

COMRADES: A STORY OF SOCIAL ADVENTURE IN CALIFORNIA

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Dixon T.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
THE WOMAN IN RED

"Fools and fanatics!"

Colonel Worth crumpled the morning paper with a gesture of rage and walked to the window.

Elena followed softly and laid her hand on his arm.

"What is it, Guardie? I thought you were supremely happy this morning over the news that Dewey has smashed the Spanish fleet?"

"And so I am, little girl," was the gentle reply, "or was until my eye fell on this call of the Socialists for a meeting to-night to denounce the war – denounce the men who are dying for the flag. Read their summons."

He opened the crumpled sheet and pointed to its head lines:

"Down with the Stars and Stripes – up with the Red Flag of Revolution – the symbol of universal human brotherhood! Come and bring your friends. A big surprise for all!" The Colonel's jaws snapped suddenly.

"I'd like to give them the surprise they need to-night."

"What?" Elena asked.

"A serenade."

"A serenade?"

"Yes, with Mauser rifles and Gatling guns. I'd mow them down as I would a herd of wild beasts loose in the streets of San Francisco."

"Merely for a difference of opinion, Governor?" lazily broke in a voice from the depths of a heavy armchair.

"If you want to put it so, Norman, yes. Opinions, my boy, are the essence of life – they may lead to heaven or hell. Opinions make cowards or heroes, patriots or traitors, criminals or saints."

"But you believe in free speech?" persisted the boy.

"Yes. And that's more than any Socialist can say. I don't deny their right to speak their message. What I can't understand is how the people who have been hounded from the tyrant-ridden countries of the old world and found shelter and protection beneath our flag should turn thus to curse the hand that shields them."

"But if they propose to give you a better flag, Governor?" drawled the lazy voice. "Why not consider?"

"Look, Elena! Did the sun ever shine on anything more beautiful? See it fluttering from a thousand house-tops – the proud emblem of human freedom and human progress! Dewey has lifted it this morning on the foulest slave-pen of the Orient – the flag that has never met defeat. The one big faith in me is the belief that Almighty God inspired our fathers to build this Republic – the noblest dream yet conceived by the mind of man. Dewey has sunk a tyrant fleet and conquered an empire of slaves without the loss of a single man. The God of our fathers was with him. We have a message for the swarming millions of the East – "

"Pardon the interruption, Governor, but I must hold the mirror up to nature just a moment – your portrait sketched by the poet-laureate of the English-speaking world. He speaks of the American:

"Enslaved, illogical, elate.
He greets the embarrassed gods, nor fears
To shake the iron hand of Fate
Or match with Destiny for beers.

"Lo! imperturbable he rules,
Unkempt, disreputable, vast —
And in the teeth of all the schools
I – I shall save him at the last!"

The Colonel smiled.

"How do you like the picture?"

"Not bad for an Englishman, Norman. You know we licked England twice – "

"And we kin do it again, b' gosh, can't we?" blustered the younger man with mock heroics.

"You can bet we can, my son!" continued the Colonel, quietly. "The roar of Dewey's guns are echoing round the world this morning. The lesson will not be lost. You will observe that even your English poet foresees at last our salvation.

"'And in the teeth of all the schools
I – I shall save him at the last!'"

"Even in spite of the Socialists?" queried the boy, with a grin.

"In spite of every foe – even those within our own household. War is the searchlight of history, the great revealer of national life, of hidden strength and unexpected weakness. I saw it in the Civil conflict – I've seen it in this little struggle – "

"Then you do acknowledge it's not the greatest struggle in history – that's something to be thankful for in these days of patriotism," exclaimed Norman, rising and stretching himself before the open fire while he winked mischievously at Elena.

"It's big enough, my boy, to show us the truth about our nation. Our old problems are no longer real. The Union our fathers dreamed has come at last. We are one people – one out of many – and we can whip Spain before breakfast – "

"With one hand tied behind our back!" laughed the boy.

"Yes, and blindfolded. It will be easy. But the next serious job will be to bury a half million deluded fools in this country who call themselves Socialists."

The Colonel paused and a look of foreboding clouded his face as he gazed from the window of his house on Nob Hill over the city of San Francisco, which he loved with a devotion second only to his passionate enthusiasm for the Union.

Elena sat watching him in silent sympathy. He was the one perfect man of her life dreams, the biggest, strongest, tenderest soul she had ever known. Since the day she crept into his arms a lonely little orphan ten years old she had worshipped him as father, mother, guardian, lover, friend – all in one. She had accepted Norman's love and promised to be his wife more to please his father than from any overwhelming passion for the handsome, lazy young athlete. It had come about as a matter of course because Colonel Worth wished it.

The Colonel turned from the window, and his eyes rested on Elena's upturned face.

"It will be bloody work – but we've got to do it – "

Elena sprang to her feet with a start and a laugh.

"Do what, Guardie? I forgot what you were talking about."

"Then don't worry your pretty head about it, dear. It's a job we men will look after in due time."

He stooped and kissed her forehead. "By-by until to-night – I'll drop down to the club and hear the latest from the front."

With the firm, swinging stride of a man who lives in the open the Colonel passed through the door of the library.

"Norman, I can't realize that you two are father and son – he looks more like your brother."

"At least my older brother – "

"Yes, of course, but you would never take him for a man of forty-eight. I like the touch of gray in his hair. It means dignity, strength, experience. I've always hated sap-headed youngsters."

"Say, Elena, for heaven's sake, who are you in love with anyhow – with me or the Governor?"

A smile flickered around the corners of the girl's eyes and mouth before she slowly answered:

"I sometimes think I really love you both, Norman – but there are times when I have doubts about you."

"Thanks. I suppose I must be duly grateful for small favours, or else resign myself to call you 'Mother.'"

"Would such a fate be intolerable?"

Elena drew her magnificent figure to its full height and looked into the young athlete's face with laughing audacity.

"By George, Elena, if I'm honest with you, I'd have to say no. You are tall, stately, dignified, beautiful from the crown of your black hair to the tip of your dainty toe – the most stunning-looking woman I ever saw. I never think of you as a girl just out of school. You always remind me of a glorious royal figure in some old romance of the Middle Ages – "

"Now I'm sure I love you, Norman – for the moment at least."

"Then promise to go with me on a lark to-night," he suddenly cried.

"A lark?"

Elena's gray-blue eyes danced beneath their black lashes.

"Yes, a real lark, daring, adventurous, dangerous, audacious."

"What is it – what is it? Tell me quick."

The girl seized Norman's arm with eager, childish glee.

"Let's go to that Socialist meeting and beard the lion in his den."

Elena drew back.

"No. Guardie will be furious!"

"Ah, who's afraid? Guardie be hanged!"

"Go by yourself."

"No, you've got to go with me."

"I won't do it. You just want to worry your father and then hide behind my skirts."

"You can see yourself that's the easiest way to manage it. If he has a fit, I can just say that your curiosity was excited and I had to go with you."

"But it's not excited."

"For the purposes of the lark I tell you that it is excited. There's too much patriotism in the air. It's giving me nervous prostration. I want something to brace me up. I think those fellows can give me some good points to tease the Governor with."

"Tease the Governor! You flatter yourself, Norman. He doesn't pay any more attention to your talk than he would to the bark of a six weeks' old puppy."

"That's what riles me. The Governor's so cocksure of himself. I don't know how to answer him, but I know he's wrong. The fury with which he hates the Socialists rouses my curiosity. I've always found that the good things in life are forbidden. All respectable people are positively forbidden to attend a Socialist – traitors' – meeting. For that reason let's go."

"No."

"Ah, come on. Don't be a chump. Be a sport!"

"I'd like the lark, but I won't hurt Guardie's feelings; so that's the end of it."

"Going to be a surprise, they say."

"What kind of a surprise?"

"Going to spring a big sensation."

Elena's eyes began to dance again.

"The woman called the Scarlet Nun is going to speak, and Herman Wolf, the famous 'blond beast' of Socialism, will preside. They are mates – affinities."

"Married?"

"God knows. A hundred weird stories about them circulate in the under-world."

"I won't go! Don't you say another word!" Elena snapped.

Norman was silent.

"Are you sure it would be perfectly safe, Norman?" the girl softly asked.

"Perfectly. I know every inch of that quarter of the city – went there a hundred times the year I was a reporter."

"I won't go!"

"It's the wickedest street in town. They say it's the worst block in America."

"I don't want to see it." Elena laughed.

"And the hall is a famous red-light dancing dive in the heart of Hell's Half Acre."

"Hush! Hush! I tell you I won't —*I won't* go! But – but if I *do*– you promise to hold my hand every minute, Norman?"

"And keep my arm around your waist, if you like."

Elena's cheeks flushed and her voice quivered with excitement as she paused in the doorway.

"I'll be ready in twenty minutes after dinner."

"Bully for my chum! I'll tell the Governor we've gone for a stroll."

As the shadows slowly fell over the city, Norman led Elena down the marble steps of his father's palatial home and paused for a moment on the edge of the hill on which were perched the seats of the mighty. Elena fumbled with a new glove.

"Are you ready to descend with me to the depths, my princess in disguise?" he gaily asked.

"Did you ever know me to flunk when I gave my word?"

"No, you're a brick, Elena."

Norman seized her arm and strode down the steep hillside with sure, firm step, the girl accompanying his every movement with responsive joy.

"You're awfully wicked to get me into a scrape of this kind, Norman," she cried, with bantering laughter. "You know I was dying to go slumming, and Guardie wouldn't let me. It's awfully mean of you to take advantage of me like this."

He stopped suddenly and looked gravely into her flushed face.

"Let's go back, then."

"No! I won't."

Norman broke into a laugh. "Then away with vain regrets! And remember the fate of Lot's wife."

Elena pressed his hand close to her side and whispered:

"You are with me. The big handsome captain of last year's football team. Very young and very vain and very foolish and very lazy – but I do think you'd stand by me in a scrap, Norman. Wouldn't you?"

"Well, I rather think!" was the deep answer, half whispered, as they suddenly turned a corner and plunged into the red-light district. His strong hand gripped her wrist with unusual tenderness.

"So who's afraid?" she cried, looking up into his face just as a drunken blear-eyed woman staggered through an open door and lurched against her.

A low scream of terror came from Elena as she sprang back, and the woman's head struck the pavement with a dull whack. Norman bent over her and started to lift the heavy figure, when her fist suddenly shot into his face.

"Go ter hell – I can take care o' myself!"

"Evidently," he laughed.

Elena's hand suddenly gripped his.

"Let's go back, Norman."

"Nonsense – who's afraid?"

"I am. I don't mind saying it. This is more than I bargained for."

The woman scrambled to her feet and limped back into the doorway.

Elena shivered. "I didn't know such women lived on this earth."

"To say nothing of living but a stone's throw from your own door," he continued.

"Let's go back," she pleaded.

"No. A thing like this is merely one more reason why we should keep on. This only shows that the world we live in isn't quite perfect, as the Governor seems to think. These Socialists may be right after all. Now that we've started let's hear their side of it. Come on! Don't be a quitter!"

Norman seized her arm and hurried through the swiftly moving throng of the under-world – gambling touts, thieves, cut-throats, pick-pockets, opium fiends, drunkards, thugs, carousing miners, and sailors – but above all, everywhere, omnipresent, the abandoned woman – painted, bedizened, lurching through the streets, hanging in doorways, clinging to men on the sidewalks, beckoning from windows, singing vulgar songs on crude platforms among throngs of half-drunken men, whirling past doors and windows in dance-halls, their cracked voices shrill and rasping above the din of cheap music.

Elena stopped suddenly and clung heavily to Norman's arm.

"Please, Norman, let's go back. I can't endure this."

"And you're my chum that never flunked when she gave her word?" he asked with scorn. "We are only a few feet from the hall now."

"Where is it?"

"Right there in the middle of the block where you see that sign with the blazing red torch."

"Come on, then," Elena said, with a shudder.

They walked quickly through the long, dimly lighted passage to the entrance of the hall. It was densely packed with a crowd of five hundred. Elena closed her eyes and allowed Norman to lead her through the mob that blocked the space inside the door. At the entrance to the centre aisle he encountered an usher who stared with bulging eyes at his towering figure. Norman leaned close and whispered:

"My boy, can you possibly get us two seats?"

"Can I git de captain er de football team two seats? Well, des watch me!"

The boy darted up the aisle, dived under the platform, drew out two folding-chairs, placed them in the aisle on the front row, darted back, and bowed with grave courtesy.

"Dis way, sir!"

Norman followed with Elena clinging timidly and blindly to his arm. In a moment they were seated. He offered the boy a dollar.

The youngster bowed again.

"De honour is all mine, sir. But you can give it to the Cause when they pass the box."

Norman turned to Elena. "Well, doesn't that jar you? A sixteen-year-old boy declines a tip, and says give it to the Cause!"

The boy darted up the steps of the platform and whispered to the chairman:

"Git on to his curves! Dat's de captain o' de football – de bloke dat's worth millions, an' don't give a doggone!"

A woman dressed in deep red who sat beside the chairman leaned close and asked with quiet intensity:

"You mean young Worth, the millionaire of Nob Hill?"

"Bet yer life! Dat's him!"

The woman in red whispered to the chairman, who nodded, while his keen gray eyes flashed a ray of light from his heavy brows as he turned toward Norman.

The woman wheeled suddenly in her chair, and with her back to the audience bent over a girl who was evidently hiding behind her.

"Outdo yourself to-night, Barbara. Young Norman Worth, the son of our multi-millionaire nabob, is sitting in the aisle just in front of you. Win him for the Cause and I'll give you the half of our kingdom."

"How can I know him?" the girl asked excitedly.

"He's not ten feet from the platform in the centre aisle – front row – clean shaven – a young giant of twenty-three – the handsomest man in the house. Put your soul *and* your body in every word you utter, every breath you breathe – and *win* him!"

"I'll try," was the low reply.

CHAPTER II
A NEW JOAN OF ARC

The woman in scarlet rose, lifted her hand, and the crowd sprang to their feet to the music of the most stirring song of revolution ever written.

Norman and Elena were both swept from their seats in spite of themselves. Elena's eyes flashed with excitement.

"What on earth is that they are singing, Norman?" she whispered.

"The Marseillaise hymn."

"Isn't it thrilling?" she gasped.

"It makes your heart leap, doesn't it?"

"And, heavens, how they sing it!" she exclaimed.

Norman turned and looked over the crowd of eager faces – every man and woman singing with the passionate enthusiasm of religious fanatics – an enthusiasm electric, contagious, overwhelming. In spite of himself he felt his heart beat with quickened sympathy.

He was amazed at the character of the audience. He had expected to see a throng of low-browed brutes. The first shock he received was the feeling that this crowd was distinctly an intellectual one. They might be fanatics. They certainly were not fools. The stamp of personality was clean cut on almost every face. They were fighters. They meant business and they didn't care who knew it. Some of them wore dirty clothes, but their faces were stamped with the power of free, rebellious thought – a power that always commands respect in spite of shabby clothes. He looked in vain for a single joyous face. Not a smile. Deep, dark eyes, shining with the light of purpose, mouths firm, headstrong, merciless, and bitter, but nowhere the glimmer of a ray of sunlight! He felt with a sense of awe the uncanny presence of Tragedy.

And to his amazement he noticed a lot of men he knew in the crowd – three or four authors, a newspaper reporter evidently off duty, two college professors, a clergyman, three artists, a priest, and a street preacher.

The hymn died away into a low sigh, like the sob of the wind after a storm. The crowd sank to their seats so quietly with the dying of the music that Norman and Elena were standing alone for an instant. They awoke from the spell, and dropped into their seats with evident embarrassment.

A boy of sixteen stepped briskly to the front in answer to a nod from the chairman, and recited a Socialist poem. After the first stanza, which was crude and stilted, Norman's eye rested on the heavy figure of the chairman. He was surprised at the power of his rugged face. Through its brute strength flashed the keenest sense of alert intelligence – an intelligence which seemed to lurk behind the big, shaggy eyebrows as if about to spring on its victim. His heavy-set face was covered with a thick, reddish blond beard and his short hair stood up straight on his head, like the bristles of a wild boar. Of medium height and heavy build, with arms and legs of extraordinary muscle and big, coarse short fingers evidently gnarled and knotted, by the coarsest labor in youth, he looked like a blacksmith who had taken a college course by the light of his forge at night. There was something about the way he sat crouching low in his seat, watching with his keen gray eyes everything that passed, that bespoke the man of reserve power – the man who was quietly waiting his hour.

"By George, a pretty good pet name they've given him – 'The Blond Beast,'" Norman muttered. "I shouldn't like to tackle him in the dark."

The woman in red leaned toward the chairman and said something in low tones. He nodded his massive head, smiled, and looked back over his shoulder at the girl sitting behind them. The movement showed for the first time a long ugly scar on the side of his great neck.

"Look at that fellow's neck!" whispered Elena.

"Yes. He had a close call that time," Norman answered. "But I'll bet the other one never lived to tell the story – "

"Sh! 'The Scarlet Nun' is going to speak."

The woman in red rose and walked to the edge of the platform. She stood silent for a moment, her tall, graceful, willowy figure erect and tense. The crowd burst into a tumult of applause. She smiled, bowed, and lifted her slender hand with a quick, imperious gesture for silence.

Norman was struck by the note of religious fervour which her whole personality seemed to radiate. The peculiar scarlet robe she wore accented this impression perhaps, and its strangeness added a touch of awe. The dress gave one the impression of a nun's garb except that its long folds were so arranged that they revealed rather than concealed the beautiful lines of her graceful figure. The colour was the deep, warm red of the Socialist flag – the colour of human blood, chosen as the symbol of the universal brotherhood of man. The effect of a nun's cowl was given by a thin scarlet mantilla thrown over the head, the silken meshes of its long fringe mingling with the waves of her thick black hair. Her face was that of a madonna of the slender type, except that the lips were too full, round, and sensuous and her long eyelashes drooped slightly over dark, lustrous eyes.

"Comrades," she began, in slow, measured tones, "after to-night I retire from the platform to take up work for which I am better fitted. I promised you a big surprise this evening, and you shall not be disappointed – "

A murmur rippled the audience and she paused, smiling into Norman's face with a curious look. She spoke with a decided foreign accent with little moments of coquettish hesitation as though feeling for words. Norman felt an almost irresistible impulse to help her.

"I am going to in-tro-duce to you to-night," she continued, "a new leader, whose tongue the God of the poor and the outcast and the dis-in-herited has touched with divine fire. She is no stranger. Twenty years ago she was born beneath the bright skies of Cal-i-for-nia at Anaheim, in the little Socialist colony of Polish dreamers led by Madame Modjeska, Count Bozenta, and Henry Sienkiewicz, the distin-guished author of 'Quo Vadis.' As you know, the colony failed. Her mother died in poverty and she was placed in an orphan asylum until eight years of age, when she was taken back to Poland by her foolish kins-men. Four years later I found her, a ragged, homeless waif, in the streets of Warsaw, alone and star-ving. Since then she has been mine. Amid the squalor and misery of the old world her busy little tongue never tired telling of the glories of Cali-for-nia! Always she sighed for its groves of oranges and olives, its dazzling flowers, its luscious grapes, its rich valleys, its cloud-kissed, snow-clad mountains and the mur-mur of its mighty seas! It was her tiny hand that led me across the ocean to you. I have sent her to school in one of your Western colleges where a great Socialist professor has taught her history and e-con-omics. I have the high honour, comrades, of intro-ducing to you the child of genius who from to-night will be the Joan of Arc of our Cause, Comrade Barbara Bozenta!"

She quickly turned and drew forward a trembling slip of a girl whose big brown eyes were swimming in tears of excitement. A moment of intense silence, and the crowd burst into cheers as the dazzling beauty of their new champion slowly dawned on their understanding. The woman in red resumed her seat, and the girl stood bowing, trembling, and smiling.

The young athlete watched her keenly. Never had he seen such a bundle of quivering, pulsing, nervous, ravishing beauty. He could have sworn he saw electric sparks flash from the tips of every eyelash, from every strand of the mass of brown curls that circled her face and fell in rich profusion on her shoulders and across her heaving bosom. He felt before she had uttered a word – felt, rather than saw – the remarkable effectiveness of the simple, girlish dress which enhanced her dark beauty. She wore the same deep red as the older woman, but the bottom of the skirt was relieved by a row of ruffles edged with white lace. A scarf of white embroidered at the ends with scarlet flowers, was thrown gracefully around her shoulders and hung below the knees. Her round young arms were bare to the elbows, her throat and neck bare to the upper edge of the full bust.

The girl's eyes sought Norman's for an imperceptible instant and a smile flashed from her trembling lips. The cheering ceased and she began to speak. He watched her with breathless intensity, and listened with steadily increasing fascination. Her voice at first was low, yet every word fell clear and distinct. Never had he heard a voice so tender and full of expressive feeling – soft and mellow, sweet like the notes of a flute. There was something in its tone quality that compelled sympathy, that stole into the inner depths of the soul of the listener, and led reason a willing captive.

In simple yet burning words she told of the darkness and poverty, the crime and shame, hunger and cruelty of the old world in which she had spent four years of her childhood. And then in a flight of poetic eloquence, came the story of her dreams of California, the Golden West, the land of eternal sunshine and flowers. And then, in a voice quivering and choking with emotion, she drew the picture of what she found – of Hell's Half Acre, in which she stood, with its brazen vice, its crime, its hopeless misery, its want and despair. With bold and fierce invective she charged modern civilization with this infamy.

"Why do strong men go forth to war?" she cried, looking into the depths of Norman's soul. "Here is the enemy at your door, gripping the soft, white throats of your girls. Watch them sink into the mire at your feet and then down, down into the black sewers of the under-world never to rise again! I, too, call for volunteers. For heroes and heroines – not to fight another – I call you to a nobler warfare. I call you to the salvation of a world. Will you come? I offer you stones for bread, the sky for your canopy, the earth for your bed, and for your wages death! None may enter but the brave. Will you come – ?"

The last words of her appeal rang through Norman's heart with resistless power. Her round, soft arms seemed about his neck and his soul went out to her in passionate yearning. He gripped the chair to hold himself back from shouting:

"Yes! I'm coming!"

She sank to her seat before the crowd realized that she had stopped. A shout of triumph shook the building – wave after wave, rising and falling in ever-increasing intensity. At its height the Scarlet Nun sprang to her feet, with a graceful leap reached the edge of the platform, and again lifted her hand. A sudden hush fell on the crowd.

"Now, comrades, the battle-hymn of the Republic set to new music! Mark its words, and remember that we sing it not as a mem-ory, but as a proph-esy of the day our streets may run red with the blood of the last struggle of Man to break his chains of Slav-ery – a proph-esy, remember, not a mem-ory! Read it Barbara!"

The girl was by her side in an instant, and read from memory, her clear sweet voice tremulous with passion:

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on!

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;

They have builded Him an altar in the evening's dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
His day is marching on!

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat;
Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer them, be jubilant my feet!

Our God is marching on!"

The crowd burst again into triumphant song, and Norman looked at their faces with increasing amazement. The immense vitality of their faith, the rush of its forward movement, the grandeur and audacity of their programme struck him as a revelation. They proposed no half-way measures. They meant to uproot the foundations of modern society and build a new world on its ruins. Their leaders were fanatics – yes. But fanatics were the only kind of people who would dare such things and do them. Here was a movement, which at least meant something – something big, heroic, daring. His face suddenly flushed and his heart leaped with an impulse.

"In heaven's name, Norman, what's the matter?" Elena asked.

The young poet-athlete looked at her in a dazed sort of way and stammered:

"Did you ever see anything like it?"

"No, and I don't want to again," she replied with a frown. "Let's go home."

"Wait, they are taking up a collection. At least we must pay for our seats."

When the usher passed he emptied the contents of his pocket in the collection-box.

As the meeting broke up, the boy who placed their seats touched Norman on the arm.

"Let me introduce ye to her. I wants ter tell 'er ye er my friend – I've yelled my head off for ye many a day on de football ground. Jest er minute. I'll fetch 'er right down."

The boy darted up on the platform, and Norman turned to Elena:

"Shall we please the boy?"

"You mean yourself," she replied. "I decline the honour."

She turned away into the crowd as the boy returned leading Barbara.

Norman hastened to meet them at the foot of the platform steps.

"Dis is me friend, Worth, de captain of de football team, Miss Barbara," proudly exclaimed the boy.

Barbara extended her soft hand with a warm, friendly smile, and Norman clasped it while his heart throbbed.

"I congratulate you," he said, "on your wonderful triumph to-night."

"You were interested?" she asked, quietly.

"More than I can tell you," was the quick response.

"Then join our club and help me in my work among the poor," she urged, with frank eagerness. "We meet to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock. Won't you come?"

A long, deep look into her brown eyes – his face flushed and his heart leaped with sudden resolution.

"Thank you, I will," he slowly answered.

He joined Elena at the door and they walked home in brooding silence.

CHAPTER III
THE BIRTH OF A MAN

Norman stood silent and thoughtful before the fire in the dining-room, the morning after the meeting of the Socialists. His sleep had been feverish and a hundred half-formed dreams had haunted the moments in which he had lost consciousness with always the shining face of Barbara smiling and beckoning him on.

Elena silently entered and watched him a moment before he saw her.

"Still dreaming of the New Joan of Arc, Norman?" she asked with playful banter.

"I'm going to do it, Elena," he said, with slow, thoughtful emphasis.

"What? Marry her without even giving me the usual two weeks' notice?" Elena laughed.

"Now, isn't that like a woman! I wasn't even thinking of the girl – "

"Of course not."

Norman laughed. "By Jove, you're jealous at last, Elena."

"You flatter yourself."

"Honestly, I wasn't thinking of the girl – "

"Well, I've been thinking of her. She haunts me. I like her and I hate her. I feel that she's charming and vicious, of the spirit and flesh, and yet I can't help believing that she's good. The woman who introduced her is a she-devil, and the man who presided over that meeting is a brute. It's a pity she's mixed up with them. What are you going to do – play the hero and rescue her from their clutches?"

"Nonsense. The girl is nothing to me, except as the symbol of a great idea. It stirs my blood. I'm going to join the Socialist Club."

"Of which the fair Barbara is secretary."

"Come with me, and join too. We'll go together to every meeting."

"Have you gone mad?" Elena asked, with deep seriousness.

"I'm in dead earnest."

"And you think your father will stand for it?"

"That remains to be seen. I'm going to tackle him as soon as he comes down to breakfast."

"Well, if I never see you again, good-bye, old pal." She extended her hand in mock gravity.

"I'm not afraid of him."

"No, of course not!"

"You're a coward, or you'd stand by me. Wait, Elena, he's coming now."

"Why stand by? You're not afraid? I'll return in time for the inquest. Brace up! Remember Barbara. Be a hero!"

With a ripple of laughter she disappeared as the Colonel's footsteps were heard at the door.

Norman braced himself for the ordeal. He had never before dared to test his father's iron will. He had grown accustomed to see strong men bow and cringe before him, and felt a secret contempt for them all. They were bowing to his millions. And yet the boy knew with intuitive certainty that beneath the mask of quiet dignity and polished military bearing of the man he facetiously called "the Governor" there slumbered a will unique, powerful, and overbearing. More than once he had resented the silent pressure of his positive and aggressive personality. His own budding manhood had begun instinctively to bristle at its approach.

The Colonel started on seeing Norman, and looked at him with a quizzical expression.

"Was there an earthquake this morning, Norman?"

"I didn't feel it, sir – why?"

"You're downstairs rather early."

Norman smiled. "I've been a little lazy, I'm afraid, Governor. But you know I wasn't consulted as to whether I wished to be born. You assumed a fearful responsibility. You see the results."

The Colonel dropped his paper and looked at Norman a moment.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed. "What's happened?"

"The biggest thing that ever came into my life, Governor," was the low, serious answer.

"What?"

"The decision that hereafter I'd rather be than seem to be, that I'm going to do some thinking for myself."

"And what brought you to this decision?" the father quietly asked.

"I went last night to that Socialist meeting."

"Indeed!"

"Yes," he went on, impetuously, "and I heard the most wonderful appeal to which I ever listened – an appeal which stirred me to the deepest depths of my being. I think it's the biggest movement of the century. I'm going to study it. I'm going to see what it means. What do you say to it?"

The boy lifted his tall figure with instinctive dignity, and his eyes met his father's in a straight, deep man's gaze.

The faintest smile played about the corners of the Colonel's mouth as he suddenly extended his hand.

"I congratulate you!"

"Congratulate me?" Norman stammered.

"Upon the attainment of your majority. Up to date you have written a few verses and played football. But this is the first evidence you have ever shown of conscious personality. You're in the grub-worm stage as yet, but you're on the move. You're a human being. You have developed the germ of character. And that's the only thing in this world that's worth the candle, my boy. It's funny to hear you say that the appeal of Socialism has worked this miracle. For character is the one thing the scheme of Socialism leaves out of account. A character is the one thing a machine-made society could never produce if given a million years in which to develop the experiment."

"And you don't object?" Norman asked with increasing amazement.

"Certainly not. Study Socialism to your heart's content. Go to the bottom of it. Don't slop over it. Don't accept sentimental mush for facts. Find out for yourself. Read, think, and learn to know your fellow man. When you've picked up a few first principles, and know enough to talk intelligently, I've something to say to you – something I've learned for myself."

The boy looked at his father steadily and spoke with a slight tremor in his voice.

"Governor, you're a bigger man than I thought you were. I like you – even if you are my father."

"Thanks, my boy," the Colonel gravely replied, "I trust we may know each other still better in the future."

CHAPTER IV
AMONG THE SHADOWS

Under the tutelage of Barbara, the young millionaire plunged into the study of Socialism with the zeal of the fresh convert to a holy crusade.

At first he had listened to her stories of the sufferings of the poor and the unemployed with mild incredulity. She laid her warm little hand on his and said:

"Come and see. If you think that Socialism is a dream, I'll show you that capitalism is a nightmare."

He followed her down the ugly pavements of a squalid street into the poorest quarter of the city. She entered a dingy hall and pushed her way through a swarm of filthy children to the rear room. On a bed of rags lay the body of a suicide – a working-man who had shot himself the day before. The wife sat crouching on a broken chair, with eyes staring out of the window at the sunlit skies of a May morning in California. Her body seemed to have turned to stone and her eyes to have frozen in their sockets. Her hands lay limp in her lap, her shoulders drooped, her mouth hung hopelessly open. She was as dead to every sight and sound of earth as though shrouded and buried in six feet of clay instead of sunlight.

Barbara touched her shoulder, but she did not move.

"Have you been sitting there all night, Mrs. Nelson?" she asked, gently.

The woman turned her weak eyes toward the speaker and stared without reply.

"You haven't tasted the food I brought you," Barbara continued.

The drooping figure stirred with sudden energy, as if the realization of the question first asked had begun to stir her intelligence.

"Yes. I set up all night with Jim. He'd a-done as much fer me. There's nobody else that cared enough to come. Ye know it ain't respectful to leave your dead alone – "

"But you must eat something," Barbara urged.

"I can't eat – it chokes me." She paused a moment, and looked at Norman in a dazed sort of way. "I tried to eat and something choked me – what was it? O God, I remember now!" she cried, with strangling emotion. "They are going to bury him in the potter's field unless we can save him, and I know we can't. He's got an old mother way back East that thinks he's doing well out here. Hit'll kill her dead when she finds out he wuz buried by the city."

"He shan't go to the potter's field," Norman interrupted, looking out of the window.

The woman rose, and tried to speak, but sank sobbing:

"Thank God! Thank God! Thank God!"

When the first flood of grateful emotion had spent itself, she looked up at Norman and said:

"You see, sir, he wasn't strong, and kept losin' his job in Chicago. We'd heard about California all our lives. We sold out everything and got enough to come. For two years we've made a hard fight, but it was no use. Jim couldn't git work. I tried and I couldn't. Folks have helped us, but he was proud. He wouldn't beg and he wouldn't let me. He wouldn't sell his gun. I think he always meant to use it that way when he got to the end, and it come yesterday when they give us notice to git out."

She staggered over to the bed and fell across the body, sobbing:

"My poor old boy. He loved me. He was always good to me. I tried to go with him. But I couldn't pull the trigger! I was afraid! I was afraid!"

When they reached the street, Barbara lifted her brown eyes to Norman's face and asked:

"What do you think of a social system that drives thousands of men to kill themselves like that?"

"To tell you the truth I never thought of it at all before."

"He would have been buried in a pauper's grave but for your help. I brought you here this morning because I knew you would save her that anguish when you understood."

"You knew I would?" he softly asked.

"I wouldn't have let you come with me if I hadn't known it," she answered, earnestly.

"It's funny how many of us live in this world without knowing anything about it," he said, musingly.

"It would be funny were it not a tragedy," she answered, turning across the street to the next block. They paused at the entrance of another narrow hallway.

"My work as secretary of the club includes, as you see, a wide range of calls. I'm a dispenser of alms, the pastor of a great parish, the friend, adviser, and champion of a lost world, and you have no idea what a big world it is."

"I'm beginning to understand. What's the trouble here? Another suicide?"

"No – something worse, I think. A man who was afraid to die and took to drink. That's the way with most of them. None but the brave can look into the face of Death. This man is good to his family until he's drunk. Drink is the only thing that makes life worth the candle to him. But when he's under the influence of liquor he's a fiend. Last night he beat his wife into insensibility. This morning he sent one of the children for me."

They climbed two flights of rickety stairs and entered a room littered with broken furniture. Every chair was smashed, the table lay in splinters, pieces of crockery scattered everywhere, and the stove broken into fragments. Two blear-eyed children with the look of hunted rabbits crouched in a corner. A man was bending over the bed, where the form of a woman lay still and white.

"For God's sake, brace up, Mary!" he was saying. "Ye mustn't die! Ye mustn't, I tell ye! Your white face will haunt me and drive me into hell a raving maniac. I didn't know what I was doin', old gal. I was crazy. I wouldn't 'a' hurt a hair of your head if I'd 'a' knowed what I was doin'!"

He bowed his face in his coarse, bloated hands and sobbed.

The thin white hand of the wife stroked his hair feebly.

"It's all right, Sam. I know ye didn't mean it," she sighed.

Norman sent for a doctor, and left some money.

With each new glimpse of the under-world of pain and despair the conviction grew in Norman's mind that he had not lived, and the determination deepened that he would get acquainted with his fellow men and the place he called his home.

"You are not tired?" Barbara asked, as they hurried into the street.

"No, I'm just beginning to live," he answered, soberly.

"Good. Then you shall be allowed the honour of accompanying me to the county jail, to the poorhouse, to the hospital, and to the morgue – the four greatest institutions of modern civilization. We must hurry. I've another sadder visit after these."

As they hurried through the streets, Norman began to study with increasing intensity the phenomena presented in the development of Barbara's character. The more he saw of her, the more he realized the lofty ideals of her life, the more puerile and contemptible his own past seemed.

At the jail they found a boy who had been convicted of stealing and sentenced to the penitentiary. His old mother was ill. Barbara bore her last message of love.

They stopped at the poorhouse to see a curious old pauper who had become a regular attendant on the Socialists' meetings. He was called "Methodist John," because he was forever shouting "Glory, Hallelujah!" and interrupting the speakers. Barbara was the bearer of a painful message to John. Wolf had instructed her to keep him out of the meetings. She had decided to try a gentler way – to warn him against yelling "Glory" again under penalty of being deprived of a dish of soup of which he was particularly fond. The Socialist Club served this simple, wholesome meal to all who asked for it after its weekly meetings.

John promised Barbara faithfully to stop shouting.

"Remember, John," she warned him finally, "shout – no soup! No shout – soup!"

"I understand, Miss Barbara," he answered, solemnly.

"You see, sir," he said, apologetically, turning to Norman, "I get along all right till she begins ter speak, and when I hears her soft, sweet voice it seems ter run all down my back in little ticklin' waves clean down ter my toes, an' I holler 'Glory' before I can stop it!"

Norman laughed.

"I understand, old man."

"You feel that way yerself, don't ye, now, when she looks down into yer soul with them big, soft eyes o' hern, an' her voice comes a-stealin' inter yer heart like the music of the angels – "

Barbara's face lighted, and a slight blush suffused her cheeks as she caught the look of admiring assent in Norman's expression.

"That will do, John," she said, firmly. "Mr. Wolf was very angry with you yesterday."

"I'll remember, Miss Barbara," he repeated. "And God bless your dear heart fer comin' by ter tell me."

"I suppose he has no people living who are interested in him?" Norman asked, as they turned toward the Socialist hall.

"No. He came from a big mill town in the East. His children all died before they were grown, and he landed here with his wife ten years ago. When she died, he was sent to the poorhouse. He hasn't much mind, but there's enough left to burst into flame at the memory of his children being slowly ground to death by the wheels of those mills. I've seen his dead soul start to life more than once as I've looked into his face from our platform. What an awful thing to see dead men walking about!"

"Yes. People who are dead and don't know it. I never thought of it before." Norman exclaimed.

They stopped in front of a house with a scarlet light in the hall, which threw its rays through a red-glass transom over a door of coloured leaded glass. The shadows of evening had begun to fall, and for the first time the girl showed a sign of hesitation and embarrassment.

"I hate to ask you to go in here with me, and I'd hate worse to have you see me go alone. Yet I have to do it. My work leads me."

"I'm going with you, whether you ask it or not," he firmly replied.

"Then words are useless," she said, simply, as she rang the bell.

A Negro maid opened the door, and smiled a look of recognition. "She ain't no better, miss. She's been crying for you all day."

Barbara led the way up two flights of stairs to a small room in the rear, and entered without knocking. With a bound she was beside the bed on which lay a slender girl of nineteen. A mass of golden blond hair was piled in confusion on the pillow, and a pair of big, childish-looking blue eyes blinked at her through her tears.

"Oh! you've come at last! I'm so glad. It makes me strong to see you. Your face shines so, Barbara! They say I can't live, but it's not so. I shall live! I'm feeling better every day. It's nonsense. The doctors haven't got any sense. I wish you'd get me one that knows something. Won't you, dear?"

"My friend, Mr. Worth, who has called with me, has kindly agreed to send you another doctor, little sister – that's why I brought him to see you."

Norman extended his hand, and grasped the thin, cold one the girl extended. He felt the chill of death in its icy touch as he stammered:

"I'll send him right away."

"Thank you," the girl replied, as a smile flitted about her weak mouth. She turned to Barbara with a look of infinite tenderness.

"I knew you'd come, and I knew you'd save me. You're my angel! When I dream at night, you're always hovering over me."

"I'll come again to-morrow, dearie, when the new doctor has seen you," Barbara answered, as she pressed her hand good-bye.

When they reached the street, Norman asked:

"You knew her before she fell into evil ways?"

"Yes," Barbara answered, with feeling. "She was just a little child of joy and sunlight. She couldn't endure the darkness. She loved flowers and music, beauty and love. She hated drudgery and poverty. She tried to work, and gave up in despair. A man came into her life at a critical moment and she broke with the world. She's been sending all the money she could make the past two years to her mother and four little kids. Her father was killed at work in a mine for a great corporation."

"She can't live, can she?" Norman asked.

"Of course not. I only did this to humour her. She has developed acute consumption – she may not live a month."

Barbara paused.

"I must leave you now – I'm very tired, and I must sleep a while before I attend the meeting to-night. It has been a great strain on me to-day, this trip with you. How do you like our boasted civilization? Do you think it perfect? Are you satisfied with a system which drives hundreds of thousands of such girls into a life of shame? Are you content with a system which produces three million paupers in a land flowing with milk and honey? Do you like a system which drives thousands to the madness of drink and suicide every year?"

"And to think," responded Norman, dreamily, "that for the past two years of my manhood I've been writing verses and playing football! Great God!"

"Then from to-day we are comrades in the cause of humanity?" she asked tenderly, extending her hand. His own clasped hers with firm grasp.

"Comrades!"

CHAPTER V
THE ISLAND OF VENTURA

Norman had never been a boy to do things by halves. In college, when he went in for football, he made it the one supreme end of life – and won. He incidentally managed to pull through a course in mining engineering. He knew mining by instinct and inheritance from his father. It came easy.

When he had a three months' vacation from football he took up the modelling of a dredge for mining gold from the sands of the beaches. The thing had never been perfected, but after three months' experiment and study he was just on the point of making the castings for the machinery when the football season opened and he dropped such trifling matters for the more serious work of training his men for a successful season. He won the championship and forgot the dredge.

Into the new movement of Socialism he naturally threw his whole personality without reservation. Its daring programme thrilled him. The audacity of its leaders and their refusal to discuss anything less than the salvation of man appealed to every instinct of his nature. He devoured every book on the subject he could find, and in his new-found enthusiasm for humanity accepted as the inspired voice of God their wildest visions of social regeneration.

In his work of charity and organization with Barbara he found everything to confirm and nothing to shake his faith in these theories. When once he caught the idea that all the ills of modern civilization were due directly to the fiendish system of "capitalism" and its "iron law of wages," it was the key which unlocked every mystery of Pain and every tragedy of the Soul. All sin and crime and shame and suffering became the incidents of a social system whose movements were as inexorable as Fate, as merciless as Death. There was but one thing worth talking about, and that was how to destroy modern society, root and branch, and do it quickly, thoroughly and without compromise.

The same daring enthusiasm and capacity for leadership which made him the captain of his football team brought him at once to the front as a Socialist leader. He would have gained this leadership had he been the poorest man among them. It was a gift as his birthright.

But, added to this capacity for daring and successful action, was his wealth and social prestige. He had cast his lot with a class whose avowed purpose was to destroy all social distinctions, to level all wealth to a common standard. And for this reason in particular he was conspicuous and heroic in the eyes of his Socialist comrades.

He found soon after his entrance into their active councils that the woman known to the world as "The Scarlet Nun," to her associates as "Sister Catherine," was the inspiring brain of their movement in the West. This remarkable woman interested him deeply from their first hour's talk. Born in Poland and educated in Germany, she spoke fluently the Russian, German, French, and English languages. She had led two great strikes of women workers in New York and had been arrested, convicted, and sentenced twice to the penitentiary for exciting riots. To her associates she had always remained a saint and a martyr for their cause.

She had been married before her association with Wolf had begun, ten years ago. Her first husband had been divorced, and her marriage to Wolf had been merely "announced" at a Socialist meeting. And yet the young millionaire had never questioned the sincerity of their devotion or the apparent happiness of their union. He was amazed at her learning, her grasp of affairs, the simplicity and refinement of her manners, and the charm of her conversation.

Wolf he found to be a man of wide reading and deep convictions. As he came in daily contact with these two powerful personalities, and watched the singular zeal with which they devoted themselves to their self-appointed task of destroying modern society, he could not divest himself of the impression that they belonged to a religious order and were leading a crusade, as the monks of

the Middle Ages led men and women to die to rescue the tomb of Christ from the desecration of Turk and Saracen.

The woman in particular gave him this impression of religious fanaticism. The apparent simplicity and austerity of her life, the tireless zeal with which she planned and worked for the spread of the gospel of Socialism, to his mind gave the lie emphatically to all the stories he had read of her affairs with men.

The only moments of suspicion about her which ever clouded his mind came with the accidental discovery that she had skilfully managed to throw him and Barbara together for a day. It seemed just a little like the old habit of a scheming mamma angling for the rich young man, and deliberately using the beauty of her daughter as the bait with which to land him in the household.

Yet, when he found himself with Barbara he had always dismissed the thought as absurd. Whatever might be the dimly formed design in the back of the older woman's fancy, her brilliant protégé gave no sign of being her accomplice.

Norman had found Barbara a charming but baffling enigma. She walked through a world of sin and shame, filth and mire, with never a speck on the white of her soul or body. She spoke in the simplest and most direct way of things about which the ordinary girl in society would never dare to utter a word, and yet he took it as a matter of course. He grew to feel that she was a mysterious messenger from the spirit world. Yet when he took her arm and felt its warm round lines soft and thrilling against his own, or the warmth of her lithe body pressing close to his side in some lonely or dangerous spot on their rounds of work, he was brought up sharply against the fact that she was both flesh and spirit. Yet the moment he tried to draw nearer to her inner thoughts, he found her a skilful little fencer, an adept in all the arts of the most delicate and subtle coquetry.

He grew at last, however, to know, with unerring masculine instinct, that with all her brave and frank talk about her "fallen" sisters, she hadn't an idea of what their fall really meant. She was as innocent as a child, and when at last she caught the young athlete smiling at one of her apparently frank and learned discussions of the modern degradation of woman, she blushed and became silent. Whereat he laughed, and she became so angry they parted in silence.

Baffled in his efforts to approach Barbara's heart, he threw himself with zeal into the Cause. When two months had been spent in mastering the details of the Socialist programme, in studying its history and the condition of its movement, he called a meeting of the council of the Socialist Club, and fairly took away the breath of the Wolfs and Barbara by the magnitude and audacity of a scheme which he proposed to launch immediately.

He had secured, without consulting any of his associates, an option on a rich, beautiful, and fertile island off the coast of Southern California. It was owned by a corporation which had invested more than a million dollars in its improvement. The enterprise had failed for two reasons – the money had been expended recklessly in the days of the famous land boom, and it had been found impossible to induce labourers to isolate themselves on this lonely spot, sixty miles from the coast of Santa Barbara, with no means of regular connection with the outside world.

His eyes flashing with enthusiasm and his voice ringing with conviction, Norman closed his description of the island of Ventura with a demand for its immediate purchase by the Socialists.

"It can be bought," he declared impetuously, "for $200,000. A million dollars' worth of improvements are already there. I propose that we immediately raise $500,000, buy this island, establish a steamship line, plant a colony of ten thousand Socialists, found the Brotherhood of Man, build a model city, and create a vast fund for the propaganda of our faith."

Barbara's brown eyes danced with excitement, her cheeks flushed, while her little hands clapped approval.

"Good! Good! It's great! It's beautiful! We must do it!" she cried.

Wolf grimly shook his head.

"The idea has failed a hundred times. We must conquer the world by political action – we have the weapon in our hand – manhood suffrage. All colonies fail sooner or later. They are corrupted from outside – "

"Just so!" Norman interrupted. "But this one you can't reach from the outside. We will own the only means of communication. We will inherit all the advantages of modern civilization with none of its drawbacks. We can demonstrate the truths we hold and from our impregnable Gibraltar send out our missionaries to conquer the world. We will not merely dream dreams and see visions; we will make history. We will prove the God that's in man and establish the fact of his universal brotherhood."

"It's a wonderful idea, comrade!" Catherine exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "I congratulate you! We will accept your plan, and I move that we appoint you our agent vested with full power to collect this fund from the enemy!"

The motion was put and carried unanimously, even Wolf voting for it.

Barbara sprang to Norman's side, and grasped his hand:

"Our feud is over! I forgive you for laughing at me. You are a born leader. You've won your spurs to-night. You will raise this money?"

"As sure as I'm living!" was the firm reply.

CHAPTER VI
THE RED FLAG

Norman lost no time in springing his scheme for the establishment of the Socialist colony and headquarters for the propaganda of the new social religion on the island of Ventura. The season he had spent as a reporter gave him the key to the proper launching of a press story which created a profound sensation. It appeared simultaneously in the Sunday editions of all the leading dailies of the Pacific coast, and in forty-eight hours his mail had grown to such proportions that he required two secretaries to assist him in answering it.

He called for a thousand volunteers to join the advance-guard of the coming Brotherhood of Man, each contributing a thousand dollars. He announced a mass meeting and picnic for the Fourth of July, to be held on the big lawn of the Worth country house on the outskirts of Berkeley.

Colonel Worth had readily given his consent to the use of the lawn. He had not tried in any way to interfere with his son's association with the Socialists. He felt sure that in time he would tire of the fad, as he had of football, and in a fatherly way he began to admire the dash and audacity of the boy's plans.

On the morning of the picnic, when Elena expressed her fears of the outcome, the Colonel laughed.

"Don't worry, Elena. He'll come to his senses. It's like a fever. It must run its course. I'm rather proud of the extravagance of his foolishness. A boy who can forget his games and give his life to destroy the foundations of human society and try to rebuild a new world on its ruins – well, there's good stuff in him."

"But if he does something rash?" Elena persisted.

"He won't. With all his extravagance and enthusiasm he's not a fool. I, too, saw visions like that once."

"You, Guardie?"

"Yes, when I was very, very young – a mere boy of thirteen – I joined a colony of Communists."

"I wish I could have seen you at thirteen," Elena cried, with a joyous laugh.

The laugh died suddenly and a frown overspread her face as Norman appeared.

"I want you and Elena to hear our orator to-day, Governor," Norman said, with enthusiasm. "We are going to make it a great day."

"It's already great, my boy – I've just got the news."

"What news?"

The Colonel drew a telegram from his pocket.

"A message from Washington. Sampson and Schley have annihilated the Spanish fleet. Admiral Cervera is a prisoner on board the flagship, and the army is rapidly closing in on the doomed city of Santiago."

He handed the telegram to Norman, who glanced at it in silence and returned it to his father.

"Come to our meeting on the lawn at noon, Governor. We've bigger news than that for you."

"Bigger news?" the older man asked with a quizzical look.

"Yes. A message announcing the dawn of a day when every gun on earth shall be broken to pieces and melted into ploughshares."

The Colonel looked at Norman a moment, smiled, and slowly said:

"I love the young – because I live myself over again in them."

"Then you'll join us to-day?"

"Thanks – no – Elena and I are going to shoot firecrackers – but we won't disturb your crowd. Let them speak to their hearts' content."

The Colonel turned with Elena, and entered the house, which crowned an eminence overlooking the distant bay and city, while Norman hurried down the green sloping lawn to finish the decorations of the speakers' stand.

The crowd had already begun to pour in from Oakland and San Francisco, and more than a hundred delegates from Socialist locals in other cities were expected.

On a little headland which jutted out from the long sloping mountain side on which the lawn was laid out, Colonel Worth had erected a tall steel flag-pole. The big flag which flew from its peak could be seen by every ship that entered or left the bay and for miles on shore in almost every direction.

Around this flag-pole Norman had built the speakers' platform, with every inch of its boards covered with the deep-red bunting symbolic of the Socialist cause. Behind the stand toward the mountains rose a smooth grass-carpeted hillside in semi-circular form, making a natural amphitheatre on which five thousand people might sit in tiers one above the other and distinctly hear every word uttered on the platform.

By noon every inch of this space was packed with a dense crowd of Socialists, their friends, and the curious who had come, drawn by the sensational announcement of the launching of the Socialist colony on the island of Ventura.

In the front row, packed close against the platform, were a number of famous people – conspicuous among whom was an author whose impassioned stories of the coming social upheaval had resulted in fame for himself and a divorce-suit by his first wife. His new wife, the "affinity" who caused the disturbance, sat by his side.

On his left sat a solemn looking poet with bushy, unkempt hair. He had deliberately chosen the title "The Bard of Ramcat." The name Ramcat had been long applied to a shabby section of the outskirts of San Francisco. Here the poet had chosen to dwell and sing of social horrors which existed only in his fertile imagination.

He had won wide fame, however, as the supreme exponent of the "affinity" theory which has always been epidemic among thoughtful Socialists. He coolly informed his wife that he had discovered his true "affinity" in a woman he had installed as her guest. The two affinities accompanied the wife and her child to a steamer for Europe with instructions to obtain a divorce.

The poet married the affinity, and on the birth of a new son and heir acquired the habit of beating her as a form of relaxation from the strain of work. Considerable trouble followed, and he spent a portion of his time in jail. He had once gone barefooted and bareheaded. But since his "affinity" marriage he had been compelled for reasons best known to himself to resume shoe-leather and to buy a hat. Nevertheless he was still a striking-looking figure, seated beside his new wife whose strong, intellectual face won the sympathy of all who saw her.

Just behind him sat an ex-clergyman with whom a rich young woman in his congregation had fallen in love. To avoid trouble, the woman of wealth got him to leave the ministry, and bought him from his wife for a good round sum. He became an apostle of the new gospel of Socialism, and secured a position as a professor of economics. When finally he lost this position by his vagaries, his wife hired a hall and set him up in business as an inspired leader of new thought emancipated from the chains of capitalistic tyranny.

Beside the distinguished ex-clergyman Socialistic apostle sat Professor Otto Schmitt, a famous teacher of economics at a Western university. His supreme passion was hatred of women. His one big book was written to prove that woman has no soul, that she is the mere matter on which man by his will acts, that she is not immoral, but merely non-moral, having never possessed even the rudiments of a moral nature. Schmitt had, therefore, maintained that the entrance of women into competition in the economic world presaged the downfall of man and the utter extinction of humanity. For this reason he had joined the Socialists.

Not three feet away from him sat a thoughtful, elderly, short-haired woman who had written a book on the evolution of woman to prove that woman alone is the original unit of creation, man a

superfluous and temporary addition, merely the missing link between woman and the monkey, and in the process of human development the male biped would be eliminated. She demanded equal rights with man, and more besides, and she, too, had joined the Socialists.

Yet through all these ludicrous incongruities there ran the single scarlet thread of social discontent which made them one. In every soul rang the stirring cry:

"Down with civilization! Up with the Red Flag!"

A more remarkable group of men and women could scarcely be gathered together on the face of the earth. But the one mark they all bore, distinctly cut deep in the lines of every face on which character had set its seal, and written large in the restless, nervous personality of the young – they all had a grievance, and though their troubles might come from as many different causes as there were men and women present, they united in one thought:

"Modern civilization must be destroyed!"

Every heart beat with this fiery resolution, and every incongruity melted and faded into insignificance before this consuming belief.

And they had gone about this purpose with a deadly earnestness which meant business. Their political campaigns were merely moments when the captain of their ship cast the lead-line to feel the bottom and find his position with certainty before signalling full speed ahead.

They worked all the year round and every day in every year, from one election to the next. They were mastering the tricks of the demagogue in their appeal to the masses, and they kept everlastingly at it. No man is too high, no man too low, for them to reach for him. They couldn't be beaten for they had accepted defeat before they began to fight, and began the next fight before they got up from the ground where they had been knocked down. They had become the one element in American politics to which it was utterly useless to direct any argument of expediency.

The Fourth of July, the Nation's birthday, they were now using to demand its extinction. The fact that our army and navy had just torn the flag of Spain from its last masthead in the Western hemisphere and startled the old world with our sudden advent among the great powers of the earth, stirred in their hearts no emotion save that of contempt. While the souls of millions beat with patriotic pride, they had met to uproot the very ideas from whose soil patriotism sprang into life.

There was no question as to who should be the orator of the day. The fame of Barbara Bozenta had become national from the day of her first speech in San Francisco. Her beauty and eloquence were sufficient to pack any hall at twenty-four hours' notice.

Her delicate face was radiant to-day with unusual elation. She walked with a quick, nervous energy that seemed to lift her whole body into the air. As she ascended the platform and bowed to the tumult of applause, she trembled from head to foot with intensest excitement. As she stood looking over the inspiring scene for a moment, her sensitive nostrils dilated, her brown eyes flashed, and her heart beat with a great throb of personal pride. She had never before faced such an immense throng of excited men and women, and the secret consciousness that she had within her soul the message which would sweep their heartstrings as she willed, lifted her into the clouds.

She felt for the moment that the whole scene was a tribute to her power. The magnificent house whose windows flashed in the sunlight, the vast lawn carpeted with green and set in dazzling flowers, the emerald waters of the bay, and the spires and domes of the distant city set on its proud hills beyond – all were hers to-day! Her voice had called to their standard the young millionaire whose name was now on every lip. Her voice had inspired his dream of the experiment to be made on the island of Ventura which had called this host together. For one big moment she felt the thrill of conscious creative genius, the pain, the joy, the glory of a positive achievement.

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and she sank to her seat with a suppressed sob.

When at last she rose to speak, her whole personality was a quivering battery of resistless emotion. Her voice, low and pulsing with magnetic waves of suppressed feeling, caught and chained

the attention of the farthest straggler on the edge of the throng. Instinctively they moved closer. Resistlessly she drew them.

She had not spoken two minutes before she was sweeping the hearts of her hearers. Men and women who had come to laugh or scoff, as well as the young and thoughtless who had drifted with the crowd, were all alike caught in the spell and hung breathless on her words.

Every trick and art of persuasive speech were hers without effort. Scorn, pathos, humour, passion, were of the breath she breathed. At times her eloquence reached the highest conception of its might. It was simple thought packed until it took fire. At such moments scores of men leaped to their feet and shouted. Nothing disconcerted her or changed the swift current of her ideas. She was a master-musician whose hands swept a harp of a thousand strings – every string a throbbing human soul.

What matter if her appeal was to the emotions and not to the intellect? Her purpose was to persuade her hearers. And she did it. Her courage, her beauty, her skill, her utter sincerity, commanded the respect of the strongest man who listened. If their intellects were not convinced, no matter – she carried them with her on a storm of resistless emotion.

Suddenly a thing happened which would have destroyed the total impression of the average speech. Old Methodist John, her pauper protégé, had listened with increasing torture, choking down a hundred "Glorys" as they leaped from his soul until at last he could endure no more. At the climax of one of her impassioned appeals the old man leaped to his feet, rushed in front of the speakers' stand and shouted into the face of the chairman:

"Look here! Look here, now, Wolf! Soup or no soup – Glory hallelujah!"

Barbara alone smiled. The crowd took up his shout, and a thousand voices made the heavens ring with its wild music.

Norman whispered to the old man, who sat down, and Barbara swept on in her impetuous triumph without the lapse of a moment's power. She seized the instant's hush which followed the storm of cheering to fire into the minds of her hearers some of the solid shot of the revolutionary programme.

In a voice which swelled to the clarion note of a trumpet she cried:

"The earth for all the people! This is our demand!

"The machinery of all production and distribution for all the people! This is our demand!

"The collective ownership and control of all industry! This is our demand!

"The elimination of rent, interest, and profit! This is our demand!

"A new social order, a higher civilization, a real republic! This is our demand!

"The end of the hell called war, of poverty and shame, of cruelty and crime, the birth of freedom, the dawn of brotherhood, the beginning of man! These are our demands! This is Socialism! Is this an idle dream? Have you no faith in your fellow man?

"In the grim prison beyond the bay I found one day a woman convict who was little removed from a fiend. I got permission to hang a beautiful picture in her cell – a picture that set her soul to dreaming, that melted her at last to tears, and transformed the beast within her to a gentle, loving, beautiful, human character.

"I believe in man because he alone possesses this power to look through the window of the soul into the infinite and eternal. Here the world's real battles are fought. Here the world's real work is done. Here cowards run and the brave die. This power to recreate the earth, people it with beauty, and fill it with harmony is your birthright.

"Lo, the day of humanity dawns!

"I preach class consciousness that we may destroy all classes. Class must perish and Man be glorified. Man, whose inhumanity to his fellow man has filled the ages with ashes and tears, is coming forth at last purified by suffering, and we shall see his tears turned to smiles upon the faces of a nobler race.

"Why should we rejoice to-day in the death of our fellow man? Nations are but the dung-heaps out of which the fair flower of a world-democracy is slowly growing. Truth is not national, it is infinite. France may fight Germany because two titled fools insult each other, but there can be no war between the laboratories of Pasteur and of Koch. Their work is the common heritage of humanity. Who asks if Humboldt was German or English, whether Spinoza was Jew or Gentile, Darwin English or French? A German wrote 'Faust,' a Frenchman set it to immortal music, and an American girl sang it into the hearts of millions. Who cares to know nationalities? The great belong to the democracy of the world. And I swear that your children will still laugh with the soul of Cervantes in spite of the Fourth of July, Santiago, and Manila!

"Why should you fight one another? When called to war by your rulers, let the liberty-loving spirits of the modern world say to their masters:

"'Go and do your own killing – you who have separated us from our brothers and made the earth a slaughter-pen.'

"If you are court-martialed and shot for this act of heroism remember:

"'They never fail who die
In a great cause: the block may soak their gore:
Their heads may sodden in the sun: their limbs
Be strung to city gates and castle walls —
But still their spirit walks abroad. Though years

Elapse and others share as dark a doom,
They but augment the deep and sweeping thoughts
Which overpower all others, and conduct
The world at last to freedom!'"

A shout of wild applause rent the air as the last note of Byron's immortal song fell from her beautiful lips. And then, in a low, intense voice, she closed her speech with a thrilling appeal for human brotherhood. To Norman, who hung on her lips, the slight girlish figure seemed transformed before their eyes into a radiant messenger of the spirit. And when the sweet womanly tones at last broke and choked into deep-drawn sobs, his soul and body seemed no longer his own. As her last words sank into his heart: "From to-day let each of us swear allegiance to but one flag, the deep-red emblem of human blood, God's sign of universal brotherhood!" Norman leaped to his feet, sprang on the platform, and while the crowd swayed in a frenzy of applause, hauled down the Stars and Stripes and quickly raised the big red standard of Socialism which was thrown across the speaker's table.

And then the great crowd seemed to go mad. Wave after wave of cheering rose and fell, rose and fell, in apparently unending power. Catherine threw her arms around Barbara in a paroxysm of emotion, while the big figure of Wolf towered above them both, shouting and gesturing like a madman. Barbara at last lifted her hand and, as the storm subsided, began the Marseillaise hymn.

The first stirring notes had just swept the audience when the stalwart figure of Colonel Worth suddenly appeared on the platform, his face a blaze of anger, his magnificent figure erect, every nerve and muscle drawn to the highest tension.

He stepped to the edge of the stand, lifted his head, and his voice rang over the crowd like the sudden boom of a cannon:

"Silence!"

He didn't repeat the word.

The singing stopped, and every eye was riveted on the group that stood on the platform.

The Colonel confronted Wolf, and shot his words at him as though from a machine-gun.

"Who lowered that flag?"

A moment of silence followed. The Colonel spoke with increasing rapidity.

"Who lowered that flag? The man who did it must answer to me!"

Some one behind him moved, and the Colonel turned, confronting Norman.

"I did it, Governor," was the quiet answer.

"You?" the father gasped.

"Yes," said the even, firm voice.

"Haul that red rag down and raise the flag back to its place!" The Colonel's voice was low and thick with rage.

Elena put her hand on his arm and said gently:

"Guardie!"

"Will you do it?" he firmly asked, ignoring Elena, and holding Norman with his gaze.

The young man hesitated an instant, met his father's look with a deadly straight stare, and slowly replied:

"I will not."

A smothered cry from Barbara, half joy, half pain, was the only sound that followed, until the Colonel said:

"Then I'll do it for you."

Amid a dead silence he hauled down the red flag, threw it on the floor, boldly stamped on it, made fast the Stars and Stripes, and quickly raised it to the top of its staff. He turned to the crowd, and in clear-cut, sharp tones of command shouted:

"This is my flag, my house, my lawn. Get off it! And do it quick!"

As the crowd hastened away, he turned to Norman:

"You and I must come to an understanding at once, young man," he said, with angry emphasis.

"I'll meet you in the library in thirty minutes," was Norman's firm reply as he led Barbara from the platform and joined the retreating throng.

CHAPTER VII
FATHER AND SON

The Colonel paced the floor of his library with increasing anger as he waited the return of Norman. Never in his life had his whole being been so abandoned to incontrollable rage. He had always been a man of fiery temper, but an iron will had held his temper in control.

His most intimate business associates had always found him suave, persuasive, and genial in every hour of trial. Never once had they heard a threat or an idle boast fall from his lips. He had the rare faculty of beating his enemies in a fight in which no quarter was asked or given, and coming out of it with his bitterest foe turned into a friend. This was one of the secrets of his fortune – an instinctive leadership among powerful men.

For the first time he realized that he had challenged the one man in all his personal acquaintance about whose character he knew nothing – his own son. For the first time he realized that they were strangers. He had been absorbed in the big affairs of life. He had taken the boy for granted. Since the death of his mother twelve years ago, Norman had spent most of his time at school.

The Colonel had always been in command. His word had been law for so many years, it brought him up with a disagreeable start to find that the one man with whom his life was bound, and in whom his hopes centred, could dare thus to defy and flaunt his wishes. It was the most disgusting, enraging fact he had ever encountered. The longer he confronted the situation the more furious and blind his anger became.

Elena had timidly entered the room, and stood watching him gravely before she spoke.

"Has he returned from that woman yet?" the Colonel asked with sudden energy.

"No, and I hope he will stay all day," she answered slowly.

"But he won't," the father snapped.

"I'm sure he will not," the girl sighed. "I don't like you to-day, Guardie."

"You, too, side with these fanatics then?"

"No. I hate them – hate everything they say and do and stand for. I loathe the very sight of them. But you were unfair to Norman."

"Unfair? How?"

"You allowed him the widest liberty to do as he pleased, think as he pleased, associate with whom he pleased, and then all of a sudden you sprang on that platform and insulted him before his invited guests."

"How could I dream that he would commit such an act of insane treason before my very eyes?"

"You make no allowance for the spell of Barbara Bozenta's eloquence. I don't like her, but she's a wonderful little woman, and I envy her her power over men."

"I'll end this folly to-day," was the Colonel's firm announcement.

"I'm not so sure," Elena warned.

"I'll show you!"

She came close and laid her hand on the Colonel's arm.

"Will you promise me one thing, Guardie?" she asked, tenderly.

The anger faded from the strong face, and his voice sank low.

"I'm afraid I've never been able to refuse you anything, child. It's on your account, I think, I'm most angry with Norman to-day."

"You promise?" she repeated.

"Yes, what is it?" he said, bending to kiss her smooth, white forehead.

"Promise to put all anger out of your heart and talk to Norman as a father, not as an enemy – won't you?"

"An enemy?" the Colonel slowly asked.

"Yes. I thought you were going to strike him once. It would have been horrible. I never could have forgiven you for that. You've always been my hero, Guardie – I never saw you give way to anger before. I don't like it. You'll talk to him lovingly and tenderly as a father, won't you?"

"Yes, dear, for your sake, I will," he answered.

"Then I'll tell him to come. I asked him to wait outside until I saw you."

She turned and quickly left the room. In a moment Norman entered and stood facing his father.

The Colonel flushed with anger at sight of the insolence with which the younger man calmly surveyed him.

"Well, sir," the father said, at length, "have you nothing to say to me after what has occurred to-day?"

"I was under the impression that you had something to say to me," was the cool answer.

By an effort of will the older man crushed back an angry retort, smiled, and said:

"Sit down, please – I've a good deal to say to you."

Norman threw himself lazily into a chair, and continued to watch his father with a curious expression of half-amused contempt. The Colonel stood in silence, evidently struggling with his emotions, and feeling for the right word with which to begin.

Norman anticipated him.

"Honestly, now, Governor, just between us, don't you think you were a little bit absurd to-day?"

"Absurd?" his father broke in with rising accent.

"Just a little childish about a piece of red, white, and blue cloth?"

"Perhaps so, my boy," was the answer. "Just about as absurd as you were over the red rag you lifted in its place. Why did you do it?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.