

THOMAS DIXON

THE SINS OF THE
FATHER: A ROMANCE OF
THE SOUTH

Thomas Dixon

**The Sins of the Father:
A Romance of the South**

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Содержание

TO THE READER	5
Book One – Sin	6
CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	16
CHAPTER III	22
CHAPTER IV	25
CHAPTER V	30
CHAPTER VI	36
CHAPTER VII	39
CHAPTER VIII	42
CHAPTER IX	46
CHAPTER X	48
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	51

Thomas Dixon

The Sins of the Father: A Romance of the South

TO THE READER

I wish it understood that I have not used in this novel the private life of Captain Randolph Shotwell, to whom this book is dedicated. I have drawn the character of my central figure from the authentic personal history of Major Daniel Norton himself, a distinguished citizen of the far South, with whom I was intimately acquainted for many years.

THOMAS DIXON.

NEW YORK

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Book One – Sin

CHAPTER I THE WOMAN IN YELLOW

The young editor of *The Daily Eagle and Phoenix* straightened his tall figure from the pile of papers that smothered his desk, glanced at his foreman who stood waiting, and spoke in the quiet drawl he always used when excited:

"Just a moment – 'til I read this over – "

The foreman nodded.

He scanned the scrawled pencil manuscript twice and handed it up without changing a letter:

"Set the title in heavy black-faced caps —*black*– the blackest you've got."

He read the title over again musingly, his strong mouth closing with a snap at its finish:

THE BLACK LEAGUE AND THE KU KLUX KLAN

DOWN WITH ALL SECRET SOCIETIES

The foreman took the manuscript with a laugh:

"You've certainly got 'em guessing, major – "

"Who?"

"Everybody. We've all been thinking until these editorials began that you were a leader of the Klan."

A smile played about the corners of the deep-set brown eyes as he swung carelessly back to his desk and waved the printer to his task with a friendly sweep of his long arm:

"Let 'em think again!"

A shout in the Court House Square across the narrow street caused him to lift his head with a frown:

"Salesday – of course – the first Monday – doomsday for the conquered South – God, the horror of it all!"

He laid his pencil down, walked to the window and looked out on the crowd of slouching loafers as they gathered around the auctioneer's block. The negroes outnumbered the whites two to one.

A greasy, loud-mouthed negro, as black as ink, was the auctioneer.

"Well, gemmen an' feller citizens," he began pompously, "de fust piece er property I got ter sell hain't no property 'tall – hit's dese po' folks fum de County Po' House. Fetch 'em up agin de wall so de bidders can see 'em – "

He paused and a black court attendant led out and placed in line against the weatherbeaten walls fifty or sixty inmates of the County Poor House – all of them white men and women. Most of them were over seventy years old, and one with the quickest step and brightest eye, a little man of eighty-four with snow-white hair and beard, was the son of a hero of the American Revolution. The women were bareheaded and the blazing Southern sun of August beat down piteously on their pinched faces.

The young editor's fists slowly clinched and his breath came in a deep quivering draught. He watched as in a trance. He had seen four years' service in the bloodiest war in history – seen thousands swept into eternity from a single battlefield without a tear. He had witnessed the sufferings of the wounded and dying until it became the routine of a day's work. Yet no event of all that fierce and

terrible struggle had stirred his soul as the scene he was now witnessing – not even the tragic end of his father, the editor of the *Daily Eagle*– who had been burned to death in the building when Sherman's army swept the land with fire and sword. The younger man had never referred to this except in a brief, hopeful editorial in the newly christened *Eagle and Phoenix*, which he literally built on the ashes of the old paper. He had no unkind word for General Sherman or his army. It was war, and a soldier knew what that meant. He would have done the same thing under similar conditions.

Now he was brushing a tear from his cheek. A reporter at work in the adjoining room watched him curiously. He had never before thought him capable of such an emotion. A brilliant and powerful editor, he had made his paper the one authoritative organ of the white race. In the midst of riot, revolution and counter revolution his voice had the clear ring of a bugle call to battle. There was never a note of hesitation, of uncertainty or of compromise. In the fierce white heat of an unconquered spirit, he had fused the souls of his people as one. At this moment he was the one man hated and feared most by the negroid government in power, the one man most admired and trusted by the white race.

And he was young – very young – yet he had lived a life so packed with tragic events no one ever guessed his real age, twenty-four. People took him to be more than thirty and the few threads of gray about his temples, added to the impression of age and dignity. He was not handsome in the conventional sense. His figure was too tall, his cheek bones too high, the nostrils too large and his eyebrows too heavy. His great height, six feet three, invariably made him appear gaunt and serious. Though he had served the entire four years in the Confederate army, entering a private in the ranks at eighteen, emerging a major in command of a shattered regiment at twenty-two, his figure did not convey the impression of military training. He walked easily, with the long, loose stride of the Southerner, his shoulders slightly stooped from the habit of incessant reading.

He was lifting his broad shoulders now in an ominous way as he folded his clenched fists behind his back and listened to the negro auctioneer.

"Come now, gemmens," he went on; "what's de lowes' offer ye gwine ter start me fer dese folks? 'Member, now, de lowes' bid gets 'em, not de highes'! 'Fore de war de black man wuz put on de block an' sole ter de *highes'* bidder! Times is changed – "

"Yas, Lawd!" shouted a negro woman.

"Times is changed, I tells ye! – now I gwine ter sell dese po' white folks ter de lowes' bidder. Whosomever'll take de Po' House and bode 'em fer de least money gits de whole bunch. An' you has de right ter make 'em all work de Po' farm. Dey kin work, too, an' don' ye fergit it. Dese here ones I fotch out here ter show ye is all soun' in wind and limb. De bedridden ones ain't here. Dey ain't but six er dem. What's de lowes' bid now, gemmens, yer gwine ter gimme ter bode 'em by de month? Look 'em all over, gemmens, I warrants 'em ter be sound in wind an' limb. Sound in wind an' limb."

The auctioneer's sonorous voice lingered on this phrase and repeated it again and again.

The watcher at the window turned away in disgust, walked back to his desk, sat down, fidgeted in his seat, rose and returned to the window in time to hear the cry:

"An' sold to Mister Abum Russ fer fo' dollars a month!"

Could it be possible that he heard aright? Abe Russ the keeper to the poor! – a drunkard, wife beater, and midnight prowler. His father before him, "Devil Tom Russ," had been a notorious character, yet he had at least one redeeming quality that saved him from contempt – a keen sense of humor. He had made his living on a ten-acre red hill farm and never used a horse or an ox. He hitched himself to the plow and made Abe seize the handles. This strange team worked the fields. No matter how hard the day's task the elder Russ never quite lost his humorous view of life. When the boy, tired and thirsty, would stop and go to the spring for water, a favorite trick of his was to place a piece of paper or a chunk of wood in the furrow a few yards ahead. When the boy returned and they approached this object, the old man would stop, lift his head and snort, back and fill, frisk and caper, plunge and kick, and finally break and run, tearing over the fields like a maniac, dragging the plow

after him with the breathless boy clinging to the handles. He would then quietly unhitch himself and thrash Abe within an inch of his life for being so careless as to allow a horse to run away with him.

But Abe grew up without a trace of his father's sense of humor, picked out the strongest girl he could find for a wife and hitched her to the plow! And he permitted no pranks to enliven the tedium of work except the amusement he allowed himself of beating her at mealtimes after she had cooked his food.

He had now turned politician, joined the Loyal Black League and was the successful bidder for Keeper of the Poor. It was incredible!

The watcher was roused from his painful reverie by a reporter's voice:

"I think there's a man waiting in the hall to see you, sir."

"Who is it?"

The reporter smiled:

"Mr. Bob Peeler."

"What on earth can that old scoundrel want with me? All right – show him in."

The editor was busy writing when Mr. Peeler entered the room furtively. He was coarse, heavy and fifty years old. His red hair hung in tangled locks below his ears and a bloated double chin lapped his collar. His legs were slightly bowed from his favorite mode of travel on horseback astride a huge stallion trapped with tin and brass bespangled saddle. His supposed business was farming and the raising of blooded horses. As a matter of fact, the farm was in the hands of tenants and gambling was his real work.

Of late he had been displaying a hankering for negro politics. A few weeks before he had created a sensation by applying to the clerk of the court for a license to marry his mulatto housekeeper. It was common report that this woman was the mother of a beautiful octoroon daughter with hair exactly the color of old Peeler's. Few people had seen her. She had been away at school since her tenth year.

The young editor suddenly wheeled in his chair and spoke with quick emphasis:

"Mr. Peeler, I believe?"

The visitor's face lighted with a maudlin attempt at politeness:

"Yes, sir; yes, sir! – and I'm shore glad to meet you, Major Norton!"

He came forward briskly, extending his fat mottled hand.

Norton quietly ignored the offer by placing a chair beside his desk:

"Have a seat, Mr. Peeler."

The heavy figure flopped into the chair:

"I want to ask your advice, major, about a little secret matter" – he glanced toward the door leading into the reporters' room.

The editor rose, closed the door and resumed his seat:

"Well, sir; how can I serve you?"

The visitor fumbled in his coat pocket and drew out a crumpled piece of paper which he fingered gingerly:

"I've been readin' your editorials agin' secret societies, major, and I like 'em – that's why I made up my mind to put my trust in you – "

"Why, I thought you were a member of the Loyal Black League, Mr. Peeler?"

"No, sir – it's a mistake, sir," was the smooth lying answer. "I hain't got nothin' to do with no secret society. I hate 'em all – just run your eye over that, major."

He extended the crumpled piece of paper on which was scrawled in boyish writing:

"We hear you want to marry a nigger. Our advice is to leave this country for the more congenial climate of Africa.

"By order of the Grand Cyclops, ku klux klan."

The young editor studied the scrawl in surprise:

"A silly prank of schoolboys!" he said at length.

"You think that's all?" Peeler asked dubiously.

"Certainly. The Ku Klux Klan have more important tasks on hand just now. No man in their authority sent that to you. Their orders are sealed in red ink with a crossbones and skull. I've seen several of them. Pay no attention to this – it's a fake."

"I don't think so, major – just wait a minute, I'll show you something worse than a red-ink crossbones and skull."

Old Peeler tipped to the door leading into the hallway, opened it, peered out and waved his fat hand, beckoning someone to enter.

The voice of a woman was heard outside protesting:

"No – no – I'll stay here – "

Peeler caught her by the arm and drew her within:

"This is Lucy, my housekeeper, major."

The editor looked in surprise at the slender, graceful figure of the mulatto. He had pictured her coarse and heavy. He saw instead a face of the clean-cut Aryan type with scarcely a trace of negroid character. Only the thick curling hair, shining black eyes and deep yellow skin betrayed the African mother.

Peeler's eyes were fixed in a tense stare on a small bundle she carried. His voice was a queer muffled tremor as he slowly said:

"Unwrap the thing and show it to him."

The woman looked at the editor and smiled contemptuously, showing two rows of perfect teeth, as she slowly drew the brown wrapper from a strange object which she placed on the desk.

The editor picked the thing up, looked at it and laughed.

It was a tiny pine coffin about six inches long and two inches wide. A piece of glass was fitted into the upper half of the lid and beneath the glass was placed a single tube rose whose peculiar penetrating odor already filled the room.

Peeler mopped the perspiration from his brow.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he asked in an awed whisper.

In spite of an effort at self-control, Norton broke into a peal of laughter:

"It does look serious, doesn't it?"

"Serious ain't no word for it, sir! It not only looks like death, but I'm damned if it don't smell like it – smell it!"

"So it does," the editor agreed, lifting the box and breathing the perfume of the pale little flower.

"And that ain't all," Peeler whispered, "look inside of it."

He opened the lid and drew out a tightly folded scrap of paper on which was written in pencil the words:

"You lying, hypocritical, blaspheming old scoundrel – unless you leave the country within forty-eight hours, this coffin will be large enough to hold all we'll leave of you.

K. K. K."

The editor frowned and then smiled.

"All a joke, Peeler," he said reassuringly.

But Peeler was not convinced. He leaned close and his whiskey-laden breath seemed to fill the room as his fat finger rested on the word "blaspheming:"

"I don't like that word, major; it sounds like a preacher had something to do with the writin' of it. You know I've been a tough customer in my day and I used to cuss the preachers in this county somethin' frightful. Now, ye see, if they should be in this Ku Klux Klan – I ain't er skeered er their hell hereafter, but they sho' might give me a taste in this world of what they think's comin' to me in

the next. I tell you that thing makes the cold chills run down my back. Now, major, I reckon you're about the level-headest and the most influential man in the county – the question is, what shall I do to be saved?"

Again Norton laughed:

"Nothing. It's a joke, I tell you – "

"But the Ku Klux Klan ain't no joke!" persisted Peeler. "More than a thousand of 'em – some say five thousand – paraded the county two weeks ago. A hundred of 'em passed my house. I saw their white shrouds glisten in the moonlight. I said my prayers that night! I says to myself, if it don't do no good, at least it can't do no harm. I tell you, the Klan's no joke. If you think so, take a walk through that crowd in the Square to-day and see how quiet they are. Last court day every nigger that could holler was makin' a speech yellin' that old Thad Stevens was goin' to hang Andy Johnson, the President, from the White House porch, take every foot of land from the rebels and give it to the Loyal Black League. Now, by gum, there's a strange peace in Israel! I felt it this mornin' as I walked through them crowds – and comin' back to this coffin, major, the question is – what shall I do to be saved?"

"Go home and forget about it," was the smiling answer. "The Klan didn't send that thing to you or write that message."

"You think not?"

"I know they didn't. It's a forgery. A trick of some devilish boys."

Peeler scratched his red head:

"I'm glad you think so, major. I'm a thousand times obliged to you, sir. I'll sleep better to-night after this talk."

"Would you mind leaving this little gift with me, Peeler?" Norton asked, examining the neat workmanship of the coffin.

"Certainly – certainly, major, keep it. Keep it and more than welcome! It's a gift I don't crave, sir. I'll feel better to know you've got it."

The yellow woman waited beside the door until Peeler had passed out, bowed her thanks, turned and followed her master at a respectful distance.

The editor watched them cross the street with a look of loathing, muttering slowly beneath his breath:

"Oh, my country, what a problem – what a problem!"

He turned again to his desk and forgot his burden in the joy of work. He loved this work. It called for the best that's in the strongest man. It was a man's work for men. When he struck a blow he saw the dent of his hammer on the iron, and heard it ring to the limits of the state.

Dimly aware that some one had entered his room unannounced, he looked up, sprang to his feet and extended his hand in hearty greeting to a stalwart farmer who stood smiling into his face:

"Hello, MacArthur!"

"Hello, my captain! You know you weren't a major long enough for me to get used to it – and it sounds too old for you anyhow – "

"And how's the best sergeant that ever walloped a recruit?"

"Bully," was the hearty answer.

The young editor drew his old comrade in arms down into his chair and sat on the table facing him:

"And how's the wife and kids, Mac?"

"Bully," he repeated evenly and then looked up with a puzzled expression.

"Look here, Bud," he began quietly, "you've got me up a tree. These editorials in *The Eagle and Phoenix* cussin' the Klan – "

"You don't like them?"

"Not a little wee bit!"

The editor smiled:

"You've got Scotch blood in you, Mac – that's what's the matter with you – "

"Same to you, sir."

"But my great-great-grandmother was a Huguenot and the French, you know, had a saving sense of humor. The Scotch are thick, Mac!"

"Well, I'm too thick to know what you mean by lambastin' our only salvation. The Ku Klux Klan have had just one parade – and there hasn't been a barn burnt in this county or a white woman scared since, and every nigger I've met to-day has taken off his hat – "

"Are you a member of the Klan, Mac?" The question was asked with his face turned away.

The farmer hesitated, looked up at the ceiling and quietly answered:

"None of your business – and that's neither here nor there – you know that every nigger is organized in that secret Black League, grinning and whispering its signs and passwords – you know that they've already begun to grip the throats of our women. The Klan's the only way to save this country from hell – what do you mean by jumpin' on it?"

"The Black League's a bad thing, Mac, and the Klan's a bad thing – "

"All right – still you've got to fight the devil with fire – "

"You don't say so?" the editor said, while a queer smile played around his serious mouth.

"Yes, by golly, I do say so," the farmer went on with increasing warmth, "and what I can't understand is how you're against 'em. You're a leader. You're a soldier – the bravest that ever led his men into the jaws of death – I know, for I've been with you – and I just come down here to-day to ask you the plain question, what do you mean?"

"The Klan *is* a band of lawless night raiders, isn't it?"

"Oh, you make me tired! What are we to do without 'em, that's the question?"

"Scotch! That's the trouble with you" – the young editor answered carelessly. "Have you a pin?"

The rugged figure suddenly straightened as though a bolt of lightning had shot down his spine.

"What's – what's that?" he gasped.

"I merely asked, have you a pin?" was the even answer, as Norton touched the right lapel of his coat with his right hand.

The farmer hesitated a moment, and then slowly ran three trembling fingers of his left hand over the left lapel of his coat, replying:

"I'm afraid not."

He looked at Norton a moment and turned pale. He had been given and had returned the signs of the Klan. It might have been an accident. The rugged face was a study of eager intensity as he put his friend to the test that would tell. He slowly thrust the fingers of his right hand into the right pocket of his trousers, the thumb protruding.

Norton quietly answered in the same way with his left hand.

The farmer looked into the smiling brown eyes of his commander for a moment and his own filled with tears. He sprang forward and grasped the outstretched hand:

"Dan Norton! I said last night to my God that you couldn't be against us! And so I came to ask – oh, why – why've you been foolin' with me?"

The editor tenderly slipped his arm around his old comrade and whispered:

"The cunning of the fox and the courage of the lion now, Mac! It was easy for our boys to die in battle while guns were thundering, fifes screaming, drums beating and the banners waving. You and I have something harder to do – we've got to live – our watchword, '*The cunning of the fox and the courage of the lion!*' I've some dangerous work to do pretty soon. The little Scalawag Governor is getting ready for us – "

"I want that job!" MacArthur cried eagerly.

"I'll let you know when the time comes."

The farmer smiled:

"I *am* a Scotchman – ain't I?"

"And a good one, too!"

With his hand on the door, the rugged face aflame with patriotic fire, he slowly repeated:

"The cunning of the fox and the courage of the lion! – And by the living God, we'll win this time, boy!"

Norton heard him laugh aloud as he hurried down the stairs. Gazing again from his window at the black clouds of negroes floating across the Square, he slowly muttered:

"Yes, we'll win this time! – but twenty years from now – I wonder!"

He took up the little black coffin and smiled at the perfection of its workmanship:

"I think I know the young gentleman who made that and he may give me trouble."

He thrust the thing into a drawer, seized his hat, strolled down a side street and slowly passed the cabinet shop of the workman whom he suspected. It was closed. Evidently the master had business outside. It was barely possible, of course, that he had gone to the galleries of the Capitol to hear the long-expected message of the Governor against the Klan. The galleries had been packed for the past two sessions in anticipation of this threatened message. The Capital city was only a town of five thousand white inhabitants and four thousand blacks. Rumors of impending political movements flew from house to house with the swiftness of village gossip.

He walked to the Capitol building by a quiet street. As he passed through the echoing corridor the rotund figure of Schlitz, the Carpetbagger, leader of the House of Representatives, emerged from the Governor's office.

The red face flushed a purple hue as his eye rested on his arch-enemy of the *Eagle and Phoenix*. He tried to smile and nodded to Norton. His smile was answered by a cold stare and a quickened step.

Schlitz had been a teamster's scullion in the Union Army. He was not even an army cook, but a servant of servants. He was now the master of the Legislature of a great Southern state and controlled its black, ignorant members with a snap of his bloated fingers. There was but one man Norton loathed with greater intensity and that was the shrewd little Scalawag Governor, the native traitor who had betrayed his people to win office. A conference of these two cronies was always an ill omen for the state.

He hurried up the winding stairs, pushed his way into a corner of the crowded galleries from which he could see every face and searched in vain for his young workman.

He stood for a moment, looked down on the floor of the House and watched a Black Parliament at work making laws to govern the children of the men who had created the Republic – watched them through fetid smoke, the vapors of stale whiskey and the deafening roar of half-drunken brutes as they voted millions in taxes, their leaders had already stolen.

The red blood rushed to his cheeks and the big veins on his slender swarthy neck stood out for a moment like drawn cords.

He hurried down to the Court House Square, walked with long, leisurely stride through the thinning crowds, and paused before a vacant lot on the opposite side of the street. A dozen or more horses were still tied to the racks provided for the accommodation of countrymen.

"Funny," he muttered, "farmers start home before sundown, and it's dusk – I wonder if it's possible!"

He crossed the street, strolled carelessly among the horses and noted that their saddles had not been removed and the still more significant fact that their saddle blankets were unusually thick. Only an eye trained to observe this fact would have noticed it. He lifted the edge of one of the blankets and saw the white and scarlet edges of a Klan costume. It was true. The young dare-devil who had sent that message to old Peeler had planned an unauthorized raid. Only a crowd of youngsters bent on a night's fun, he knew; and yet the act at this moment meant certain anarchy unless he nipped it in the bud. The Klan was a dangerous institution. Its only salvation lay in the absolute obedience of its members to the orders of an intelligent and patriotic chief. Unless the word of that chief remained the sole law of its life, a reign of terror by irresponsible fools would follow at once. As commander

of the Klan in his county he must subdue this lawless element. It must be done with an iron hand and done immediately or it would be too late. His decision to act was instantaneous.

He sent a message to his wife that he couldn't get home for supper, locked his door and in three hours finished his day's work. There was ample time to head these boys off before they reached old Peeler's house. They couldn't start before eleven, yet he would take no chances. He determined to arrive an hour ahead of them.

The night was gloriously beautiful – a clear star-gemmed sky in the full tide of a Southern summer, the first week in August. He paused inside the gate of his home and drank for a moment the perfume of the roses on the lawn. The light from the window of his wife's room poured a mellow flood of welcome through the shadows beside the white, fluted columns. This home of his father's was all the wreck of war had left him and his heart gave a throb of joy to-night that it was his.

Behind the room where the delicate wife lay, a petted invalid, was the nursery. His baby boy was there, nestling in the arms of the black mammy who had nursed him twenty odd years ago. He could hear the soft crooning of her dear old voice singing the child to sleep. The heart of the young father swelled with pride. He loved his frail little wife with a deep, tender passion, but this big rosy-cheeked, laughing boy, which she had given him six months ago, he fairly worshipped.

He stopped again under the nursery window and listened to the music of the cradle. The old lullaby had waked a mocking bird in a magnolia beside the porch and he was answering her plaintive wail with a thrilling love song. By the strange law of contrast, his memory flashed over the fields of death he had trodden in the long war.

"What does it matter after all, these wars and revolutions, if God only brings with each new generation a nobler breed of men!"

He tipped softly past the window lest his footfall disturb the loved ones above, hurried to the stable, saddled his horse and slowly rode through the quiet streets of the town. On clearing the last clump of negro cabins on the outskirts his pace quickened to a gallop.

He stopped in the edge of the woods at the gate which opened from Peeler's farm on the main road. The boys would have to enter here. He would stop them at this spot.

The solemn beauty of the night stirred his soul to visions of the future, and the coming battle which his Klan must fight for the mastery of the state. The chirp of crickets, the song of katydids and the flash of fireflies became the martial music and the flaming torches of triumphant hosts he saw marching to certain victory. But the Klan he was leading was a wild horse that must be broken to the bit or both horse and rider would plunge to ruin.

There would be at least twenty or thirty of these young marauders to-night. If they should unite in defying his authority it would be a serious and dangerous situation. Somebody might be killed. And yet he waited without a fear of the outcome. He had faced odds before. He loved a battle when the enemy outnumbered him two to one. It stirred his blood. He had ridden with Forrest one night at the head of four hundred daring, ragged veterans, surrounded a crack Union regiment at two o'clock in the morning, and forced their commander to surrender 1800 men before he discovered the real strength of the attacking force. It stirred his blood to-night to know that General Forrest was the Commander-in-Chief of his own daring Clansmen.

Half an hour passed without a sign of the youngsters. He grew uneasy. Could they have dared to ride so early that they had reached the house before his arrival? He must know at once. He opened the gate and galloped down the narrow track at a furious pace.

A hundred yards from Peeler's front gate he drew rein and listened. A horse neighed in the woods, and the piercing shriek of a woman left nothing to doubt. They were already in the midst of their dangerous comedy.

He pressed cautiously toward the gate, riding in the shadows of the overhanging trees. They were dragging old Peeler across the yard toward the roadway, followed by the pleading voice of a woman begging for his worthless life.

Realizing that the raid was now an accomplished fact, Norton waited to see what the young fools were going to do. He was not long in doubt. They dragged their panting, perspiring victim into the edge of the woods, tied him to a sapling and bared his back. The leader stepped forward holding a lighted torch whose flickering flames made an unearthly picture of the distorted features and bulging eyes.

"Mr. Peeler," began the solemn muffled voice behind the cloth mask, "for your many sins and blasphemies against God and man the preachers of this county have assembled to-night to call you to repentance – "

The terror-stricken eyes bulged further and the fat neck twisted in an effort to see how many ghastly figures surrounded him, as he gasped:

"Oh, Lord – oh, hell – are you all preachers?"

"All!" was the solemn echo from each sepulchral figure.

"Then I'm a goner – that coffin's too big – "

"Yea, verily, there'll be nothing left when we get through – Selah!" solemnly cried the leader.

"But, say, look here, brethren," Peeler pleaded between shattering teeth, "can't we compromise this thing? I'll repent and join the church. And how'll a contribution of fifty dollars each strike you? Now what do you say to that?"

The coward's voice had melted into a pious whine.

The leader selected a switch from the bundle extended by a shrouded figure and without a word began to lay on. Peeler's screams could be heard a mile.

Norton allowed them to give him a dozen lashes and spurred his horse into the crowd. There was a wild scramble to cover and most of the boys leaped to their saddles. Three white figures resolutely stood their ground.

"What's the meaning of this, sir?" Norton sternly demanded of the man who still held the switch.

"Just a little fun, major," was the sheepish answer.

"A dangerous piece of business."

"For God's sake, save me, Major Norton!" Peeler cried, suddenly waking from the spell of fear. "They've got me, sir – and it's just like I told you, they're all preachers – I'm a goner!"

Norton sprang from his horse and faced the three white figures.

"Who's in command of this crowd?"

"I am, sir!" came the quick answer from a stalwart masquerader who suddenly stepped from the shadows.

Norton recognized the young cabinet-maker's voice, and spoke in low tense tones:

"By whose authority are you using these disguises, to-night?"

"It's none of your business!"

The tall sinewy figure suddenly stiffened, stepped close and peered into the eyes of the speaker's mask:

"Does my word go here to-night or must I call out a division of the Klan?"

A moment's hesitation and the eyes behind the mask fell:

"All right, sir – nothing but a boyish frolic," muttered the leader apologetically.

"Let this be the end of such nonsense," Norton said with a quiet drawl. "If I catch you fellows on a raid like this again I'll hang your leader to the first limb I find – good night."

A whistle blew and the beat of horses' hoofs along the narrow road told their hurried retreat.

Norton loosed the cords and led old Peeler to his house. As the fat, wobbling legs mounted the steps the younger man paused at a sound from behind and before he could turn a girl sprang from the shadows into his arms, and slipped to her knees, sobbing hysterically:

"Save me! – they're going to beat me – they'll beat me to death – don't let them – please – please don't let them!"

By the light from the window he saw that her hair was a deep rich red with the slightest tendency to curl and her wide dilated eyes a soft greenish grey.

He was too astonished to speak for a moment and Peeler hastened to say:

"That's our little gal, Cleo – that is – I – mean – of – course – it's Lucy's gal! She's just home from school and she's scared to death and I don't blame her!"

The girl clung to her rescuer with desperate grip, pressing her trembling form close with each convulsive sob.

The man drew the soft arms down, held them a moment and looked into the dumb frightened face. He was surprised at her unusual beauty. Her skin was a delicate creamy yellow, almost white, and her cheeks were tinged with the brownish red of ripe apple. As he looked in to her eyes he fancied that he saw a young leopardess from an African jungle looking at him through the lithe, graceful form of a Southern woman.

And then something happened in the shadows that stood out forever in his memory of that day as the turning point of his life.

Laughing at her fears, he suddenly lifted his hand and gently stroked the tangled red hair, smoothing it back from her forehead with a movement instinctive, and irresistible as he would have smoothed the fur of a yellow Persian kitten.

Surprised at his act, he turned without a word and left the place.

And all the way home, through the solemn starlit night, he brooded over the strange meeting with this extraordinary girl. He forgot his fight. One thing only stood out with increasing vividness – the curious and irresistible impulse that caused him to stroke her hair. Personally he had always loathed the Southern white man who stooped and crawled through the shadows to meet such women. She was a negress and he knew it, and yet the act was instinctive and irresistible.

Why?

He asked himself the question a hundred times, and the longer he faced it the angrier he became at his stupid folly. For hours he lay awake, seeing in the darkness only the face of this girl.

CHAPTER II

CLEO ENTERS

The conference of the carpetbagger with the little Governor proved more ominous than even Norton had feared. The blow struck was so daring, so swift and unexpected it stunned for a moment the entire white race.

When the editor reached his office on the second morning after the raid, his desk was piled with telegrams from every quarter of the state. The Governor had issued a proclamation disarming every white military company and by wire had demanded the immediate surrender of their rifles to the negro Adjutant-General. The same proclamation had created an equal number of negro companies who were to receive these guns and equipments.

The negroid state Government would thus command an armed black guard of fifty thousand men and leave the white race without protection.

Evidently His Excellency was a man of ambitions. It was rumored that he aspired to the Vice-Presidency and meant to win the honor by a campaign of such brilliance that the solid negro-ruled South would back him in the National Convention.

Beyond a doubt, this act was the first step in a daring attempt inspired by the radical fanatics in Congress to destroy the structure of white civilization in the South.

And the Governor's resources were apparently boundless. President Johnson, though a native Southerner, was a puppet now in the hands of his powerful enemies who dominated Congress. These men boldly proclaimed their purpose to make the South negro territory by confiscating the property of the whites and giving it to the negroes. Their bill to do this, House Bill Number Twenty-nine, introduced by the government leader, Thaddeus Stevens, was already in the calendar and Mr. Stevens was pressing for its passage with all the skill of a trained politician inspired by the fiercest hate. The army had been sent back into the prostrate South to enforce the edicts of Congress and the negro state government could command all the Federal troops needed for any scheme concocted.

But the little Governor had a plan up his sleeve by which he proposed to startle even the Black Radical Administration at Washington. He was going to stamp out "Rebellion" without the aid of Federal troops, reserving his right to call them finally as a last resort. That they were ready at his nod gave him the moral support of their actual presence.

That any man born of a Southern mother and reared in the South under the conditions of refinement and culture, of the high ideals and the courage of the old régime, could fall so low as to use this proclamation, struck Norton at first as impossible. He refused to believe it. There must be some misunderstanding. He sent a messenger to the Capitol for a copy of the document before he was fully convinced.

And then he laughed in sheer desperation at the farce-tragedy to which the life of a brave people had been reduced. It was his business as an editor to record the daily history of the times. For a moment in imagination he stood outside his office and looked at his work.

"Future generations simply can't be made to believe it!" he exclaimed. "It's too grotesque to be credible even to-day."

It had never occurred to him that the war was unreasonable. Its passions, its crushing cost, its bloodstained fields, its frightful cruelties were of the great movements of the race from a lower to a higher order of life. Progress could only come through struggle. War was the struggle which had to be when two great moral forces clashed. One must die, the other live. A great issue had to be settled in the Civil War, an issue raised by the creation of the Constitution itself, an issue its creators had not dared to face. And each generation of compromisers and interpreters had put it off and put it off until at last the storm of thundering guns broke from a hundred hills at once.

It had never been decided by the builders of the Republic whether it should be a mighty unified nation or a loose aggregation of smaller sovereignties. Slavery made it necessary to decide this fundamental question on which the progress of America and the future leadership of the world hung.

He could see all this clearly now. He had felt it dimly true throughout every bloody scene of the war itself. And so he had closed the eyes of the lonely dying boy with a reverent smile. It was for his country. He had died for what he believed to be right and it was good. He had stood bareheaded in solemn court martials and sentenced deserters to death, led them out in the gray morning to be shot and ordered them dumped into shallow trenches without a doubt or a moment's hesitation. He had walked over battlefields at night and heard the groans of the wounded, the sighs of the dying, the curses of the living, beneath the silent stars and felt that in the end it must be good. It was war, and war, however cruel, was inevitable – the great High Court of Life and Death for the nations of earth.

But this base betrayal which had followed the honorable surrender of a brave, heroic army – this wanton humiliation of a ruined people by pot-house politicians – this war on the dead, the wounded, the dying, and their defenseless women – this enthronement of Savagery, Superstition, Cowardice and Brutality in high places where Courage and Honor and Chivalry had ruled – these vandals and camp followers and vultures provoking violence and exciting crime, set to rule a brave people who had risked all for a principle and lost – this was a nightmare; it was the reduction of human society to an absurdity!

For a moment he saw the world red. Anger, fierce and cruel, possessed him. The desire to kill gripped and strangled until he could scarcely breathe.

Nor did it occur to this man for a moment that he could separate his individual life from the life of his people. His paper was gaining in circulation daily. It was paying a good dividend now and would give his loved ones the luxuries he had dreamed for them. The greater the turmoil the greater his profits would be. And yet this idea never once flashed through his mind. His people were of his heart's blood. He had no life apart from them. Their joys were his, their sorrows his, their shame his. This proclamation of a traitor to his race struck him in the face as a direct personal insult. The hot shame of it found his soul.

When the first shock of surprise and indignation had spent itself, he hurried to answer his telegrams. His hand wrote now with the eager, sure touch of a master who knew his business. To every one he sent in substance the same message:

"Submit and await orders."

As he sat writing the fierce denunciation of this act of the Chief Executive of the state, he forgot his bitterness in the thrill of life that meant each day a new adventure. He was living in an age whose simple record must remain more incredible than the tales of the Arabian Nights. And the spell of its stirring call was now upon him.

The drama had its comedy moments, too. He could but laugh at the sorry figures the little puppets cut who were strutting for a day in pomp and splendor. Their end was as sure as the sweep of eternal law. Water could not be made to run up hill by the proclamation of a Governor.

He had made up his mind within an hour to give the Scalawag a return blow that would be more swift and surprising than his own. On the little man's reception of that counter stroke would hang the destiny of his administration and the history of the state for the next generation.

On the day the white military companies surrendered their arms to their negro successors something happened that was not on the programme of the Governor.

The Ku Klux Klan held its second grand parade. It was not merely a dress affair. A swift and silent army of drilled, desperate men, armed and disguised, moved with the precision of clockwork at the command of one mind. At a given hour the armory of every negro military company in the state was broken open and its guns recovered by the white and scarlet cavalry of the "Invisible Empire."

Within the next hour every individual negro in the state known to be in possession of a gun or pistol was disarmed. Resistance was futile. The attack was so sudden and so unexpected, the attacking

party so overwhelming at the moment, each black man surrendered without a blow and a successful revolution was accomplished in a night without a shot or the loss of a life.

Next morning the Governor paced the floor of his office in the Capitol with the rage of a maddened beast, and Schlitz, the Carpetbagger, was summoned for a second council of war. It proved to be a very important meeting in the history of His Excellency.

The editor sat at his desk that day smiling in quiet triumph as he read the facetious reports wired by his faithful lieutenants from every district of the Klan. An endless stream of callers had poured through his modest little room and prevented any attempt at writing. He had turned the columns over to his assistants and the sun was just sinking in a smother of purple glory when he turned from his window and began to write his leader for the day.

It was an easy task. A note of defiant power ran through a sarcastic warning to the Governor that found the quick. The editorial flashed with wit and stung with bitter epigram. And there was in his consciousness of power a touch of cruelty that should have warned the Scalawag against his next act of supreme folly.

But His Excellency had bad advisers, and the wheels of Fate moved swiftly toward the appointed end.

Norton wrote this editorial with a joy that gave its crisp sentences the ring of inspired leadership. He knew that every paper in the state read by white men and women would copy it and he already felt in his heart the reflex thrill of its call to his people.

He had just finished his revision of the last paragraph when a deep, laughing voice beside his chair slowly said:

"May I come in?"

He looked up with a start to find the tawny figure of the girl whose red hair he had stroked that night bowing and smiling. Her white, perfect teeth gleamed in the gathering twilight and her smile displayed two pretty dimples in the brownish red cheeks.

"I say, may I come in?" she repeated with a laugh.

"It strikes me you are pretty well in," Norton said good-humoredly.

"Yes, I didn't have any cards. So I came right up. It's getting dark and nobody saw me – "

The editor frowned and moved uneasily

"You're alone, aren't you?" she asked.

"The others have all gone to supper, I believe."

"Yes, I waited 'til they left. I watched from the Square 'til I saw them go."

"Why?" he asked sharply.

"I don't know. I reckon I was afraid of 'em."

"And you're not afraid of me?" he laughed.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I know you."

Norton smiled:

"You wish to see me?"

"Yes."

"Is there anything wrong at Mr. Peeler's?"

"No, I just came to thank you for what you did and see if you wouldn't let me work for you?"

"Work? Where – here?"

"Yes. I can keep the place clean. My mother said it was awful. And, honest, it's worse than I expected. It doesn't look like it's been cleaned in a year."

"I don't believe it has," the editor admitted.

"Let me keep it decent for you."

"Thanks, no. It seems more home-like this way."

"Must it be so dirty?" she asked, looking about the room and picking up the scattered papers from the floor.

Norton, watching her with indulgent amusement at her impudence, saw that she moved her young form with a rhythmic grace that was perfect. The simple calico dress, with a dainty little check, fitted her perfectly. It was cut low and square at the neck and showed the fine lines of a beautiful throat. Her arms were round and finely shaped and bare to an inch above the elbows. The body above the waistline was slender, and the sinuous free movement of her figure showed that she wore no corset. Her step was as light as a cat's and her voice full of good humor and the bubbling spirits of a perfectly healthy female animal.

His first impulse was to send her about her business with a word of dismissal. But when she laughed it was with such pleasant assurance and such faith in his friendliness it was impossible to be rude.

She picked up the last crumpled paper and laid it on a table beside the wall, turned and said softly:

"Well, if you don't want me to clean up for you, anyhow, I brought you some flowers for your room – they're outside."

She darted through the door and returned in a moment with an armful of roses.

"My mother let me cut them from our yard, and she told me to thank you for coming that night. They'd have killed us if you hadn't come."

"Nonsense, they wouldn't have touched either you or your mother!"

"Yes, they would, too. Goodness – haven't you anything to put the flowers in?"

She tipped softly about the room, holding the roses up and arranging them gracefully.

Norton watched her with a lazy amused interest. He couldn't shake off the impression that she was a sleek young animal, playful and irresponsible, that had strayed from home and wandered into his office. And he loved animals. He never passed a stray dog or a cat without a friendly word of greeting. He had often laid on his lounge at home, when tired, and watched a kitten play an hour with unflagging interest. Every movement of this girl's lithe young body suggested such a scene – especially the velvet tread of her light foot, and the delicate motions of her figure followed suddenly by a sinuous quick turn and a childish laugh or cry. The faint shadows of negro blood in her creamy skin and the purring gentleness of her voice seemed part of the gathering twilight. Her eyes were apparently twice the size as when first he saw them, and the pupils, dilated in the dusk, flashed with unusual brilliance.

She had wandered into the empty reporters' room without permission looking for a vase, came back and stood in the doorway laughing:

"This is the dirtiest place I ever got into in my life. Gracious! Isn't there a thing to put the flowers in?"

The editor, roused from his reveries, smiled and answered:

"Put them in the pitcher."

"Why, yes, of course, the pitcher!" she cried, rushing to the little washstand.

"Why, there isn't a drop of water in it – I'll go to the well and get some."

She seized the pitcher, laid the flowers down in the bowl, darted out the door and flew across the street to the well in the Court House Square.

The young editor walked carelessly to the window and watched her. She simply couldn't get into an ungraceful attitude. Every movement was instinct with vitality. She was alive to her finger tips. Her body swayed in perfect rhythmic unison with her round, bare arms as she turned the old-fashioned rope windlass, drew the bucket to the top and dropped it easily on the wet wooden lids that flapped back in place.

She was singing now a crooning, half-savage melody her mother had taught her. The low vibrant notes of her voice, deep and tender and quivering with a strange intensity, floated across the street

through the gathering shadows. The voice had none of the light girlish quality of her age of eighteen, but rather the full passionate power of a woman of twenty-five. The distance, the deepening shadows and the quiet of the town's lazy life, added to the dreamy effectiveness of the song.

"Beautiful!" the man exclaimed. "The negro race will give the world a great singer some day –"

And then for the first time in his life the paradox of his personal attitude toward this girl and his attitude in politics toward the black race struck him as curious. He had just finished an editorial in which he had met the aggressions of the negro and his allies with the fury, the scorn, the defiance, the unyielding ferocity with which the Anglo-Saxon conqueror has always treated his inferiors. And yet he was listening to the soft tones of this girl's voice with a smile as he watched with good-natured indulgence the light gleam mischievously from her impudent big eyes while she moved about his room.

Yet this was not to be wondered at. The history of the South and the history of slavery made such a paradox inevitable. The long association with the individual negro in the intimacy of home life had broken down the barriers of personal race repugnance. He had grown up with negro boys and girls as playmates. He had romped and wrestled with them. Every servant in every home he had ever known had been a negro. The first human face he remembered bending over his cradle was a negro woman's. He had fallen asleep in her arms times without number. He had found refuge there against his mother's stern commands and sobbed out on her breast the story of his fancied wrongs and always found consolation. "Mammy's darlin'" was always right – the world cruel and wrong! He had loved this old nurse since he could remember. She was now nursing his own and he would defend her with his life without a moment's hesitation.

And so it came about inevitably that while he had swung his white and scarlet legions of disguised Clansmen in solid line against the Governor and smashed his negro army without the loss of a single life, he was at the same moment proving himself defenseless against the silent and deadly purpose that had already shaped itself in the soul of this sleek, sensuous young animal. He was actually smiling with admiration at the beautiful picture he saw as she lifted the white pitcher, placed it on the crown of red hair, and crossed the street.

She was still softly singing as she entered the room and arranged the flowers in pretty confusion.

Norton had lighted his lamp and seated himself at his desk again. She came close and looked over his shoulder at the piles of papers.

"How on earth can you work in such a mess?" she asked with a laugh.

"Used to it," he answered without looking up from the final reading of his editorial.

"What's that you've written?"

The impudent greenish gray eyes bent closer.

"Oh, a little talk to the Governor –"

"I bet it's a hot one. Peeler says you don't like the Governor – read it to me!"

The editor looked up at the mischievous young face and laughed aloud:

"I'm afraid you wouldn't understand it."

The girl joined in the laugh and the dimples in the reddish brown cheeks looked prettier than ever.

"Maybe I wouldn't," she agreed.

He resumed his reading and she leaned over his chair until he felt the soft touch of her shoulder against his. She was staring at his paste-pot, extended her tapering, creamy finger and touched the paste.

"What in the world's that?" she cried, giggling again.

"Paste."

Another peal of silly laughter echoed through the room.

"Lord, I thought it was mush and milk – I thought it was your supper! – don't you eat no supper?"

"Sometimes."

The editor looked up with a slight frown and said:

"Run along now, child, I've got to work. And tell your mother I'm obliged for the flowers."

"I'm not going back home – "

"Why not?"

"I'm scared out there. I've come in town to live with my aunt."

"Well, tell her when you see her."

"Please let me clean this place up for you?" she pleaded.

"Not to-night."

"To-morrow morning, then? I'll come early and every morning – please – let me – it's all I can do to thank you. I'll do it a month just to show you how pretty I can keep it and then you can pay me if you want me. It's a bargain, isn't it?"

The editor smiled, hesitated, and said:

"All right – every morning at seven."

"Thank you, major – good night!"

She paused at the door and her white teeth gleamed in the shadows. She turned and tripped down the stairs, humming again the strangely appealing song she had sung at the well.

CHAPTER III

A BEAST AWAKES

Within a week Norton bitterly regretted the arrangement he had made with Cleo. Not because she had failed to do her work properly, but precisely because she was doing it so well. She had apparently made it the sole object of her daily thought and the only task to which she devoted her time.

He couldn't accustom his mind to the extraordinary neatness with which she kept the office. The clean floor, the careful arrangement of the chairs, the neat piles of exchanges laid on a table she had placed beside his desk, and the vase of fresh flowers he found each morning, were constant reminders of her personality which piqued his curiosity and disturbed his poise.

He had told her to come at seven every morning. It was his habit to reach the office and begin reading the exchanges by eight-thirty and he had not expected to encounter her there. She had always managed, however, to linger over her morning tasks until his arrival, and never failed to greet him pleasantly and ask if there were anything else she could do. She also insisted on coming at noon to fill his pitcher and again just before supper to change the water in the vase of flowers.

At this last call she always tried to engage him in a few words of small talk. At first this program made no impression on his busy brain except that she was trying to prove her value as a servant. Gradually, however, he began to notice that her dresses were cut with remarkable neatness for a girl of her position and that she showed a rare talent in selecting materials becoming to her creamy yellow skin and curling red hair.

He observed, too, that she had acquired the habit of hanging about his desk when finishing her tasks and had a queer way of looking at him and laughing.

She began to make him decidedly uncomfortable and he treated her with indifference. No matter how sullen the scowl with which he greeted her, she was always smiling and humming snatches of strange songs. He sought for an excuse to discharge her and could find none. She had the instincts of a perfect servant – intelligent, careful and loyal. She never blundered over the papers on his desk. She seemed to know instinctively what was worthless and what was valuable, and never made a mistake in rearranging the chaotic piles of stuff he left in his wake.

He thought once for just a moment of the possibility of her loyalty to the negro race. She might in that case prove a valuable spy to the Governor and his allies. He dismissed the idea as preposterous. She never associated with negroes if she could help it and apparently was as innocent as a babe of the nature of the terrific struggle in which he was engaged with the negroid government of the state.

And yet she disturbed him deeply and continuously, as deeply sometimes when absent as when present.

Why?

He asked himself the question again and again. Why should he dislike her? She did her work promptly and efficiently, and for the first time within his memory the building was really fit for human habitation.

At last he guessed the truth and it precipitated the first battle of his life with the beast that slumbered within. Feeling her physical nearness more acutely than usual at dusk and noting that she had paused in her task near his desk, he slowly lifted his eyes from the paper he was reading and, before she realized it, caught the look on her face when off guard. The girl was in love with him. It was as clear as day now that he had the key to her actions the past week. For this reason she had come and for this reason she was working with such patience and skill.

His first impulse was one of rage. He had little of the vanity of the male animal that struts before the female. His pet aversion was the man of his class who lowered himself to vulgar association with such girls. The fact that, at this time in the history of the South, such intrigues were common made his determination all the more bitter as a leader of his race to stand for its purity.

He suddenly swung in his chair, determined to dismiss her at once with as few words as possible. She leaped gracefully back with a girlish laugh, so soft, low and full of innocent surprise, the harsh words died on his lips.

"Lordy, major," she cried, "how you scared me! I thought you had a fit. Did a pin stick you – or maybe a flea bit you?"

She leaned against the mantel laughing, her white teeth gleaming.

He hesitated a moment, his eyes lingered on the graceful pose of her young figure, his ear caught the soft note of friendly tenderness in her voice and he was silent.

"What's the matter?" she asked, stepping closer.

"Nothing."

"Well, you made an awful fuss about it!"

"Just thought of something – suddenly – "

"I thought you were going to bite my head off and then that something bit you!"

Again she laughed and walked slowly to the door, her greenish eyes watching him with studied carelessness, as a cat a mouse. Every movement of her figure was music, her smile contagious, and, by a subtle mental telepathy, she knew that the man before her felt it, and her heart was singing a savage song of triumph. She could wait. She had everything to gain and nothing to lose. She belonged to the pariah world of the Negro. Her love was patient, joyous, insistent, unconquerable.

It was unusually joyous to-night because she felt without words that the mad desires that burned a living fire in every nerve of her young body had scorched the man she had marked her own from the moment she had first laid eyes on his serious, aristocratic face – for back of every hysterical cry that came from her lips that night in the shadows beside old Peeler's house lay the sinister purpose of a mad love that had leaped full grown from the depths of her powerful animal nature.

She paused in the doorway and softly said:

"Good night."

The tone of her voice was a caress and the bold eyes laughed a daring challenge straight into his. He stared at her a moment, flushed, turned pale and answered in a strained voice:

"Good night, Cleo."

But it was not a good night for him. It was a night never to be forgotten. Until after twelve he walked beneath the stars and fought the Beast – the Beast with a thousand heads and a thousand legs; the Beast that had been bred in the bone and sinew of generations of ancestors, wilful, cruel, courageous conquerors of the world. Before its ravenous demands the words of mother, teacher, priest and lawgiver were as chaff before the whirlwind – the Beast demanded his own! Peace came at last with the vision of a baby's laughing face peeping at him from the arms of a frail little mother.

He made up his mind and hurried home. He would get rid of this girl to-morrow and never again permit her shadow to cross his pathway. With other men of more sluggish temperament, position, dignity, the responsibility of leadership, the restraints of home and religion might be the guarantee of safety under such temptations. He didn't propose to risk it. He understood now why he was so nervous and distracted in her presence. The mere physical proximity to such a creature, vital, magnetic, unmoral, beautiful and daring, could only mean one thing to a man of his age and inheritance – a temptation so fierce that yielding could only be a question of time and opportunity.

And when he told her the next morning that she must not come again she was not surprised, but accepted his dismissal without a word of protest.

With a look of tenderness she merely said:

"I'm sorry."

"Yes," he went on curtly, "you annoy me; I can't write while you are puttering around, and I'm always afraid you'll disturb some of my papers."

She laughed in his face, a joyous, impudent, good-natured, ridiculous laugh, that said more eloquently than words:

"I understand your silly excuse. You're afraid of me. You're a big coward. Don't worry, I can wait. You'll come to me. And if not, I'll find you – for I shall be near – and now that you know and fear, I shall be very near!"

She moved shyly to the door and stood framed in its white woodwork, an appealing picture of dumb regret.

She had anticipated this from the first. And from the moment she threw the challenge into his eyes the night before, saw him flush and pale beneath it, she knew it must come at once, and was prepared. There was no use to plead and beg or argue. It would be a waste of breath with him in this mood.

Besides, she had already found a better plan.

So when he began to try to soften his harsh decision with kindly words she only smiled in the friendliest possible way, stepped back to his desk, extended her hand, and said:

"Please let me know if you need me. I'll do anything on earth for you, major. Good-by."

It was impossible to refuse the gracefully outstretched hand. The Southern man had been bred from the cradle to the most intimate and friendly personal relations with the black folks who were servants in the house. Yet the moment he touched her hand, felt its soft warm pressure and looked into the depths of her shining eyes he wished that he had sent her away with downright rudeness.

But it was impossible to be rude with this beautiful young animal that purred at his side. He started to say something harsh, she laughed and he laughed.

She held his hand clasped in hers for a moment and slowly said:

"I haven't done anything wrong, have I, major?"

"No."

"You are not mad at me for anything?"

"No, certainly not."

"I wonder why you won't let me work here?"

She looked about the room and back at him, speaking slowly, musingly, with an impudence that left little doubt in his mind that she suspected the real reason and was deliberately trying to tease him.

He flushed, hurriedly withdrew his hand and replied carelessly:

"You bother me – can't work when you're fooling around."

"All right, good-bye."

He turned to his work and she was gone. He was glad she was out of his sight and out of his life forever. He had been a fool to allow her in the building at all.

He could concentrate his mind now on his fight with the Governor.

CHAPTER IV THE ARREST

The time had come in Norton's fight when he was about to be put to a supreme test.

The Governor was preparing the most daring and sensational movement of his never-to-be-forgotten administration. The audacity and thoroughness with which the Klan had disarmed and made ridiculous his army of fifty thousand negroes was at first a stunning blow. In vain Schlitz stormed and pleaded for National aid.

"You must ask for Federal troops without a moment's delay," he urged desperately.

The Scalawag shook his head with quiet determination.

"Congress, under the iron rule of Stevens, will send them, I grant you – "

"Then why hesitate?"

"Because their coming would mean that I have been defeated on my own soil, that my administration of the state is a failure."

"Well, isn't it?"

"No; I'll make good my promises to the men in Washington who have backed me. They are preparing to impeach the President, remove him from office and appoint a dictator in his stead. I'll show them that I can play my part in the big drama, too. I am going to deliver this state bound hand and foot into their hands, with a triumphant negro electorate in the saddle, or I'll go down in ignominious defeat."

"You'll go down, all right – without those troops – mark my word," cried the Carpetbagger.

"All right, I'll go down flying my own flag."

"You're a fool!" Schlitz roared. "Union troops are our only hope!"

His Excellency kept his temper. The little ferret eyes beneath their bushy brows were drawn to narrow lines as he slowly said:

"On the other hand, my dear Schlitz, I don't think I could depend on Federal troops if they were here."

"No?" was the indignant sneer.

"Frankly I do not," was the even answer. "Federal officers have not shown themselves very keen about executing the orders of Reconstruction Governors. They have often pretended to execute them and in reality treated us with contempt. They hold, in brief, that they fought to preserve the Union, not to make negroes rule over white men! The task before us is not to their liking. I don't trust them for a moment. I have a better plan – "

"What?"

"I propose to raise immediately an army of fifty thousand loyal white men, arm and drill them without delay – "

"Where'll you get them?" Schlitz cried incredulously.

"I'll find them if I have to drag the gutters for every poor white scamp in the state. They'll be a tough lot, maybe, but they'll make good soldiers. A soldier is a man who obeys orders, draws his pay, and asks no questions – "

"And then what?"

"And then, sir! – "

The Governor's leathery little face flushed as he sprang to his feet and paced the floor of his office in intense excitement.

"I'll tell you what then!" Schlitz cried with scorn.

The pacing figure paused and eyed his tormentor, lifting his shaggy brows:

"Yes?"

"And then," the Carpetbagger answered, "the Ku Klux Klan will rise in a night, jump on your mob of ragamuffins, take their guns and kick them back into the gutter."

"Perhaps," the Governor said, musingly, "if I give them a chance! But I won't!"

"You won't? How can you prevent it?"

"Very simply. I'll issue a proclamation suspending the *writ of habeas corpus*—"

"But you have no right," Schlitz gasped. The ex-scullion had been studying law the past two years and aspired to the Supreme Court bench.

"My right is doubtful, but it will go in times of revolution. I'll suspend the *writ*, arrest the leaders of the Klan without warrant, put them in jail and hold them there without trial until the day after the election."

Schlitz's eyes danced as he sprang forward and extended his fat hand to the Scalawag:

"Governor, you're a great man! Only a great mind would dare such a plan. But do you think your life will be safe?"

The little figure was drawn erect and the ferret eyes flashed:

"The Governor of a mighty commonwealth – they wouldn't dare lift their little finger against me."

Schlitz shook his head dubiously.

"A pretty big job in times of peace – to suspend the civil law, order wholesale arrests without warrants by a ragged militia and hold your men without trial –"

"I like the job!" was the quick answer. "I'm going to show the smart young man who edits the paper in this town that he isn't running the universe."

Again the adventurer seized the hand of his chief:

"Governor, you're a great man! I take my hat off to you, sir."

His Excellency smiled, lifted his sloping shoulders, moistened his thin lips and whispered:

"Not a word now to a living soul until I strike –"

"I understand, sir, not a word," the Carpetbagger replied in low tones as he nervously fumbled his hat and edged his way out of the room.

The editor received the Governor's first move in the game with contempt. It was exactly what he had expected – this organization of white renegades, thieves, loafers, cut-throats, and deserters. It was the last resort of desperation. Every day, while these dirty ignorant recruits were being organized and drilled, he taunted the Governor over the personnel of his "Loyal" army. He began the publication of the history of its officers and men. These biographical stories were written with a droll humor that kept the whole state in a good-humored ripple of laughter and inspired the convention that nominated a complete white man's ticket to renewed enthusiasm.

And then the bolt from the blue – the Governor's act of supreme madness!

As the editor sat at his desk writing an editorial congratulating the state on the brilliant ticket that the white race had nominated and predicting its triumphant election, in spite of negroes, thieves, cut-throats, Scalawags and Carpetbaggers, a sudden commotion on the sidewalk in front of his office stopped his pencil in the midst of an unfinished word.

He walked to the window and looked out. By the flickering light of the street lamp he saw an excited crowd gathering in the street.

A company of the Governor's new guard had halted in front. An officer ripped off the palings from the picket fence beside the building and sent a squad of his men to the rear.

The tramp of heavy feet on the stairs was heard and the dirty troopers crowded into the editor's room, muskets in hand, cocked, and their fingers on the triggers.

Norton quietly drew the pencil from his ear, smiled at the mottled group of excited men, and spoke in his slow drawl:

"And why this excitement, gentlemen?"

The captain stepped forward:

"Are you Major Daniel Norton?"

"I am, sir."

"You're my prisoner."

"Show your warrant!" was the quick challenge.

"I don't need one, sir."

"Indeed! And since when is this state under martial law?"

"Will you go peaceable?" the captain asked roughly.

"When I know by whose authority you make this arrest."

The editor walked close to the officer, drew himself erect, his hands clenched behind his back and held the man's eye for a moment with a cold stare.

The captain hesitated and drew a document from his pocket.

The editor scanned it hastily and suddenly turned pale:

"A proclamation suspending the *writ of habeas corpus*— impossible!"

The captain lifted his dirty palms:

"I reckon you can read!"

"Oh, yes, I can read it, captain – still it's impossible. You can't suspend the law of gravitation by saying so on a scrap of paper – "

"You are ready to go?"

The editor laughed:

"Certainly, certainly – with pleasure, I assure you."

The captain lifted his hand and his men lowered their guns. The editor seized a number of blank writing pads, a box of pencils, put on his hat and called to his assistants:

"I'm moving my office temporarily to the county jail, boys. It's quieter over there. I can do better work. Send word to my home that I'm all right and tell my wife not to worry for a minute. Every man to his post now and the liveliest paper ever issued! And on time to the minute."

The printers had crowded into the room and a ringing cheer suddenly startled the troopers.

The foreman held an ugly piece of steel in his hand and every man seemed to have hold of something.

"Give the word, chief!" the foreman cried.

The editor smiled:

"Thanks, boys, I understand. Go back to your work. You can help best that way."

The men dropped their weapons and crowded to the door, jeering and howling in derision at the awkward squad as they stumbled down the stairs after their commander, who left the building holding tightly to the editor's arm, as if at any moment he expected an escape or a rescue.

The procession wended its way to the jail behind the Court House through a crowd of silent men who merely looked at the prisoner, smiled and nodded to him over the heads of his guard.

An ominous quiet followed the day's work. The Governor was amazed at the way his sensational coup was received. He had arrested and thrown into jail without warrant the leaders of the white party in every county in the state. He was absolutely sure that these men were the leaders of the Ku Klux Klan, the one invisible but terrible foe he really feared.

He had expected bluster, protests, mass meetings and fiery resolutions. Instead his act was received with a silence that was uncanny. In vain his Carpetbagger lieutenant congratulated him on the success of his Napoleonic move.

His little ferret eyes snapped with suppressed excitement.

"But what the devil is the meaning of this silence, Schlitz?" he asked with a tremor.

"They're stunned, I tell you. It was a master stroke. They're a lot of cowards and sneaks, these night raiders, anyhow. It only took a bold act of authority to throw them into a panic."

The Scalawag shook his head thoughtfully:

"Doesn't look like a panic to me – I'm uneasy – "

"The only possible mistake you've made was the arrest of Norton."

"Yes, I know public sentiment in the North don't like an attempt to suppress free speech, but I simply had to do it. Damn him, I've stood his abuse as long as I'm going to. Besides his dirty sheet is at the bottom of all our trouble."

When the Governor scanned his copy of the next morning's *Eagle and Phoenix* his feeling of uneasiness increased.

Instead of the personal abuse he had expected from the young firebrand, he read a long, carefully written editorial reviewing the history of the great writ of *habeas corpus* in the evolution of human freedom. The essay closed with the significant statement that no Governor in the records of the state or the colony had ever dared to repeal or suspend this guarantee of Anglo-Saxon liberty – not even for a moment during the chaos of the Civil War.

But the most disquieting feature of this editorial was the suggestive fact that it was set between heavy mourning lines and at the bottom of it stood a brief paragraph enclosed in even heavier black bands:

"We regret to announce that the state is at present without a chief executive. Our late unlamented Governor passed away in a fit of insanity at three o'clock yesterday."

When the little Scalawag read the sarcastic obituary he paled for a moment and the hand which held the paper trembled so violently he was compelled to lay it on the table to prevent his secretary from noting his excitement.

For the first time in the history of the state an armed guard was stationed at the door of the Governor's mansion that night.

The strange calm continued. No move was made by the negroid government to bring the imprisoned men to trial and apparently no effort was being made by the men inside the jails to regain their liberty.

Save that his editorials were dated from the county jail, no change had occurred in the daily routine of the editor's life. He continued his series of articles on the history of the state each day, setting them in heavy black mourning lines. Each of these editorials ended with an appeal to the patriotism of the reader. And the way in which he told the simple story of each step achieved in the blood-marked struggle for liberty had a punch in it that boded ill for the little man who had set himself the task of dictatorship for a free people.

No reference was made in the *Eagle and Phoenix* to the Governor. He was dead. The paper ignored his existence. Each day of this ominous peace among his enemies increased the terror which had gripped the little Scalawag from the morning he had read his first obituary. The big black rules down the sides of those editorials seemed a foot wide now when he read them.

Twice he seated himself at his desk to order the editor's release and each time cringed and paused at the thought of the sneers with which his act would be greeted. He was now between the devil and the deep sea. He was afraid to retreat and dared not take the next step forward. If he could hold his ground for two weeks longer, and carry the election by the overwhelming majority he had planned, all would be well. Such a victory, placing him in power for four years and giving him an obedient negro Legislature once more to do his bidding, would strike terror to his foes and silence their assaults. The negro voters far outnumbered the whites, and victory was a certainty. And so he held his ground – until something happened!

It began in a semi-tropical rain storm that swept the state. All day it poured in blinding torrents, the wind steadily rising in velocity until at noon it was scarcely possible to walk the streets.

At eight o'clock the rain ceased to fall and by nine glimpses of the moon could be seen as the fast flying clouds parted for a moment. But for these occasional flashes of moonlight the night was pitch dark. The Governor's company of nondescript soldiers in camp at the Capitol, drenched with rain, had abandoned their water-soaked tents for the more congenial atmosphere of the low dives and saloons of the negro quarters.

The minute the rain ceased to fall, Norton's wife sent his supper – but to-night by a new messenger. Cleo smiled at him across the little table as she skillfully laid the cloth, placed the dishes and set a tiny vase of roses in the center.

"You see," she began, smiling, "your wife needed me and I'm working at your house now, major."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Mammy isn't well and I help with the baby. He's a darling. He loved me the minute I took him in my arms and hugged him."

"No doubt."

"His little mother likes me, too. I can pick her up in my arms and carry her across the room. You wouldn't think I'm so strong, would you?"

"Yes – I would," he answered slowly, studying her with a look of increasing wonder at her audacity.

"You're not mad at me for being there, are you? You can't be – mammy wants me so" – she paused – "Lordy, I forgot the letter!"

She drew from her bosom a note from his wife. He looked curiously at a smudge where it was sealed and, glancing at the girl who was busy with the tray, opened and read:

"I have just received a message from MacArthur's daughter that your life is to be imperilled to-night by a dangerous raid. Remember your helpless wife and baby. Surely there are trusted men who can do such work. You have often told me that no wise general ever risks his precious life on the firing line. You are a soldier, and know this. Please, dearest, do not go. Baby and little mother both beg of you!"

Norton looked at Cleo again curiously. He was sure that the seal of this note had been broken and its message read by her.

"Do you know what's in this note, Cleo?" he asked sharply.

"No, sir!" was the quick answer.

He studied her again closely. She was on guard now. Every nerve alert, every faculty under perfect control. He was morally sure she was lying and yet it could only be idle curiosity or jealous interest in his affairs that prompted the act. That she should be an emissary of the Governor was absurd.

"It's not bad news, I hope?" she asked with an eagerness that was just a little too eager. The man caught the false note and frowned.

"No," he answered carelessly. "It's of no importance." He picked up a pad and wrote a hurried answer:

"Don't worry a moment, dear. I am not in the slightest danger. I know a soldier's duty and I'll not forget it. Sleep soundly, little mother and baby mine!"

He folded the sheet of paper and handed it to her without sealing it. She was watching him keenly. His deep, serious eyes no longer saw her. His body was there, but the soul was gone. The girl had never seen him in this mood. She was frightened. His life *was* in danger. She knew it now by an unerring instinct. She would watch the jail and see what happened. She might do something to win his friendship, and then – the rest would be easy. Her hand trembled as she took the note.

"Give this to Mrs. Norton at once," he said, "and tell her you found me well and happy in my work."

"Yes, sir," the soft voice answered mechanically as she picked up the tray and left the room watching him furtively.

CHAPTER V

THE RESCUE

Cleo hurried to the house, delivered the message, rocked the baby to sleep and quietly slipped through the lawn into the street and back to the jail.

A single guard kept watch at the door. She saw him by a flash of moonlight and then passed so close she could have touched the long old-fashioned musket he carried loosely across his shoulder.

The cat-like tread left no echo and she took her stand in the underbrush that had pushed its way closer and closer until its branches touched the rear walls of the jail. For two hours she stood amid the shadows, her keen young ears listening and her piercing eyes watching. Again and again she counted the steps the sentinel made as he walked back and forth in front of the entrance to the jail.

She knew from the sound that he passed the corner of the building for three steps in full view from her position, could she but see him through the darkness. Twice she had caught a glimpse of his stupid face as the moon flashed a moment of light through a rift of clouds.

"The Lord help that idiot," she muttered, "if the major's men want to pass him to-night!"

She turned with a sharp start. The bushes softly parted behind her and a stealthy step drew near. Her heart stood still. She was afraid to breathe. They wouldn't hurt her if they only knew she was the major's friend. But if they found and recognized her as old Peeler's half-breed daughter, they might kill her on the spot as a spy.

She hadn't thought of this terrible possibility before. It was too late now to think. To run meant almost certain death. She flattened her figure against the wall of the jail and drew the underbrush close completely covering her form.

She stood motionless and as near breathless as possible until the two men who were approaching a step at a time had passed. At the corner of the jail they stopped within three feet of her. She could hear every word of their conference.

"Now, Mac, do as I tell you," a voice whispered. "Jump on him from behind as he passes the corner and get him in the gills."

"I understand."

"Choke him stiff until I get something in his mouth."

"Ah, it's too easy. I'd like a little excitement."

"We'll get it before morning –"

"Sh! what's that?"

"I didn't hear anything!"

"Something moved."

A bush had slipped from Cleo's hand. She gripped the others with desperation. Ten minutes passed amid a death-like silence. A hundred times she imagined the hand of one of these men feeling for her throat. At last she drew a deep breath.

The men began to move step by step toward the doomed sentinel. They were standing beside the front corner of the jail now waiting panther-like for their prey. They allowed him to pass twice. He stopped at the end of his beat, blew his nose and spoke to himself:

"God, what a lonely night!"

The girl heard him turn, his feet measure three steps on his return and stop with a dull thud. She couldn't see, but she could feel through the darkness the grip of those terrible fingers on his throat. The only sound made was the dull thud of his body on the wet ground.

In two minutes they had carried him into the shadows of a big china tree in the rear and tied him to the trunk. She could hear their sharp order:

"Break those cords now or dare to open your mouth and, no matter what happens, we'll kill you first – just for luck."

In ten minutes they had reported the success of their work to their comrades who were waiting and the men who had been picked for their dangerous task surrounded the jail and slowly took up their appointed places in the shadows.

The attacking group stopped for their final instructions not five feet from the girl's position. A flash of moonlight and she saw them – six grim white and scarlet figures wearing spiked helmets from which fell a cloth mask to their shoulders. Their big revolvers were buckled on the outside of their disguises and each man's hand rested on the handle.

One of them quietly slipped his robe from his shoulders, removed his helmet, put on the sentinel's coat and cap, seized his musket and walked to the door of the jail.

She heard him drop the butt of the gun on the flagstone at the steps and call:

"Hello, jailer!"

Some one stirred inside. It was not yet one o'clock and the jailer who had been to a drinking bout with the soldiers had not gone to bed. In his shirt sleeves he thrust his head out the door:

"Who is it?"

"The guard, sir."

"Well, what the devil do you want?"

"Can't ye gimme a drink of somethin'? I'm soaked through and I've caught cold – "

"All right, in a minute," was the gruff reply.

The girl could hear the soft tread of the shrouded figures closing in on the front door. A moment more and it opened. The voice inside said:

"Here you are!"

The words had scarcely passed his lips, and there was another dull crash. A dozen masked Clansmen hurled themselves into the doorway and rushed over the prostrate form of the half-drunken jailer. He was too frightened to call for help. He lay with his face downward, begging for his life.

It was the work of a minute to take the keys from his trembling fingers, bind and gag him, and release Norton. The whole thing had been done so quietly not even a dog had barked at the disturbance.

Again they stopped within a few feet of the trembling figure against the wall. The editor had now put on his disguise and stood in the centre of the group giving his orders as quietly as though he were talking to his printers about the form of his paper.

"Quick now, Mac," she heard him say, "we've not a moment to lose. I want two pieces of scantling strong enough for a hangman's beam. Push one of them out of the center window of the north end of the Capitol building, the other from the south end. We'll hang the little Scalawag on the south side and the Carpetbagger on the north. We'll give them this grim touch of poetry at the end. Your ropes have ready swinging from these beams. Keep your men on guard there until I come."

"All right, sir!" came the quick response.

"My hundred picked men are waiting?"

"On the turnpike at the first branch – "

"Good! The Governor is spending the night at Schlitz's place, three miles out. He has been afraid to sleep at home of late, I hear. We'll give the little man and his pal a royal escort for once as they approach the Capitol – expect us within an hour."

A moment and they were gone. The girl staggered from her cramped position and flew to the house. She couldn't understand it all, but she realized that if the Governor were killed it meant possible ruin for the man she had marked her own.

A light was still burning in the mother's room. She had been nervous and restless and couldn't sleep. She heard the girl's swift, excited step on the stairway and rushed to the door:

"What is it? What has happened?"

Cleo paused for breath and gasped:

"They've broken the jail open and he's gone with the Ku Klux to kill the Governor!"

"To kill the Governor?"

"Yessum. He's got a hundred men waiting out on the turnpike and they're going to hang the Governor from one of the Capitol windows!"

The wife caught the girl by the shoulders and cried:

"Who told you this?"

"Nobody. I saw them. I was passing the jail, heard a noise and went close in the dark. I heard the major give the orders to the men."

"Oh, my God!" the little mother groaned. "And they are going straight to the Governor's mansion?"

"No – no – he said the Governor's out at Schlitz's place, spending the night. They're going to kill him, too – "

"Then there's time to stop them – quick – can you hitch a horse?"

"Yessum!"

"Run to the stable, hitch my horse to the buggy and take a note I'll write to my grandfather, old Governor Carteret – you know where his place is – the big red brick house at the edge of town?"

"Yessum – "

"His street leads into the turnpike – quick now – the horse and buggy!"

The strong young body sprang down the steps three and four rounds at a leap and in five minutes the crunch of swift wheels on the gravel walk was heard.

She sprang up the stairs, took the note from the frail, trembling little hand and bounded out of the house again.

The clouds had passed and the moon was shining now in silent splendor on the sparkling refreshed trees and shrubbery. The girl was an expert in handling a horse. Old Peeler had at least taught her that. In five more minutes from the time she had left the house she was knocking furiously at the old Governor's door. He was eighty-four, but a man of extraordinary vigor for his age.

He came to the door alone in his night-dress, candle in hand, scowling at the unseemly interruption of his rest.

"What is it?" he cried with impatience.

"A note from Mrs. Norton."

At the mention of her name the fine old face softened and then his eyes flashed:

"She is ill?"

"No, sir – but she wants you to help her."

He took the note, placed the candle on the old-fashioned mahogany table in his hall, returned to his room for his glasses, adjusted them with deliberation and read its startling message.

He spoke without looking up:

"You know the road to Schlitz's house?"

"Yes, sir, every foot of it."

"I'll be ready in ten minutes."

"We've no time to lose – you'd better hurry," the girl said nervously.

The old man lifted his eyebrows:

"I will. But an ex-Governor of the state can't rush to meet the present Governor in his shirt-tail – now, can he?"

Cleo laughed:

"No, sir."

The thin, sprightly figure moved quickly in spite of the eighty-four years and in less than ten minutes he was seated beside the girl and they were flying over the turnpike toward the Schlitz place.

"How long since those men left the jail?" the old Governor asked roughly.

"About a half-hour, sir."

"Give your horse the rein – we'll be too late, I'm afraid."

The lines slacked over the spirited animal's back and he sprang forward as though lashed by the insult to his high breeding.

The sky was studded now with stars sparkling in the air cleared by the rain, and the moon flooded the white roadway with light. The buggy flew over the beaten track for a mile, and as they suddenly plunged down a hill the old man seized both sides of the canopy top to steady his body as the light rig swayed first one way and then the other.

"You're going pretty fast," he grumbled.

"Yes, you said to give him the reins."

"But I didn't say to throw them on the horse's head, did I?"

"No, sir," the girl giggled.

"Pull him in!" he ordered sharply.

The strong young arms drew the horse suddenly down on his haunches and the old man lurched forward.

"I didn't say pull him into the buggy," he growled.

The girl suppressed another laugh. He was certainly a funny old man for all his eighty odd winters. She thought that he must have been a young devil at eighteen.

"Stop a minute!" he cried sharply. "What's that roaring?"

Cleo listened:

"The wind in the trees, I think."

"Nothing of the sort – isn't this Buffalo creek?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's water we hear. The creek's out of banks. The storm has made the ford impassable. They haven't crossed this place yet. We're in time."

The horse lifted his head and neighed. Another answered from the woods and in a moment a white-masked figure galloped up to the buggy and spoke sharply:

"You can't cross this ford – turn back."

"Are you one of Norton's men?" the old man asked angrily.

"None of your damned business!" was the quick answer.

"I think it is, sir! I'm Governor Carteret. My age and services to this state entitle me to a hearing to-night. Tell Major Norton I must speak to him immediately – immediately, sir!" His voice rose to a high note of imperious command.

The horseman hesitated and galloped into the shadows. A moment later a tall shrouded figure on horseback slowly approached.

"Cut your wheel," the old Governor said to the girl. He stepped from the buggy without assistance. "Now turn round and wait for me." Cleo obeyed, and the venerable statesman with head erect, his white hair and beard shining in the moonlight calmly awaited the approach of the younger man.

Norton dismounted and led his horse, the rein hanging loosely over his arm.

"Well, Governor Carteret" – the drawling voice was low and quietly determined.

The white-haired figure suddenly stiffened:

"Don't insult me, sir, by talking through a mask – take that thing off your head."

The major bowed and removed his mask.

When the old man spoke again, his voice trembled with emotion, he stepped close and seized Norton's arm:

"My boy, have you gone mad?"

"I think not," was the even answer. The deep brown eyes were holding the older man's gaze with a cold, deadly look. "Were you ever arrested, Governor, by the henchmen of a peanut politician and thrown into a filthy jail without warrant and held without trial at the pleasure of a master?"

"No – by the living God!"

"And if you had been, sir?"

"I'd have killed him as I would a dog – I'd have shot him on sight – but you – you can't do this now, my boy – you carry the life of the people in your hands to-night! You are their chosen leader. The peace and dignity of a great commonwealth are in your care – "

"I am asserting its outraged dignity against a wretch who has basely betrayed it."

"Even so, this is not the way. Think of the consequences to-morrow morning. The President will be forced against his wishes to declare the state in insurrection. The army will be marched back into our borders and martial law proclaimed."

"The state is under martial law – the *writ* has been suspended."

"But not legally, my boy. I know your provocation has been great – yes, greater than I could have borne in my day. I'll be honest with you, but you've had better discipline, my son. I belong to the old régime and an iron will has been my only law. You must live in the new age under new conditions. You must adjust yourself to these conditions."

"The man who calls himself Governor has betrayed his high trust," Norton broke in with solemn emphasis. "He has forfeited his life. The people whom he has basely sold into bondage will applaud his execution. The Klan to-night is the high court of a sovereign state and his death has been ordered."

"I insist there's a better way. Your Klan is a resistless weapon if properly used. You are a maniac to-night. You are pulling your own house down over your head. The election is but a few weeks off. Use your men as an army to force this election. The ballot is force – physical force. Apply that force. Your men can master that rabble of negroes on election day. Drive them from the polls. They'll run like frightened sheep. Their enfranchisement is a crime against civilization. Every sane man in the North knows this. No matter how violent your methods, an election that returns the intelligent and decent manhood of a state to power against a corrupt, ignorant and vicious mob will be backed at last by the moral sentiment of the world. There's a fiercer vengeance to be meted out to your Scalawag Governor – "

"What do you mean?" the younger man asked.

"Swing the power of your Klan in solid line against the ballot-box at this election, carry the state, elect your Legislature, impeach the Governor, remove him from office, deprive him of citizenship and send him to the grave with the brand of shame on his forehead!"

The leader lifted his somber face, and the older man saw that he was hesitating:

"That's possible – yes – "

The white head moved closer:

"The only rational thing to do, my boy – come, I love you and I love my granddaughter. You've a great career before you. Don't throw your life away to-night in a single act of madness. Listen to an old man whose sands are nearly run" – a trembling arm slipped around his waist.

"I appreciate your coming here to-night, Governor, of course."

"But if I came in vain, why at all?" there were tears in his voice now. "You must do as I say, my son – send those men home! I'll see the Governor to-morrow morning and I pledge you my word of honor that I'll make him revoke that proclamation within an hour and restore the civil rights of the people. None of those arrests are legal and every man must be released."

"He won't do it."

"When he learns from my lips that I saved his dog's life to-night, he'll do it and lick my feet in gratitude. Won't you trust me, boy?"

The pressure of the old man's arm tightened and his keen eyes searched Norton's face. The strong features were convulsed with passion, he turned away and the firm mouth closed with decision:

"All right. I'll take your advice."

The old Governor was very still for a moment and his voice quivered with tenderness as he touched Norton's arm affectionately:

"You're a good boy, Dan! I knew you'd hear me. God! how I envy you the youth and strength that's yours to fight this battle!"

The leader blew a whistle and his orderly galloped up:

"Tell my men to go home and meet me to-morrow at one o'clock in the Court House Square, in their everyday clothes, armed and ready for orders. I'll dismiss the guard I left at the Capitol."

The white horseman wheeled and galloped away. Norton quietly removed his disguise, folded it neatly, took off his saddle, placed the robe between the folds of the blanket and mounted his horse.

The old Governor waved to him:

"My love to the little mother and that boy, Tom, that you've named for me!"

"Yes, Governor – good night."

The tall figure on horseback melted into the shadows and in a moment the buggy was spinning over the glistening, moonlit track of the turnpike.

When they reached the first street lamps on the edge of town, the old man peered curiously at the girl by his side.

"You drive well, young woman," he said slowly. "Who taught you?"

"Old Peeler."

"You lived on his place?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, sir."

"What's your mother's name?"

"Lucy."

"Hm! I thought so."

"Why, sir?"

"Oh, nothing," was the gruff answer.

"Did you – did you know any of my people, sir?" she asked.

He looked her squarely in the face, smiled and pursed his withered lips:

"Yes. I happen to be personally acquainted with your grandfather and he was something of a man in his day."

CHAPTER VI

A TRAITOR'S RUSE

The old Governor had made a correct guess on the line of action his little Scalawag successor in high office would take when confronted by the crisis of the morning.

The Clansmen had left the two beams projecting through the windows of the north and south wings of the Capitol. A hangman's noose swung from each beam's end.

When His Excellency drove into town next morning and received the news of the startling events of the night, he ordered a double guard of troops for his office and another for his house.

Old Governor Carteret called at ten o'clock and was ushered immediately into the executive office. No more striking contrast could be imagined between two men of equal stature. Their weight and height were almost the same, yet they seemed to belong to different races of men. The Scalawag official hurried to meet his distinguished caller – a man whose administration thirty years ago was famous in the annals of the state.

The acting Governor seemed a pigmy beside his venerable predecessor. The only prominent feature of the Scalawag's face was his nose. Its size should have symbolized strength, yet it didn't. It seemed to project straight in front in a way that looked ridiculous – as if some one had caught it with a pair of tongs, tweaked and pulled it out to an unusual length. It was elongated but not impressive. His mouth was weak, his chin small and retreating and his watery ferret eyes never looked any one straight in the face. The front of his head was bald and sloped backward at an angle. His hair was worn in long, thin, straight locks which he combed often in a vain effort to look the typical long-haired Southern gentleman of the old school.

His black broadcloth suit with a velvet collar and cuffs fitted his slight figure to perfection and yet failed to be impressive. The failure was doubtless due to his curious way of walking about a room. Sometimes sideways like a crab or a crawfish, and when he sought to be impressive, straight forward with an obvious jerk and an effort to appear dignified.

He was the kind of a man an old-fashioned negro, born and bred in the homes of the aristocratic régime of slavery, would always laugh at. His attempt to be a gentleman was so obvious a fraud it could deceive no one.

"I am honored, Governor Carteret, by your call this morning," he cried with forced politeness. "I need the advice of our wisest men. I appreciate your coming."

The old Governor studied the Scalawag for a moment calmly and said:

"Thank you."

When shown to his seat the older man walked with the unconscious dignity of a man born to rule, the lines of his patrician face seemed cut from a cameo in contrast with the rambling nondescript features of the person who walked with a shuffle beside him. It required no second glance at the clean ruffled shirt with its tiny gold studs, the black string tie, the polished boots and gold-headed cane to recognize the real gentleman of the old school. And no man ever looked a second time at his Roman nose and massive chin and doubted for a moment that he saw a man of power, of iron will and fierce passions.

"I have called this morning, Governor," the older man began with sharp emphasis, "to advise you to revoke at once your proclamation suspending the *writ of habeas corpus*. Your act was a blunder – a colossal blunder! We are not living in the Dark Ages, sir – even if you were elected by a negro constituency! Your act is four hundred years out of date in the English-speaking world."

The Scalawag began his answer by wringing his slippery hands:

"I realize, Governor Carteret, the gravity of my act. Yet grave dangers call for grave remedies. You see from the news this morning the condition of turmoil into which reckless men have plunged the state."

The old man rose, crossed the room and confronted the Scalawag, his eyes blazing, his uplifted hand trembling with passion:

"The breed of men with whom you are fooling have not submitted to such an act of tyranny from their rulers for the past three hundred years. Your effort to set the negro up as the ruler of the white race is the act of a madman. Revoke your order to-day or the men who opened that jail last night will hang you – "

The Governor laughed lamely:

"A cheap bluff, sir, a schoolboy's threat!"

The older man drew closer:

"A cheap bluff, eh? Well, when you say your prayers to-night, don't forget to thank your Maker for two things – that He sent a storm yesterday that made Buffalo creek impassable and that I reached its banks in time!"

The little Scalawag paled and his voice was scarcely a whisper:

"Why – why, what do you mean?"

"That I reached the ford in time to stop a hundred desperate men who were standing there in the dark waiting for its waters to fall that they might cross and hang you from that beam's end you call a cheap bluff! That I stood there in the moonlight with my arm around their leader for nearly an hour begging, praying, pleading for your damned worthless life! They gave it to me at last because I asked it. No other man could have saved you. Your life is mine to-day! But for my solemn promise to those men that you would revoke that order your body would be swinging at this moment from the Capitol window – will you make good my promise?"

"I'll – I'll consider it," was the waning answer.

"Yes or no?"

"I'll think it over, Governor Carteret – I'll think it over," the trembling voice repeated. "I must consult my friends – "

"I won't take that answer!" the old man thundered in his face. "Revoke that proclamation here and now, or, by the Lord God, I'll send a message to those men that'll swing you from the gallows before the sun rises to-morrow morning!"

"I've got my troops – "

"A hell of a lot of troops they are! Where were they last night – the loafing, drunken cowards? You can't get enough troops in this town to save you. Revoke that proclamation or take your chances!"

The old Governor seized his hat and walked calmly toward the door. The Scalawag trembled, and finally said:

"I'll take your advice, sir – wait a moment until I write the order."

The room was still for five minutes, save for the scratch of the Governor's pen, as he wrote his second famous proclamation, restoring the civil rights of the people. He signed and sealed the document and handed it to his waiting guest:

"Is that satisfactory?"

The old man adjusted his glasses, read each word carefully, and replied with dignity:

"Perfectly – good morning!"

The white head erect, the visitor left the executive chamber without a glance at the man he despised.

The Governor had given his word, signed and sealed his solemn proclamation, but he proved himself a traitor to the last.

With the advice of his confederates he made a last desperate effort to gain his end of holding the leaders of the opposition party in jail by a quick shift of method. He wired orders to every jailer to hold the men until warrants were issued for their arrest by one of his negro magistrates in each county and wired instructions to the clerk of the court to admit none of them to bail no matter what amount offered.

The charges on which these warrants were issued were, in the main, preposterous perjuries by the hirelings of the Governor. There was no expectation that they would be proven in court. But if they could hold these prisoners until the election was over the little Scalawag believed the Klan could be thus intimidated in each district and the negro ticket triumphantly elected.

The Governor was explicit in his instructions to the clerk of the court in the Capital county that under no conceivable circumstances should he accept bail for the editor of the *Eagle and Phoenix*.

The Governor's proclamation was issued at noon and within an hour a deputy sheriff appeared at Norton's office and served his warrant charging the preposterous crime of "Treason and Conspiracy" against the state government.

Norton's hundred picked men were already lounging in the Court House Square. When the deputy appeared with his prisoner they quietly closed in around him and entered the clerk's room in a body. The clerk was dumfounded at the sudden packing of his place with quiet, sullen looking, armed men. Their revolvers were in front and the men were nervously fingering the handles.

The clerk had been ordered by the Governor under no circumstances to accept bail, and he had promised with alacrity to obey. But he changed his mind at the sight of those revolvers. Not a word was spoken by the men and the silence was oppressive. The frightened official mopped his brow and tried to leave for a moment to communicate with the Capitol. He found it impossible to move from his desk. The men were jammed around him in an impenetrable mass. He looked over the crowd in vain for a friendly face. Even the deputy who had made the arrest had been jostled out of the room and couldn't get back.

The editor looked at the clerk steadily for a moment and quietly asked:

"What amount of bail do you require?"

The officer smiled wanly:

"Oh, major, it's just a formality with you, sir; a mere nominal sum of \$500 will be all right."

"Make out your bond," the editor curtly ordered. "My friends here will sign it."

"Certainly, certainly, major," was the quick answer. "Have a seat, sir, while I fill in the blank."

"I'll stand, thank you," was the quick reply.

The clerk's pen flew while he made out the forbidden bail which set at liberty the arch enemy of the Governor. When it was signed and the daring young leader quietly walked out the door, a cheer from a hundred men rent the air.

The shivering clerk cowered in his seat over his desk and pretended to be very busy. In reality he was breathing a prayer of thanks to God for sparing his life and registering a solemn vow to quit politics and go back to farming.

The editor hurried to his office and sent a message to each district leader of the Klan to secure bail for the accused men in the same quiet manner.

CHAPTER VII

THE IRONY OF FATE

His political battle won, Norton turned his face homeward for a struggle in which victory would not come so easily. He had made up his mind that Cleo should not remain under his roof another day. How much she really knew or understood of the events of the night he could only guess. He was sure she had heard enough of the plans of his men to make a dangerous witness against him if she should see fit to betray the facts to his enemies.

Yet he was morally certain that he could trust her with this secret. What he could not and would not do was to imperil his own life and character by a daily intimate association with this willful, impudent, smiling young animal.

His one fear was the wish of his wife to keep her. In her illness she had developed a tyranny of love that brooked no interference with her whims. He had petted and spoiled her until it was well-nigh impossible to change the situation. The fear of her death was the sword that forever hung over his head.

He hoped that the girl was lying when she said his wife liked her. Yet it was not improbable. Her mind was still a child's. She could not think evil of any one. She loved the young and she loved grace and beauty wherever she saw it. She loved a beautiful cat, a beautiful dog, and always had taken pride in a handsome servant. It would be just like her to take a fancy to Cleo that no argument could shake. He dreaded to put the thing to an issue – but it had to be done. It was out of the question to tell her the real truth.

His heart sank within him as he entered his wife's room. Mammy had gone to bed suffering with a chill. The doctors had hinted that she was suffering from an incurable ailment and that her days were numbered. Her death might occur at any time.

Cleo was lying flat on a rug, the baby was sitting astride of her back, laughing his loudest at the funny contortions of her lithe figure. She would stop every now and then, turn her own laughing eyes on him and he would scream with joy.

The little mother was sitting on the floor like a child and laughing at the scene. In a flash he realized that Cleo had made herself, in the first few days she had been in his house, its dominant spirit.

He paused in the doorway sobered by the realization.

The supple young form on the floor slowly writhed on her back without disturbing the baby's sturdy hold, his little legs clasping her body tight. She drew his laughing face to her shoulder, smothering his laughter with kisses, and suddenly sprang to her feet, the baby astride her neck, and began galloping around the room.

"W'oa! January, w'oa, sir!" she cried, galloping slowly at first and then prancing like a playful horse.

Her cheeks were flushed, eyes sparkling and red hair flying in waves of fiery beauty over her exquisite shoulders, every change of attitude a new picture of graceful abandon, every movement of her body a throb of savage music from some strange seductive orchestra hidden in the deep woods!

Its notes slowly stole over the senses of the man with such alluring power, that in spite of his annoyance he began to smile.

The girl stopped, placed the child on the floor, ran to the corner of the room, dropped on all fours and started slowly toward him, her voice imitating the deep growl of a bear.

"Now the bears are going to get him! – Boo-oo-oo."

The baby screamed with delight. The graceful young she-bear capered around her victim from side to side, smelling his hands and jumping back, approaching and retreating, growling and pawing the floor, while with each movement the child shouted a new note of joy.

The man, watching, wondered if this marvelous creamy yellow animal could get into an ungraceful position.

The keen eyes of the young she-bear saw the boy had worn himself out with laughter and slowly approached her victim, tumbled his happy flushed little form over on the rug and devoured him with kisses.

"Don't, Cleo – that's enough now!" the little mother cried, through her tears of laughter.

"Yessum – yessum – I'm just eatin' him up now – I'm done – and he'll be asleep in two minutes."

She sprang to her feet, crushing the little form tenderly against her warm, young bosom, and walked past the man smiling into his face a look of triumph. The sombre eyes answered with a smile in spite of himself.

Could any man with red blood in his veins fight successfully a force like that? He heard the growl of the Beast within as he stood watching the scene. The sight of the frail little face of his invalid wife brought him up against the ugly fact with a sharp pain.

Yet the moment he tried to broach the subject of discharging Cleo, he hesitated, stammered and was silent. At last he braced himself with determination for the task. It was disagreeable, but it had to be done. The sooner the better.

"You like this girl, my dear?" he said softly.

"She's the most wonderful nurse I ever saw – the baby's simply crazy about her!"

"Yes, I see," he said soberly.

"It's a perfectly marvellous piece of luck that she came the day she did. Mammy was ready to drop. She's been like a fairy in the nursery from the moment she entered. The kiddy has done nothing but laugh and shriek with delight."

"And you like her personally?"

"I've just fallen in love with her! She's so strong and young and beautiful. She picks me up, laughing like a child, and carries me into the bathroom, carries me back and tucks me in bed as easily as she does the baby."

"I'm sorry, my dear," he interrupted with a firm, hard note in his voice.

"Sorry – for what?" the blue eyes opened with astonishment.

"Because I don't like her, and her presence here may be very dangerous just now – "

"Dangerous – what on earth can you mean?"

"To begin with that she's a negress – "

"So's mammy – so's the cook – the man – every servant we've ever had – or will have – "

"I'm not so sure of the last," the husband broke in with a frown.

"What's dangerous about the girl, I'd like to know?" his wife demanded.

"I said, to begin with, she's a negress. That's perhaps the least objectionable thing about her as a servant. But she has bad blood in her on her father's side. Old Peeler's as contemptible a scoundrel as I know in the county – "

"The girl don't like him – that's why she left home."

"Did she tell you that?" he asked quizzically.

"Yes, and I'm sorry for her. She wants a good home among decent white people and I'm not going to give her up. I don't care what you say."

The husband ignored the finality of this decision and went on with his argument as though she had not spoken.

"Old Peeler is not only a low white scoundrel who would marry this girl's mulatto mother if he dared, but he is trying to break into politics as a negro champion. He denies it, but he is a henchman of the Governor. I'm in a fight with this man to the death. There's not room for us both in the state – "

"And you think this laughing child cares anything about the Governor or his dirty politics? Such a thing has never entered her head."

"I'm not sure of that."

"You're crazy, Dan."

"But I'm not so crazy, my dear, that I can't see that this girl's presence in our house is dangerous. She already knows too much about my affairs – enough, in fact, to endanger my life if she should turn traitor."

"But she won't tell, I tell you – she's loyal – I'd trust her with my life, or yours, or the baby's, without hesitation. She proved her loyalty to me and to you last night."

"Yes, and that's just why she's so dangerous." He spoke slowly, as if talking to himself. "You can't understand, dear, I am entering now the last phase of a desperate struggle with the little Scalawag who sits in the Governor's chair for the mastery of this state and its life. The next two weeks and this election will decide whether white civilization shall live or a permanent negroid mongrel government, after the pattern of Haiti and San Domingo, shall be established. If we submit, we are not worth saving. We ought to die and our civilization with us! We are not going to submit, we are not going to die, we are going to win. I want you to help me now by getting rid of this girl."

"I won't give her up. There's no sense in it. A man who fought four years in the war is not afraid of a laughing girl who loves his baby and his wife! I can't risk a green, incompetent girl in the nursery now. I can't think of breaking in a new one. I like Cleo. She's a breath of fresh air when she comes into my room; she's clean and neat; she sings beautifully; her voice is soft and low and deep; I love her touch when she dresses me; the baby worships her – is all this nothing to you?"

"Is my work nothing to you?" he answered soberly.

"Bah! It's a joke! Your work has nothing to do with this girl. She knows nothing, cares nothing for politics – it's absurd!"

"My dear, you must listen to me now – "

"I won't listen. I'll have my way about my servants. It's none of your business. Look after your politics and let the nursery alone!"

"Please be reasonable, my love. I assure you I'm in dead earnest. The danger is a real one, or I wouldn't ask this of you – please – "

"No – no – no – no!" she fairly shrieked.

His voice was very quiet when he spoke at last:

"I'm sorry to cross you in this, but the girl must leave to-night."

The tones of his voice and the firm snap of his strong jaw left further argument out of the question and the little woman played her trump card.

She sprang to her feet, pale with rage, and gave way to a fit of hysteria. He attempted to soothe her, in grave alarm over the possible effects on her health of such a temper.

With a piercing scream she threw herself across the bed and he bent over her tenderly:

"Please, don't act this way!"

Her only answer was another scream, her little fists opening and closing like a bird's talons gripping the white counterpane in her trembling fingers.

The man stood in helpless misery and sickening fear, bent low and whispered:

"Please, please, darling – it's all right – she can stay. I won't say another word. Don't make yourself ill. Please don't!"

The sobbing ceased for a moment, and he added:

"I'll go into the nursery and send her here to put you to bed."

He turned to the door and met Cleo entering.

"Miss Jean called me?" she asked with a curious smile playing about her greenish eyes.

"Yes. She wishes you to put her to bed."

The girl threw him a look of triumphant tenderness and he knew that she had heard and understood.

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW WEAPON

From the moment the jail doors opened the Governor felt the chill of defeat. With his armed guard of fifty thousand "Loyal" white men he hoped to stem the rising tide of Anglo-Saxon fury. But the hope was faint. There was no assurance in its warmth. Every leader he had arrested without warrant and held without bail was now a firebrand in a powder magazine. Mass meetings, barbecues and parades were scheduled for every day by his enemies in every county.

The state was ablaze with wrath from the mountains to the sea. The orators of the white race spoke with tongues of flame.

The record of negro misrule under an African Legislature was told with brutal detail and maddening effects. The state treasury was empty, the school funds had been squandered, millions in bonds had been voted and stolen and the thieves had fled the state in terror.

All this the Governor knew from the first, but he also knew that an ignorant negro majority would ask no questions and believe no evil of their allies.

The adventurers from the North had done their work of alienating the races with a thoroughness that was nothing short of a miracle. The one man on earth who had always been his best friend, every negro now held his bitterest foe. He would consult his old master about any subject under the sun and take his advice against the world except in politics. He would come to the back door, beg him for a suit of clothes, take it with joyous thanks, put it on and march straight to the polls and vote against the hand that gave it.

He asked no questions as to his own ticket. It was all right if it was against the white man of the South. The few Scalawags who trained with negroes to get office didn't count.

The negro had always despised such trash. The Governor knew his solid black constituency would vote like sheep, exactly as they were told by their new teachers.

But the nightmare that disturbed him now, waking or dreaming, was the fear that this full negro vote could not be polled. The daring speeches by the enraged leaders of the white race were inflaming the minds of the people beyond the bounds of all reason. These leaders had sworn to carry the election and dared the Governor to show one of his scurvy guards near a polling place on the day they should cast their ballots.

The Ku Klux Klan openly defied all authority. Their men paraded the county roads nightly and ended their parades by lining their horsemen in cavalry formation, galloping through the towns and striking terror to every denizen of the crowded negro quarters.

In vain the Governor issued frantic appeals for the preservation of the sanctity of the ballot. His speeches in which he made this appeal were openly hissed.

The ballot was no longer a sacred thing. The time was in American history when it was the badge of citizen kingship. At this moment the best men in the state were disfranchised and hundreds of thousands of negroes, with the instincts of the savage and the intelligence of the child, had been given the ballot. Never in the history of civilization had the ballot fallen so low in any republic. The very atmosphere of a polling place was a stench in the nostrils of decent men.

The determination of the leaders of the Klan to clear the polls by force if need be was openly proclaimed before the day of election. The philosophy by which they justified this stand was simple, and unanswerable, for it was founded in the eternal verities. Men are not made free by writing a constitution on a piece of paper. Freedom is inside. A ballot is only a symbol. That symbol stands for physical force directed by the highest intelligence. The ballot, therefore, is force – physical force. Back of every ballot is a bayonet and the red blood of the man who holds it. Therefore, a minority submits to the verdict of a majority at the polls. If there is not an intelligent, powerful fighting unit

back of the scrap of paper that falls into a box, there's nothing there and that man's ballot has no more meaning than if it had been deposited by a trained pig or a dog.

On the day of this fated election the little Scalawag Governor sat in the Capitol, the picture of nervous despair. Since sunrise his office had been flooded with messages from every quarter of the state begging too late for troops. Everywhere his henchmen were in a panic. From every quarter the stories were the same.

Hundreds of determined, silent white men had crowded the polls, taken their own time to vote and refused to give an inch of room to the long line of panic-stricken negroes who looked on helplessly. At five o'clock in the afternoon less than a hundred blacks had voted in the entire township in which the Capital was located.

Norton was a candidate for the Legislature on the white ticket, and the Governor had bent every effort to bring about his defeat. The candidate against him was a young negro who had been a slave of his father, and now called himself Andy Norton. Andy had been a house-servant, was exactly the major's age and they had been playmates before the war. He was endowed with a stentorian voice and a passion for oratory. He had acquired a reputation for smartness, was good-natured, loud-mouthed, could tell a story, play the banjo and amuse a crowd. He had been Norton's body-servant the first year of the war.

The Governor relied on Andy to swing a resistless tide of negro votes for the ticket and sweep the county. Under ordinary conditions, he would have done it. But before the hurricane of fury that swept the white race on the day of the election, the voice of Andy was as one crying in the wilderness.

He had made three speeches to his crowd of helpless black voters who hadn't been able to vote. The Governor sent him an urgent message to mass his men and force their way to the ballot box.

The polling place was under a great oak that grew in the Square beside the Court House. A space had been roped off to guard the approach to the boxes. Since sunrise this space had been packed solid with a living wall of white men. Occasionally a well-known old negro of good character was allowed to pass through and vote and then the lines closed up in solid ranks.

One by one a new white man was allowed to take his place in this wall and gradually he was moved up to the tables on which the boxes rested, voted, and slowly, like the movement of a glacier, the line crowded on in its endless circle.

The outer part of this wall of defense which the white race had erected around the polling place was held throughout the day by the same men – twenty or thirty big, stolid, dogged countrymen, who said nothing, but every now and then winked at each other.

When Andy received the Governor's message he decided to distinguish himself. It was late in the day, but not too late perhaps to win by a successful assault. He picked out twenty of his strongest buck negroes, moved them quietly to a good position near the polls, formed them into a flying wedge, and, leading the assault in person with a loud good-natured laugh, he hurled them against the outer line of whites.

To Andy's surprise the double line opened and yielded to his onset. He had forced a dozen negroes into the ranks when to his surprise the white walls suddenly closed on the blacks and held them as in a steel trap.

And then, quick as a flash, something happened. It was a month before the negroes found out exactly what it was. They didn't see it, they couldn't hear it, but they knew it happened. They *felt* it.

And the silent swiftness with which it happened was appalling. Every negro who had penetrated the white wall suddenly leaped into the air with a yell of terror. The white line opened quickly and to a man the negro wedge broke and ran for life, each black hand clasped in agony on the same spot.

Andy's voice rang full and clear above his men's:

"Goddermighty, what's dat!"

"Dey shot us, man!" screamed a negro.

The thing was simple, almost childlike in its silliness, but it was tremendously effective. The white guard in the outer line had each been armed with a little piece of shining steel three inches long, fixed in a handle – a plain shoemaker's pegging awl. At a given signal they had wheeled and thrust these awls into the thick flesh of every negro's thigh.

The attack was so sudden, so unexpected, and the pain so sharp, so terrible, for the moment every negro's soul was possessed with a single idea, how to save his particular skin and do it quickest. All *esprit de corps* was gone. It was each for himself and the devil take the hindmost! Some of them never stopped running until they cleared Buffalo creek, three miles out of town.

Andy's ambitions were given a violent turn in a new direction. Before the polls closed at sundown he appeared at the office of the *Eagle and Phoenix* with a broad grin on his face and asked to see the major.

He entered the editor's room bowing and scraping, his white teeth gleaming.

Norton laughed and quietly said:

"Well, Andy?"

"Yassah, major, I des drap roun' ter kinder facilitate ye, sah, on de 'lection, sah."

"It does look like the tide is turning, Andy."

"Yassah, hit sho' is turnin', but hit's gotter be a purty quick tide dat kin turn afore I does, sah."

"Yes?"

"Yassah! And I drap in, major, ter 'splain ter you dat I'se gwine ter gently draw outen politics, yassah. I makes up my min' ter hitch up wid de white folks agin. Brought up by de Nortons, sah, I'se always bin a gemman, an' I can't afford to smut my hands wid de crowd dat I been 'sociating wid. I'se glad you winnin' dis 'lection, sah, an' I'se glad you gwine ter de Legislature – anyhow de office gwine ter stay in de Norton fambly – an' I'se satisfied, sah. I know you gwine ter treat us far an' squar – "

"If I'm elected I'll try to represent all the people, Andy," the major said gravely.

"If you'se 'lected?" Andy laughed. "Lawd, man, you'se dar right now! I kin des see you settin' in one dem big chairs! I knowed it quick as I feel dat thing pop fro my backbone des now! Yassah, I done resigned, an' I thought, major, maybe you get a job 'bout de office or 'bout de house fer er young likely nigger 'bout my size?"

The editor smiled:

"Nothing just now, Andy, but possibly I can find a place for you in a few days."

"Thankee, sah. I'll hold off den till you wants me. I'll des pick up er few odd jobs till you say de word – you won't fergit me?"

"No. I'll remember."

"An', major, ef you kin des advance me 'bout er dollar on my wages now, I kin cheer myself up ter-night wid er good dinner. Dese here loafers done bust me. I hain't got er nickel lef!"

The major laughed heartily and "advanced" his rival for Legislative honors a dollar.

Andy bowed to the floor:

"Any time you'se ready, major, des lemme know, sah. You'll fin' me a handy man 'bout de house, sah."

"All right, Andy, I may need you soon."

"Yassah, de sooner de better, sah," he paused in the door. "Dey gotter get up soon in de mornin', sah, ter get erhead er us Nortons – yassah, dat dey is – "

A message, the first news of the election, cut Andy's gabble short. It spelled Victory! One after another they came from every direction – north, south, east and west – each bringing the same magic word – victory! victory! A state redeemed from negroid corruption! A great state once more in the hands of the children of the men who created it!

It had only been necessary to use force to hold the polls from hordes of ignorant negroes in the densest of the black counties. The white majorities would be unprecedented. The enthusiasm had reached the pitch of mania in these counties. They would all break records.

A few daring men in the black centres of population, where negro rule was at its worst, had guarded the polls under his direction armed with the simple device of a shoemaker's awl, and in every case where it had been used the resulting terror had cleared the place of every negro. In not a single case where this novel weapon had been suddenly and mysteriously thrust into a black skin was there an attempt to return to the polls. A long-suffering people, driven at last to desperation, had met force with force and wrested a commonwealth from the clutches of the vandals who were looting and disgracing it.

Now he would call the little Scalawag to the bar of justice.

CHAPTER IX

THE WORDS THAT COST

It was after midnight when Norton closed his desk and left for home. Bonfires were burning in the squares, bands were playing and hundreds of sober, gray-haired men were marching through the streets, hand in hand with shouting boys, cheering, cheering, forever cheering! He had made three speeches from the steps of the *Eagle and Phoenix* building and the crowds still stood there yelling his name and cheering. Broad-shouldered, bronzed men had rushed into his office one by one that night, hugged him and wrung his hands until they ached. He must have rest. The strain had been terrific and in the reaction he was pitifully tired.

The lights were still burning in his wife's room. She was waiting with Cleo for his return. He had sent her the bulletins as they had come and she knew the result of the election almost as soon as he. It was something very unusual that she should remain up so late. The doctor had positively forbidden it since her last attack.

"Cleo and I were watching the procession," she exclaimed. "I never saw so many crazy people since I was born."

"They've had enough to drive them mad the past two years, God knows," he answered, as his eye rested on Cleo, who was dressed in an old silk kimono belonging to his wife, which a friend of her grandfather had sent her from Japan.

She saw his look of surprise and said casually:

"I gave it to Cleo. I never liked the color. Cleo's to stay in the house hereafter. I've moved her things from the servants' quarters to the little room in the hall. I want her near me at night. You stay so late sometimes."

He made no answer, but the keen eyes of the girl saw the silent rage flashing from his eyes and caught the look of fierce determination as he squared his shoulders and gazed at her for a moment. She knew that he would put her out unless she could win his consent. She had made up her mind to fight and never for a moment did she accept the possibility of defeat.

He muttered an incoherent answer to his wife, kissed her good night, and went to his room. He sat down in the moonlight beside the open window, lighted a cigar and gazed out on the beautiful lawn.

His soul raged in fury over the blind folly of his wife. If the devil himself had ruled the world he could not have contrived more skillfully to throw this dangerous, sensuous young animal in his way. It was horrible! He felt himself suffocating with the thought of its possibilities! He rose and paced the floor and sat down again in helpless rage.

The door softly opened and closed and the girl stood before him in the white moonlight, her rounded figure plainly showing against the shimmering kimono as the breeze through the window pressed the delicate silk against her flesh.

He turned on her angrily:

"How dare you?"

"Why, I haven't done anything, major!" she answered softly. "I just came in to pick up that basket of trash I forgot this morning" – she spoke in low, lingering tones.

He rose, walked in front of her, looked her in the eye and quietly said:

"You're lying."

"Why, major – "

"You know that you are lying. Now get out of this room – and stay out of it, do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," came the answer that was half a sob.

"And make up your mind to leave this place to-morrow, or I'll put you out, if I have to throw you head foremost into the street."

She took a step backward, shook her head and the mass of tangled red hair fell from its coil and dropped on her shoulders. Her eyes were watching him now with dumb passionate yearning.

"Get out!" he ordered brutally.

A moment's silence and a low laugh was her answer.

"Why do you hate me?" she asked the question with a note of triumph.

"I don't," he replied with a sneer.

"Then you're afraid of me!"

"Afraid of you?"

"Yes."

He took another step and towered above her, his fists clenched and his whole being trembled with anger:

"I'd like to strangle you!"

She flung back her rounded throat, shook the long waves of hair down her back and lifted her eyes to his:

"Do it! There's my throat! I want you to. I wouldn't mind dying that way!"

He drew a deep breath and turned away.

With a sob the straight figure suddenly crumpled on the floor, a scarlet heap in the moonlight. She buried her face in her hands, choked back the cries, fought for self-control, and then looked up at him through her eyes half blinded by tears:

"Oh, what's the use! I won't lie any more. I didn't come in here for the basket. I came to see you. I came to beg you to let me stay. I watched you to-night when she told you that I was to sleep in that room there, and I knew you were going to send me away. Please don't! Please let me stay! I can do you no harm, major! I'll be wise, humble, obedient. I'll live only to please you. I haven't a single friend in the world. I hate negroes. I loathe poor white trash. This is my place, here in your home, among the birds and flowers, with your baby in my arms. You know that I love him and that he loves me. I'll work for you as no one else on earth would. My hands will be quick and my feet swift. I'll be your slave, your dog – you can kick me, beat me, strangle me, kill me if you like, but don't send me away – I – I can't help loving you! Please – please don't drive me away."

The passionate, throbbing voice broke into a sob and she touched his foot with her hand. He could feel the warmth of the soft, young flesh. He stooped and drew her to her feet.

"Come, child," he said with a queer hitch in his voice, "you – you – mustn't stay here another moment. I'm sorry – "

She clung to his hand with desperate pleading and pressed close to him:

"But you won't send me away?"

She could feel him trembling.

He hesitated, and then against the warning of conscience, reason, judgment and every instinct of law and self-preservation, he spoke the words that cost so much:

"No – I – I – won't send you away!"

With a sob of gratitude her head sank, the hot lips touched his hand, a rustle of silk and she was gone.

And through every hour of the long night, maddened by the consciousness of her physical nearness – he imagined at times he could hear her breathing in the next room – he lay awake and fought the Beast for the mastery of life.

CHAPTER X MAN TO MAN

Cleo made good her vow of perfect service. In the weeks which followed she made herself practically indispensable. Her energy was exhaustless, her strength tireless. She not only kept the baby and the little mother happy, she watched the lawn and the flowers. The men did no more loafing. The grass was cut, the hedges trimmed, every dead limb from shrub and tree removed and the old place began to smile with new life.

Her work of housekeeper and maid-of-all-work was a marvel of efficiency. No orders were ever given to her. They were unnecessary. She knew by an unerring instinct what was needed and anticipated the need.

And then a thing happened that fixed her place in the house on the firmest basis.

The baby had taken a violent cold which quickly developed into pneumonia. The doctor looked at the little red fever-scorched face and parched lips with grave silence. He spoke at last with positive conviction:

"His life depends on a nurse, Norton. All I can do is to give orders. The nurse must save him."

With a sob in her voice, Cleo said:

"Let me – I'll save him. He can't die if it depends on that."

The doctor turned to the mother.

"Can you trust her?"

"Absolutely. She's quick, strong, faithful, careful, and she loves him."

"You agree, major?"

"Yes, we couldn't do better," he answered gravely, turning away.

And so the precious life was given into her hands. Norton spent the mornings in the nursery executing the doctor's orders with clock-like regularity, while Cleo slept. At noon she quietly entered and took his place. Her meals were served in the room and she never left it until he relieved her the next day. The tireless, greenish eyes watched the cradle with death-like stillness and her keen young ears bent low to catch every change in the rising and falling of the little breast. Through the long watches of the night, the quick alert figure with the velvet tread hurried about the room filling every order with skill and patience.

At the end of two weeks, the doctor smiled, patted her on the shoulder and said:

"You're a great nurse, little girl. You've saved his life."

Her head was bending low over the cradle, the baby reached up his hand, caught one of her red curls and lisped faintly:

"C-l-e-o!"

Her eyes were shining with tears as she rushed from the room and out on the lawn to have her cry alone. There could be no question after this of her position.

When the new Legislature met in the old Capitol building four months later, it was in the atmosphere of the crisp clearness that follows the storm. The thieves and vultures had winged their way to more congenial climes. They dared not face the investigation of their saturnalia which the restored white race would make. The wisest among them fled northward on the night of the election.

The Governor couldn't run. His term of office had two years more to be filled. And shivering in his room alone, shunned as a pariah, he awaited the assault of his triumphant foes.

And nothing succeeds like success. The brilliant young editor of the *Eagle and Phoenix* was the man of the hour. When he entered the hall of the House of Representatives on the day the Assembly met, pandemonium broke loose. A shout rose from the floor that fairly shook the old granite pile. Cheer after cheer rent the air, echoed and re-echoed through the vaulted arches of the hall. Men overturned their desks and chairs as they rushed pellmell to seize his hand. They lifted him on their

shoulders and carried him in procession around the Assembly Chamber, through the corridors and around the circle of the Rotunda, cheering like madmen, and on through the Senate Chamber where every white Senator joined the procession and returned to the other end of the Capitol singing "Dixie" and shouting themselves hoarse.

He was elected Speaker of the House by his party without a dissenting voice, and the first words that fell from his lips as he ascended the dais, gazed over the cheering House, and rapped sharply for order, sounded the death knell to the hopes of the Governor for a compromise with his enemies. His voice rang clear and cold as the notes of a bugle:

"The first business before this House, gentlemen, is the impeachment and removal from office of the alleged Governor of this state!"

Again the long pent feelings of an outraged people passed all bounds. In vain the tall figure in the chair rapped for order. He had as well tried to call a cyclone to order by hammering at it with a gavel. Shout after shout, cheer after cheer, shout and cheer in apparently unending succession!

They had not only won a great victory and redeemed a state's honor, but they had found a leader who dared to lead in the work of cleansing and rebuilding the old commonwealth. It was ten minutes before order could be restored. And then with merciless precision the Speaker put in motion the legal machine that was to crush the life out of the little Scalawag who sat in his room below and listened to the roar of the storm over his head.

On the day the historic trial opened before the high tribunal of the Senate, sitting as judges, with the Chief Justice of the state as presiding officer, the Governor looked in vain for a friendly face among his accusers. Now that he was down, even the dogs in his own party whom he had reared and fed, men who had waxed fat on the spoils he had thrown them, were barking at his heels. They accused him of being the cause of the party's downfall.

The Governor had quickly made up his mind to ask no favors of these wretches. If the blow should fall, he knew to whom he would appeal that it might be tempered with mercy. The men of his discredited party were of his own type. His only chance lay in the generosity of a great foe.

It would be a bitter thing to beg a favor at the hands of the editor who had hounded him with his merciless pen from the day he had entered office, but it would be easier than an appeal to the ungrateful hounds of his own kennel who had deserted him in his hour of need.

The Bill of Impeachment which charged him with high crimes and misdemeanors against the people whose rights he had sworn to defend was drawn by the Speaker of the House, and it was a terrible document. It would not only deprive him of his great office, but strip him of citizenship, and send him from the Capitol a branded man for life.

The defense proved weak and the terrific assaults of the Impeachment managers under Norton's leadership resistless. Step by step the remorseless prosecutors closed in on the doomed culprit. Each day he sat in his place beside his counsel in the thronged Senate Chamber and heard his judges vote with practical unanimity "Guilty" on a new count in the Bill of Impeachment. The Chief Executive of a million people cowered in his seat while his accusers told and re-told the story of his crimes and the packed galleries cheered.

But one clause of the bill remained to be adjudged – the brand his accusers proposed to put upon his forehead. His final penalty should be the loss of citizenship. It was more than the Governor could bear. He begged an adjournment of the High Court for a conference with his attorneys and it was granted.

He immediately sought the Speaker, who made no effort to conceal the contempt in which he held the trembling petitioner.

"I've come to you, Major Norton," he began falteringly, "in the darkest hour of my life. I've come because I know that you are a brave and generous man. I appeal to your generosity. I've made mistakes in my administration. But I ask you to remember that few men in my place could have done

better. I was set to make bricks without straw. I was told to make water run up hill and set at naught the law of gravitation.

"I struck at you personally – yes – but remember my provocation. You made me the target of your merciless ridicule, wit and invective for two years. It was more than flesh and blood could bear without a return blow. Put yourself in my place – "

"I've tried, Governor," Norton interrupted in kindly tones. "And it's inconceivable to me that any man born and bred as you have been, among the best people of the South, a man whose fiery speeches in the Secession Convention helped to plunge this state into civil war – how you could basely betray your own flesh and blood in the hour of their sorest need – it's beyond me! I can't understand it. I've tried to put myself in your place and I can't."

The little ferret eyes were dim as he edged toward the tall figure of his accuser:

"I'm not asking of you mercy, Major Norton, on the main issue. I understand the bitterness in the hearts of these men who sit as my judges to-day. I make no fight to retain the office of Governor, but – major" – his thin voice broke – "it's too hard to brand me a criminal by depriving me of my citizenship and the right to vote, and hurl me from the highest office within the gift of a great people a nameless thing, a man without a country! Come, sir, even if all you say is true, justice may be tempered with mercy. Great minds can understand this. You are the representative to-day of a brave and generous race of men. My life is in ruins – I am at your feet. I have pride. I had high ambitions – "

His voice broke, he paused, and then continued in strained tones:

"I have loved ones to whom this shame will come as a bolt from the clear sky. They know nothing of politics. They simply love me. This final ignominy you would heap on my head may be just from your point of view. But is it necessary? Can it serve any good purpose? Is it not mere wanton cruelty?"

"Come now, man to man – our masks are off – my day is done. You are young. The world is yours. This last blow with which you would crush my spirit is too cruel! Can you afford an act of such wanton cruelty in the hour of your triumph? A small man could, yes – but you? I appeal to the best that's in you, to the spark of God that's in every human soul – "

Norton was deeply touched, far more than he dreamed any word from the man he hated could ever stir him. The Governor saw his hesitation and pressed his cause:

"I might say many things honestly in justification of my course in politics; but the time has not come. When passions have cooled and we can look the stirring events of these years squarely in the face – there'll be two sides to this question, major, as there are two sides to all questions. I might say to you that when I saw the frightful blunder I had made in helping to plunge our country into a fatal war, I tried to make good my mistake and went to the other extreme. I was ambitious, yes, but we are confronted with millions of ignorant negroes. What can we do with them? Slavery had an answer. Democracy now must give the true answer or perish – "

"That answer will never be to set these negroes up as rulers over white men!"

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