THOMAS DIXON

THE CLANSMAN: AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

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Содержание

Thomas Dixon
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TO THE MEMORY OF

A SCOTCH-IRISH LEADER OF THE SOUTH

My Uncle, Colonel Leroy McAfee

GRAND TITAN OF THE INVISIBLE EMPIRE

KU KLUX KLAN

TO THE READER

"The Clansman" is the second book of a series of historical novels planned on the Race Conflict. "The Leopard's Spots" was the statement in historical outline of the conditions from the enfranchisement of the negro to his disfranchisement.

"The Clansman" develops the true story of the "Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy," which overturned the Reconstruction régime.

The organization was governed by the Grand Wizard Commander-in-Chief, who lived at Memphis, Tennessee. The Grand Dragon commanded a State, the Grand Titan a Congressional District, the Grand Giant a County, and the Grand Cyclops a Township Den. The twelve volumes of Government reports on the famous Klan refer chiefly to events which occurred after 1870, the date of its dissolution.

The chaos of blind passion that followed Lincoln's assassination is inconceivable to-day. The revolution it produced in our Government, and the bold attempt of Thaddeus Stevens to Africanize ten great States of the American Union, read now like tales from "The Arabian Nights."

I have sought to preserve in this romance both the letter and the spirit of this remarkable period. The men who enact the drama of fierce revenge into which I have woven a double love story are historical figures. I have merely changed their names without taking a liberty with any essential historic fact.

In the darkest hour of the life of the South, when her wounded people lay helpless amid rags and ashes under the beak and talon of the Vulture, suddenly from the mists of the mountains appeared a white cloud the size of a man's hand. It grew until its mantle of mystery enfolded the stricken earth and sky. An "Invisible Empire" had risen from the field of Death and challenged the Visible to mortal combat.

How the young South, led by the reincarnated souls of the Clansmen of Old Scotland, went forth under this cover and against overwhelming odds, daring exile, imprisonment, and a felon's death, and saved the life of a people, forms one of the most dramatic chapters in the history of the Aryan race.

Thomas Dixon, Jr.

Dixondale, Va.
December 14, 1904.

LEADING CHARACTERS OF THE STORY

Scene: Washington and the Foothills of the Carolinas

Time: 1865 to 1870

Ben Cameron	Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan
Margaret	His Sister
Mrs. Cameron	His Mother
Dr. Richard Cameron	His Father
Hon. Austin Stoneman	Radical Leader of Congress
Phil	His Son
Elsie	His Daughter
Marion Lenoir	Ben's First Love
Mrs. Lenoir	Her Mother
Jake	A Faithful Man
Silas Lynch	A Negro Missionary
Uncle Aleck	The Member from Ulster
Cindy	His Wife
Colonel Howle	A Carpet-bagger
Augustus Cæsar	Of the Black Guard
Charles Sumner	Of Massachusetts
Gen. Benjamin F. Butler	Of Fort Fisher
Andrew Johnson	The President
U. S. Grant	The Commanding General
Abraham Lincoln	The Friend of the South

Book I – The Assassination

CHAPTER I
The Bruised Reed

The fair girl who was playing a banjo and singing to the wounded soldiers suddenly stopped, and, turning to the surgeon, whispered:

"What's that?"

"It sounds like a mob – "

With a common impulse they moved to the open window of the hospital and listened.

On the soft spring air came the roar of excited thousands sweeping down the avenue from the Capitol toward the White House. Above all rang the cries of struggling newsboys screaming an "Extra." One of them darted around the corner, his shrill voice quivering with excitement:

"*Extra! Extra! Peace! Victory!*"

Windows were suddenly raised, women thrust their heads out, and others rushed into the street and crowded around the boy, struggling to get his papers. He threw them right and left and snatched the money – no one asked for change. Without ceasing rose his cry:

"*Extra! Peace! Victory! Lee has surrendered!*"

At last the end had come.

The great North, with its millions of sturdy people and their exhaustless resources, had greeted the first shot on Sumter with contempt and incredulity. A few regiments went forward for a month's outing to settle the trouble. The Thirteenth Brooklyn marched gayly Southward on a thirty days' jaunt, with pieces of rope conspicuously tied to their muskets with which to bring back each man a Southern prisoner to be led in a noose through the streets on their early triumphant return! It would be unkind to tell what became of those ropes when they suddenly started back home ahead of the scheduled time from the first battle of Bull Run.

People from the South, equally wise, marched gayly North, to whip five Yankees each before breakfast, and encountered unforeseen difficulties.

Both sides had things to learn, and learned them in a school whose logic is final – a four years' course in the University of Hell – the scream of eagles, the howl of wolves, the bay of tigers, the roar of lions – all locked in Death's embrace, and each mad scene lit by the glare of volcanoes of savage passions!

But the long agony was over.

The city bells began to ring. The guns of the forts joined the chorus, and their deep steel throats roared until the earth trembled.

Just across the street a mother who was reading the fateful

news turned and suddenly clasped a boy to her heart, crying for joy. The last draft of half a million had called for him.

The Capital of the Nation was shaking off the long nightmare of horror and suspense. More than once the city had shivered at the mercy of those daring men in gray, and the reveille of their drums had startled even the President at his desk.

Again and again had the destiny of the Republic hung on the turning of a hair, and in every crisis, Luck, Fate, God, had tipped the scale for the Union.

A procession of more than five hundred Confederate deserters, who had crossed the lines in groups, swung into view, marching past the hospital, indifferent to the tumult. Only a nominal guard flanked them as they shuffled along, tired, ragged, and dirty. The gray in their uniforms was now the colour of clay. Some had on blue pantaloons, some, blue vests, others blue coats captured on the field of blood. Some had pieces of carpet, and others old bags around their shoulders. They had been passing thus for weeks. Nobody paid any attention to them.

"One of the secrets of the surrender!" exclaimed Doctor Barnes. "Mr. Lincoln has been at the front for the past weeks with offers of peace and mercy, if they would lay down their arms. The great soul of the President, even the genius of Lee could not resist. His smile began to melt those gray ranks as the sun is warming the earth to-day."

"You are a great admirer of the President," said the girl, with a curious smile.

"Yes, Miss Elsie, and so are all who know him."

She turned from the window without reply. A shadow crossed her face as she looked past the long rows of cots, on which rested the men in blue, until her eyes found one on which lay, alone among his enemies, a young Confederate officer.

The surgeon turned with her toward the man.

"Will he live?" she asked.

"Yes, only to be hung."

"For what?" she cried.

"Sentenced by court-martial as a guerilla. It's a lie, but there's some powerful hand back of it – some mysterious influence in high authority. The boy wasn't fully conscious at the trial."

"We must appeal to Mr. Stanton."

"As well appeal to the devil. They say the order came from his office."

"A boy of nineteen!" she exclaimed. "It's a shame. I'm looking for his mother. You told me to telegraph to Richmond for her."

"Yes, I'll never forget his cries that night, so utterly pitiful and childlike. I've heard many a cry of pain, but in all my life nothing so heartbreaking as that boy in fevered delirium talking to his mother. His voice is one of peculiar tenderness, penetrating and musical. It goes quivering into your soul, and compels you to listen until you swear it's your brother or sweetheart or sister or mother calling you. You should have seen him the day he fell. God of mercies, the pity and the glory of it!"

"Phil wrote me that he was a hero and asked me to look after

him. Were you there?"

"Yes, with the battery your brother was supporting. He was the colonel of a shattered rebel regiment lying just in front of us before Petersburg. Richmond was doomed, resistance was madness, but there they were, ragged and half starved, a handful of men, not more than four hundred, but their bayonets gleamed and flashed in the sunlight. In the face of a murderous fire he charged and actually drove our men out of an entrenchment. We concentrated our guns on him as he crouched behind this earthwork. Our own men lay outside in scores, dead, dying, and wounded. When the fire slacked, we could hear their cries for water.

"Suddenly this boy sprang on the breastwork. He was dressed in a new gray colonel's uniform that mother of his, in the pride of her soul, had sent him.

"He was a handsome figure – tall, slender, straight, a gorgeous yellow sash tasselled with gold around his waist, his sword flashing in the sun, his slouch hat cocked on one side and an eagle's feather in it.

"We thought he was going to lead another charge, but just as the battery was making ready to fire he deliberately walked down the embankment in a hail of musketry and began to give water to our wounded men.

"Every gun ceased firing, and we watched him. He walked back to the trench, his naked sword flashed suddenly above that eagle's feather, and his grizzled ragamuffins sprang forward and

charged us like so many demons.

"There were not more than three hundred of them now, but on they came, giving that hellish rebel yell at every jump – the cry of the hunter from the hilltop at the sight of his game! All Southern men are hunters, and that cry was transformed in war into something unearthly when it came from a hundred throats in chorus and the game was human.

"Of course, it was madness. We blew them down that hill like chaff before a hurricane. When the last man had staggered back or fallen, on came this boy alone, carrying the colours he had snatched from a falling soldier, as if he were leading a million men to victory.

"A bullet had blown his hat from his head, and we could see the blood streaming down the side of his face. He charged straight into the jaws of one of our guns. And then, with a smile on his lips and a dare to death in his big brown eyes, he rammed that flag into the cannon's mouth, reeled, and fell! A cheer broke from our men.

"Your brother sprang forward and caught him in his arms, and as we bent over the unconscious form, he exclaimed: 'My God, doctor, look at him! He is so much like me I feel as if I had been shot myself!' They were as much alike as twins – only his hair was darker. I tell you, Miss Elsie, it's a sin to kill men like that. One such man is worth more to this nation than every negro that ever set his flat foot on this continent!"

The girl's eyes had grown dim as she listened to the story.

"I will appeal to the President," she said firmly.

"It's the only chance. And just now he is under tremendous pressure. His friendly order to the Virginia Legislature to return to Richmond, Stanton forced him to cancel. A master hand has organized a conspiracy in Congress to crush the President. They curse his policy of mercy as imbecility, and swear to make the South a second Poland. Their watchwords are vengeance and confiscation. Four fifths of his party in Congress are in this plot. The President has less than a dozen real friends in either House on whom he can depend. They say that Stanton is to be given a free hand, and that the gallows will be busy. This cancelled order of the President looks like it."

"I'll try my hand with Mr. Stanton," she said with slow emphasis.

"Good luck, Little Sister – let me know if I can help," the surgeon answered cheerily as he passed on his round of work.

Elsie Stoneman took her seat beside the cot of the wounded Confederate and began softly to sing and play.

A little farther along the same row a soldier was dying, a faint choking just audible in his throat. An attendant sat beside him and would not leave till the last. The ordinary chat and hum of the ward went on indifferent to peace, victory, life, or death. Before the finality of the hospital all other events of earth fade. Some were playing cards or checkers, some laughing and joking, and others reading.

At the first soft note from the singer the games ceased, and

the reader put down his book.

The banjo had come to Washington with the negroes following the wake of the army. She had laid aside her guitar and learned to play all the stirring camp songs of the South. Her voice was low, soothing, and tender. It held every silent listener in a spell.

As she played and sang the songs the wounded man loved, her eyes lingered in pity on his sun-bronzed face, pinched and drawn with fever. He was sleeping the stupid sleep that gives no rest. She could count the irregular pounding of his heart in the throb of the big vein on his neck. His lips were dry and burnt, and the little boyish moustache curled upward from the row of white teeth as if scorched by the fiery breath.

He began to talk in flighty sentences, and she listened – his mother – his sister – and yes, she was sure as she bent nearer – a little sweetheart who lived next door. They all had sweethearts – these Southern boys. Again he was teasing his dog – and then back in battle.

At length he opened his eyes, great dark-brown eyes, unnaturally bright, with a strange yearning look in their depths as they rested on Elsie. He tried to smile and feebly said:

"Here's – a – fly – on – my – left – ear – my – guns – can't – somehow – reach – him – won't – you – "

She sprang forward and brushed the fly away.

Again he opened his eyes.

"Excuse – me – for – asking – but am I alive?"

"Yes, indeed," was the cheerful answer.

"Well, now, then, is this me, or is it not me, or has a cannon shot me, or has the devil got me?"

"It's you. The cannon didn't shoot you, but three muskets did. The devil hasn't got you yet, but he will unless you're good."

"I'll be good if you won't leave me – "

Elsie turned her head away smiling, and he went on slowly:

"But I'm dead, I know. I'm sleeping on a cot with a canopy over it. I ain't hungry any more, and an angel has been hovering over me playing on a harp of gold – "

"Only a little Yankee girl playing the banjo."

"Can't fool me – I'm in heaven."

"You're in the hospital."

"Funny hospital – look at that harp and that big trumpet hanging close by it – that's Gabriel's trumpet – "

"No," she laughed. "This is the Patent Office building, that covers two blocks, now a temporary hospital. There are seventy thousand wounded soldiers in town, and more coming on every train. The thirty-five hospitals are overcrowded."

He closed his eyes a moment in silence, and then spoke with a feeble tremor:

"I'm afraid you don't know who I am – I can't impose on you – I'm a rebel – "

"Yes, I know. You are Colonel Ben Cameron. It makes no difference to me now which side you fought on."

"Well, I'm in heaven – been dead a long time. I can prove it, if you'll play again."

"What shall I play?"

"First, '*O Jonny Booker Help dis Nigger*.'"

She played and sang it beautifully.

"Now, '*Wake Up in the Morning*.'"

Again he listened with wide, staring eyes that saw nothing except visions within.

"Now, then, '*The Ole Gray Hoss*.'"

As the last notes died away he tried to smile again:

"One more – '*Hard Times an' Wuss er Comin'*.'"

With deft, sure touch and soft negro dialect she sang it through.

"Now, didn't I tell you that you couldn't fool me? No Yankee girl could play and sing these songs, I'm in heaven, and you're an angel."

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself to flirt with me, with one foot in the grave?"

"That's the time to get on good terms with the angels – but I'm done dead – "

Elsie laughed in spite of herself.

"I know it," he went on, "because you have shining golden hair and amber eyes instead of blue ones. I never saw a girl in my life before with such eyes and hair."

"But you're young yet."

"Never – was – such – a – girl – on – earth – you're – an – "

She lifted her finger in warning, and his eyelids drooped In exhausted stupor.

"You musn't talk any more," she whispered, shaking her head.

A commotion at the door caused Elsie to turn from the cot. A sweet motherly woman of fifty, in an old faded black dress, was pleading with the guard to be allowed to pass.

"Can't do it, m'um. It's agin the rules."

"But I must go in. I've tramped for four days through a wilderness of hospitals, and I know he must be here."

"Special orders, m'um – wounded rebels in here that belong in prison."

"Very well, young man," said the pleading voice. "My baby boy's in this place, wounded and about to die. I'm going in there. You can shoot me if you like, or you can turn your head the other way."

She stepped quickly past the soldier, who merely stared with dim eyes out the door and saw nothing.

She stood for a moment with a look of helpless bewilderment. The vast area of the second story of the great monolithic pile was crowded with rows of sick, wounded, and dying men – a strange, solemn, and curious sight. Against the walls were ponderous glass cases, filled with models of every kind of invention the genius of man had dreamed. Between these cases were deep lateral openings, eight feet wide, crowded with the sick, and long rows of them were stretched through the centre of the hall. A gallery ran around above the cases, and this was filled with cots. The clatter of the feet of passing surgeons and nurses over the marble floor added to the weird impression.

Elsie saw the look of helpless appeal in the mother's face and hurried forward to meet her:

"Is this Mrs. Cameron, of South Carolina?"

The trembling figure in black grasped her hand eagerly:

"Yes, yes, my dear, and I'm looking for my boy, who is wounded unto death. Can you help me?"

"I thought I recognized you from a miniature I've seen," she answered softly. "I'll lead you direct to his cot."

"Thank you, thank you!" came the low reply.

In a moment she was beside him, and Elsie walked away to the open window through which came the chirp of sparrows from the lilac bushes in full bloom below.

The mother threw one look of infinite tenderness on the drawn face, and her hands suddenly clasped in prayer:

"I thank Thee, Lord Jesus, for this hour! Thou hast heard the cry of my soul and led my feet!" She gently knelt, kissed the hot lips, smoothed the dark tangled hair back from his forehead, and her hand rested over his eyes.

A faint flush tinged his face.

"It's you, Mamma – I – know – you – that's – your – hand – or – else – it's – God's!"

She slipped her arms about him.

"My hero, my darling, my baby!"

"I'll get well now, Mamma, never fear. You see, I had whipped them that day as I had many a time before. I don't know how it happened – my men seemed all to go down at once. You know

– I couldn't surrender in that new uniform of a colonel you sent me – we made a gallant fight, and – now – I'm – just – a – little – tired – but you are here, and it's all right."

"Yes, yes, dear. It's all over now. General Lee has surrendered, and when you are better I'll take you home, where the sunshine and flowers will give you strength again."

"How's my little sis?"

"Hunting in another part of the city for you. She's grown so tall and stately you'll hardly know her. Your papa is at home, and don't know yet that you are wounded."

"And my sweetheart, Marion Lenoir?"

"The most beautiful little girl in Piedmont – as sweet and mischievous as ever. Mr. Lenoir is very ill, but he has written a glorious poem about one of your charges. I'll show it to you to-morrow. He is our greatest poet. The South worships him. Marion sent her love to you and a kiss for the young hero of Piedmont. I'll give it to you now."

She bent again and kissed him.

"And my dogs?"

"General Sherman left them, at least."

"Well, I'm glad of that – my mare all right?"

"Yes, but we had a time to save her – Jake hid her in the woods till the army passed."

"Bully for Jake."

"I don't know what we should have done without him."

"Old Aleck still at home and getting drunk as usual?"

"No, he ran away with the army and persuaded every negro on the Lenoir place to go, except his wife, Aunt Cindy."

"The old rascal, when Mrs. Lenoir's mother saved him from burning to death when he was a boy!"

"Yes, and he told the Yankees those fire scars were made with the lash, and led a squad to the house one night to burn the barns. Jake headed them off and told on him. The soldiers were so mad they strung him up and thrashed him nearly to death. We haven't seen him since."

"Well, I'll take care of you, Mamma, when I get home. Of course I'll get well. It's absurd to die at nineteen. You know I never believed the bullet had been moulded that could hit me. In three years of battle I lived a charmed life and never got a scratch."

His voice had grown feeble and laboured, and his face flushed. His mother placed her hand on his lips.

"Just one more," he pleaded feebly. "Did you see the little angel who has been playing and singing for me? You must thank her."

"Yes, I see her coming now. I must go and tell Margaret, and we will get a pass and come every day."

She kissed him, and went to meet Elsie.

"And you are the dear girl who has been playing and singing for my boy, a wounded stranger here alone among his foes?"

"Yes, and for all the others, too."

Mrs. Cameron seized both of her hands and looked at her

tenderly.

"You will let me kiss you? I shall always love you."

She pressed Elsie to her heart. In spite of the girl's reserve, a sob caught her breath at the touch of the warm lips. Her own mother had died when she was a baby, and a shy, hungry heart, long hidden from the world, leaped in tenderness and pain to meet that embrace.

Elsie walked with her to the door, wondering how the terrible truth of her boy's doom could be told.

She tried to speak, looked into Mrs. Cameron's face, radiant with grateful joy, and the words froze on her lips. She decided to walk a little way with her. But the task became all the harder.

At the corner she stopped abruptly and bade her good-bye:

"I must leave you now, Mrs. Cameron. I will call for you in the morning and help you secure the passes to enter the hospital."

The mother stroked the girl's hand and held it lingeringly.

"How good you are," she said softly. "And you have not told me your name?"

Elsie hesitated and said:

"That's a little secret. They call me Sister Elsie, the Banjo Maid, in the hospitals. My father is a man of distinction. I should be annoyed if my full name were known. I'm Elsie Stoneman. My father is the leader of the House. I live with my aunt."

"Thank you," she whispered, pressing her hand.

Elsie watched the dark figure disappear in the crowd with a strange tumult of feeling.

The mention of her father had revived the suspicion that he was the mysterious power threatening the policy of the President and planning a reign of terror for the South. Next to the President, he was the most powerful man in Washington, and the unrelenting foe of Mr. Lincoln, although the leader of his party in Congress, which he ruled with a rod of iron. He was a man of fierce and terrible resentments. And yet, in his personal life, to those he knew, he was generous and considerate. "Old Austin Stoneman, the Great Commoner," he was called, and his name was one to conjure with in the world of deeds. To this fair girl he was the noblest Roman of them all, her ideal of greatness. He was an indulgent father, and while not demonstrative, loved his children with passionate devotion.

She paused and looked up at the huge marble columns that seemed each a sentinel beckoning her to return within to the cot that held a wounded foe. The twilight had deepened, and the soft light of the rising moon had clothed the solemn majesty of the building with shimmering tenderness and beauty.

"Why should I be distressed for one, an enemy, among these thousands who have fallen?" she asked herself. Every detail of the scene she had passed through with him and his mother stood out in her soul with startling distinctness – and the horror of his doom cut with the deep sense of personal anguish.

"He shall not die," she said, with sudden resolution. "I'll take his mother to the President. He can't resist her. I'll send for Phil to help me."

She hurried to the telegraph office and summoned her brother.

CHAPTER II
The Great Heart

The next morning, when Elsie reached the obscure boarding-house at which Mrs. Cameron stopped, the mother had gone to the market to buy a bunch of roses to place beside her boy's cot.

As Elsie awaited her return, the practical little Yankee maid thought with a pang of the tenderness and folly of such people. She knew this mother had scarcely enough to eat, but to her bread was of small importance, flowers necessary to life. After all, it was very sweet, this foolishness of these Southern people, and it somehow made her homesick.

"How can I tell her!" she sighed. "And yet I must."

She had only waited a moment when Mrs. Cameron suddenly entered with her daughter. She threw her flowers on the table, sprang forward to meet Elsie, seized her hands and called to Margaret.

"How good of you to come so soon! This, Margaret, is our dear little friend who has been so good to Ben and to me."

Margaret took Elsie's hand and longed to throw her arms around her neck, but something in the quiet dignity of the Northern girl's manner held her back. She only smiled tenderly through her big dark eyes, and softly said:

"We love you! Ben was my last brother. We were playmates and chums. My heart broke when he ran away to the front. How

can we thank you and your brother!"

"I'm sure we've done nothing more than you would have done for us," said Elsie, as Mrs. Cameron left the room.

"Yes, I know, but we can never tell you how grateful we are to you. We feel that you have saved Ben's life and ours. The war has been one long horror to us since my first brother was killed. But now it's over, and we have Ben left, and our hearts have been crying for joy all night."

"I hoped my brother, Captain Phil Stoneman, would be here to-day to meet you and help me, but he can't reach Washington before Friday."

"He caught Ben in his arms!" cried Margaret. "I know he's brave, and you must be proud of him."

"Doctor Barnes says they are as much alike as twins – only Phil is not quite so tall and has blond hair like mine."

"You will let me see him and thank him the moment he comes?"

"Hurry, Margaret!" cheerily cried Mrs. Cameron, reëntering the parlour. "Get ready; we must go at once to the hospital."

Margaret turned and with stately grace hurried from the room. The old dress she wore as unconscious of its shabbiness as though it were a royal robe.

"And now, my dear, what must I do to get the passes?" asked the mother eagerly.

Elsie's warm amber eyes grew misty for a moment, and the fair skin with its gorgeous rose tints of the North paled. She hesitated,

tried to speak, and was silent.

The sensitive soul of the Southern woman read the message of sorrow words had not framed.

"Tell me, quickly! The doctor – has – not – concealed – his – true – condition – from – me?"

"No, he is certain to recover."

"What then?"

"Worse – he is condemned to death by court-martial."

"Condemned to death – a – wounded – prisoner – of – war!" she whispered slowly, with blanched face.

"Yes, he was accused of violating the rules of war as a guerilla raider in the invasion of Pennsylvania."

"Absurd and monstrous! He was on General Jeb Stuart's staff and could have acted only under his orders. He joined the infantry after Stuart's death, and rose to be a colonel, though but a boy. There's some terrible mistake!"

"Unless we can obtain his pardon," Elsie went on in even, restrained tones, "there is no hope. We must appeal to the President."

The mother's lips trembled, and she seemed about to faint.

"Could I see the President?" she asked, recovering herself with an effort.

"He has just reached Washington from the front, and is thronged by thousands. It will be difficult."

The mother's lips were moving in silent prayer, and her eyes were tightly closed to keep back the tears.

"Can you help me, dear?" she asked piteously.

"Yes," was the quick response.

"You see," she went on, "I feel so helpless. I have never been to the White House or seen the President, and I don't know how to go about seeing him or how to ask him – and – I am afraid of Mr. Lincoln! I have heard so many harsh things said of him."

"I'll do my best, Mrs. Cameron. We must go at once to the White House and try to see him."

The mother lifted the girl's hand and stroked it gently.

"We will not tell Margaret. Poor child! she could not endure this. When we return, we may have better news. It can't be worse. I'll send her on an errand."

She took up the bouquet of gorgeous roses with a sigh, buried her face in the fresh perfume, as if to gain strength in their beauty and fragrance, and left the room.

In a few moments she had returned and was on her way with Elsie to the White House.

It was a beautiful spring morning, this eleventh day of April, 1865. The glorious sunshine, the shimmering green of the grass, the warm breezes, and the shouts of victory mocked the mother's anguish.

At the White House gates they passed the blue sentry pacing silently back and forth, who merely glanced at them with keen eyes and said nothing. In the steady beat of his feet the mother could hear the tramp of soldiers leading her boy to the place of death!

A great lump rose in her throat as she caught the first view of the Executive Mansion gleaming white and silent and ghostlike among the budding trees. The tall columns of the great facade, spotless as snow, the spray of the fountain, the marble walls, pure, dazzling, and cold, seemed to her the gateway to some great tomb in which her own dead and the dead of all the people lay! To her the fair white palace, basking there in the sunlight and budding grass, shrub, and tree, was the Judgment House of Fate. She thought of all the weary feet that had climbed its fateful steps in hope to return in despair, of its fierce dramas on which the lives of millions had hung, and her heart grew sick.

A long line of people already stretched from the entrance under the portico far out across the park, awaiting their turn to see the President.

Mrs. Cameron placed her hand falteringly on Elsie's shoulder.

"Look, my dear, what a crowd already! Must we wait in line?"

"No, I can get you past the throng with my father's name."

"Will it be very difficult to reach the President?"

"No, it's very easy. Guards and sentinels annoy him. He frets until they are removed. An assassin or maniac could kill him almost any hour of the day or night. The doors are open at all hours, very late at night. I have often walked up to the rooms of his secretaries as late as nine o'clock without being challenged by a soul."

"What must I call him? Must I say 'Your Excellency?'"

"By no means – he hates titles and forms. You should say 'Mr.

President' in addressing him. But you will please him best if, in your sweet, homelike way, you will just call him by his name. You can rely on his sympathy. Read this letter of his to a widow. I brought it to show you."

She handed Mrs. Cameron a newspaper clipping on which was printed Mr. Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby, of Boston, who had lost five sons in the war.

Over and over she read its sentences until they echoed as solemn music in her soul:

"I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

"Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

"Abraham Lincoln."

"And the President paused amid a thousand cares to write that letter to a broken-hearted woman?" the mother asked.

"Yes."

"Then he is good down to the last secret depths of a great heart! Only a Christian father could have written that letter. I shall not be afraid to speak to him. And they told me he was an infidel!"

Elsie led her by a private way past the crowd and into the office of Major Hay, the President's private secretary. A word from the Great Commoner's daughter admitted them at once to the President's room.

"Just take a seat on one side, Miss Elsie," said Major Hay; "watch your first opportunity and introduce your friend."

On entering the room, Mrs. Cameron could not see the President, who was seated at his desk surrounded by three men in deep consultation over a mass of official documents.

She looked about the room nervously and felt reassured by its plain aspect. It was a medium-sized, officelike place, with no signs of elegance or ceremony. Mr. Lincoln was seated in an armchair beside a high writing-desk and table combined. She noticed that his feet were large and that they rested on a piece of simple straw matting. Around the room were sofas and chairs covered with green worsted.

When the group about the chair parted a moment, she caught the first glimpse of the man who held her life in the hollow of his hand. She studied him with breathless interest. His back was still turned. Even while seated, she saw that he was a man of enormous stature, fully six feet four inches tall, legs and arms abnormally long, and huge broad shoulders slightly stooped. His head was powerful and crowned with a mass of heavy brown hair, tinged with silver.

He turned his head slightly and she saw his profile set in its short dark beard – the broad intellectual brow, half covered by

unmanageable hair, his face marked with deep-cut lines of life and death, with great hollows in the cheeks and under the eyes. In the lines which marked the corners of his mouth she could see firmness, and his beetling brows and unusually heavy eyelids looked stern and formidable. Her heart sank. She looked again and saw goodness, tenderness, sorrow, canny shrewdness, and a strange lurking smile all haunting his mouth and eye.

Suddenly he threw himself forward in his chair, wheeled and faced one of his tormentors with a curious and comical expression. With one hand patting the other, and a funny look overspreading his face, he said:

"My friend, let me tell you something – "

The man again stepped before him, and she could hear nothing. When the story was finished, the man tried to laugh. It died in a feeble effort. But the President laughed heartily, laughed all over, and laughed his visitors out of the room.

Mrs. Cameron turned toward Elsie with a mute look of appeal to give her this moment of good-humour in which to plead her cause, but before she could move a man of military bearing suddenly stepped before the President.

He began to speak, but seeing the look of stern decision in Mr. Lincoln's face, turned abruptly and said:

"Mr. President, I see you are fully determined not to do me justice!"

Mr. Lincoln slightly compressed his lips, rose quietly, seized the intruder by the arm, and led him toward the door.

"This is the third time you have forced your presence on me, sir, asking that I reverse the just sentence of a court-martial, dismissing you from the service. I told you my decision was carefully made and was final. Now I give you fair warning never to show yourself in this room again. I can bear censure, but I will not endure insult!"

In whining tones the man begged for his papers he had dropped.

"Begone, sir," said the President, as he thrust him through the door. "Your papers will be sent to you."

The poor mother trembled at this startling act and sank back limp in her seat.

With quick, swinging stride the President walked back to his desk, accompanied by Major Hay and a young German girl, whose simple dress told that she was from the Western plains.

He handed the secretary an official paper.

"Give this pardon to the boy's mother when she comes this morning," he said kindly to the secretary, his eyes suddenly full of gentleness.

"How could I consent to shoot a boy raised on a farm, in the habit of going to bed at dark, for falling asleep at his post when required to watch all night? I'll never go into eternity with the blood of such a boy on my skirts."

Again the mother's heart rose.

"You remember the young man I pardoned for a similar offence in '62, about which Stanton made such a fuss?" he went

on in softly reminiscent tones. “Well, here is that pardon.”

He drew from the lining of his silk hat a photograph, around which was wrapped an executive pardon. Through the lower end of it was a bullet-hole stained with blood.

“I got this in Richmond. They found him dead on the field. He fell in the front ranks with my photograph in his pocket next to his heart, this pardon wrapped around it, and on the back of it in his boy’s scrawl, ‘*God bless Abraham Lincoln*.’ I love to invest in bonds like that.”

The secretary returned to his room, the girl who was waiting stepped forward, and the President rose to receive her.

The mother’s quick eye noted, with surprise, the simple dignity and chivalry of manner with which he received this humble woman of the people.

With straightforward eloquence the girl poured out her story, begging for the pardon of her young brother who had been sentenced to death as a deserter. He listened in silence.

How pathetic the deep melancholy of his sad face! Yes, she was sure, the saddest face that God ever made in all the world! Her own stricken heart for a moment went out to him in sympathy.

The President took off his spectacles, wiped his forehead with the large red silk handkerchief he carried, and his eyes twinkled kindly down into the good German face.

“You seem an honest, truthful, sweet girl,” he said, “and” – he smiled – “you don’t wear hoop skirts! I may be whipped for this,

but I'll trust you and your brother, too. He shall be pardoned." Elsie rose to introduce Mrs. Cameron, when a Congressman from Massachusetts suddenly stepped before her and pressed for the pardon of a slave trader whose ship had been confiscated. He had spent five years in prison, but could not pay the heavy fine in money imposed.

The President had taken his seat again, and read the eloquent appeal for mercy. He looked up over his spectacles, fixed his eyes piercingly on the Congressman and said:

"This is a moving appeal, sir, expressed with great eloquence. I might pardon a murderer under the spell of such words, but a man who can make a business of going to Africa and robbing her of her helpless children and selling them into bondage – no, sir – he may rot in jail before he shall have liberty by any act of mine!"

Again the mother's heart sank.

Her hour had come. She must put the issue of life or death to the test, and as Elsie rose and stepped quickly forward, she followed; nerving herself for the ordeal.

The President took Elsie's hand familiarly and smiled without rising. Evidently she was well known to him.

"Will you hear the prayer of a broken-hearted mother of the South, who has lost four sons in General Lee's army?" she asked.

Looking quietly past the girl, he caught sight, for the first time, of the faded dress and the sorrow-shadowed face.

He was on his feet in a moment, extended his hand and led her to a chair.

"Take this seat, Madam, and then tell me in your own way what I can do for you." In simple words, mighty with the eloquence of a mother's heart, she told her story and asked for the pardon of her boy, promising his word of honour and her own that he would never again take up arms against the Union.

"The war is over now, Mr. Lincoln," she said, "and we have lost all. Can you conceive the desolation of *my* heart? My four boys were noble men. They may have been wrong, but they fought for what they believed to be right. You, too, have lost a boy."

The President's eyes grew dim.

"Yes, a beautiful boy – " he said simply.

"Well, mine are all gone but this baby. One of them sleeps in an unmarked grave at Gettysburg. One died in a Northern prison. One fell at Chancellorsville, one in the Wilderness, and this, my baby, before Petersburg. Perhaps I've loved him too much, this last one – he's only a child yet – "

"You shall have your boy, my dear Madam," the President said simply, seating himself and writing a brief order to the Secretary of War.

The mother drew near his desk, softly crying. Through her tears she said:

"My heart is heavy, Mr. Lincoln, when I think of all the hard and bitter things we have heard of you."

"Well, give my love to the people of South Carolina when you go home, and tell them that I am their President, and that I

have never forgotten this fact in the darkest hours of this awful war; and I am going to do everything in my power to help them." "You will never regret this generous act," the mother cried with gratitude.

"I reckon not," he answered. "I'll tell you something, Madam, if you won't tell anybody. It's a secret of my administration. I'm only too glad of an excuse to save a life when I can. Every drop of blood shed in this war North and South has been as if it were wrung out of my heart. A strange fate decreed that the bloodiest war in human history should be fought under my direction. And I – to whom the sight of blood is a sickening horror – I have been compelled to look on in silent anguish because I could not stop it! Now that the Union is saved, not another drop of blood shall be spilled if I can prevent it."

"May God bless you!" the mother cried, as she received from him the order.

She held his hand an instant as she took her leave, laughing and sobbing in her great joy.

"I must tell you, Mr. President," she said, "how surprised and how pleased I am to find you are a Southern man."

"Why, didn't you know that my parents were Virginians, and that I was born in Kentucky?"

"Very few people in the South know it. I am ashamed to say I did not."

"Then, how did you know I am a Southerner?"

"By your looks, your manner of speech, your easy, kindly

ways, your tenderness and humour, your firmness in the right as you see it, and, above all, the way you rose and bowed to a woman in an old, faded black dress, whom you knew to be an enemy." "No, Madam, not an enemy now," he said softly. "That word is out of date."

"If we had only known you in time – "

The President accompanied her to the door with a deference of manner that showed he had been deeply touched.

"Take this letter to Mr. Stanton at once," he said. "Some folks complain of my pardons, but it rests me after a hard day's work if I can save some poor boy's life. I go to bed happy, thinking of the joy I have given to those who love him."

As the last words were spoken, a peculiar dreaminess of expression stole over his careworn face, as if a throng of gracious memories had lifted for a moment the burden of his life.

CHAPTER III
The Man of War

Elsie led Mrs. Cameron direct from the White House to the War Department.

"Well, Mrs. Cameron, what did you think of the President?" she asked.

"I hardly know," was the thoughtful answer. "He is the greatest man I ever met. One feels this instinctively."

When Mrs. Cameron was ushered into the Secretary's Office, Mr. Stanton was seated at his desk writing.

She handed the order of the President to a clerk, who gave it to the Secretary.

He was a man in the full prime of life, intellectual and physical, low and heavy set, about five feet eight inches in height and inclined to fat. His movements, however, were quick, and as he swung in his chair the keenest vigour marked every movement of body and every change of his countenance.

His face was swarthy and covered with a long, dark beard touched with gray. He turned a pair of little black piercing eyes on her and without rising said:

"So you are the woman who has a wounded son under sentence of death as a guerilla?"

"I am so unfortunate," she answered.

"Well, I have nothing to say to you," he went on in a louder

and sterner tone, “and no time to waste on you. If you have raised up men to rebel against the best government under the sun, you can take the consequences – ”

“But, my dear sir,” broke in the mother, “he is a mere boy of nineteen, who ran away three years ago and entered the service – ”

“I don’t want to hear another word from you!” he yelled in rage. “I have no time to waste – go at once. I’ll do nothing for you.”

“But I bring you an order from the President,” protested the mother.

“Yes, I know it,” he answered with a sneer, “and I’ll do with it what I’ve done with many others – see that it is not executed – now go.”

“But the President told me you would give me a pass to the hospital, and that a full pardon would be issued to my boy!”

“Yes, I see. But let me give you some information. The President is a fool – a d – fool! Now, will you go?”

With a sinking sense of horror, Mrs. Cameron withdrew and reported to Elsie the unexpected encounter.

“The brute!” cried the girl. “We’ll go back immediately and report this insult to the President.”

“Why are such men intrusted with power?” the mother sighed.

“It’s a mystery to me, I’m sure. They say he is the greatest Secretary of War in our history. I don’t believe it. Phil hates the sight of him, and so does every army officer I know, from

General Grant down. I hope Mr. Lincoln will expel him from the Cabinet for this insult."

When, they were again ushered into the President's office, Elsie hastened to inform him of the outrageous reply the Secretary of War had made to his order.

"Did Stanton say that I was a fool?" he asked, with a quizzical look out of his kindly eyes.

"Yes, he did," snapped Elsie. "And he repeated it with a blankety prefix."

The President looked good-humouredly out of the window toward the War Office and musingly said:

"Well, if Stanton says that I am a blankety fool, it must be so, for I have found out that he is nearly always right, and generally means what he says. I'll just step over and see Stanton."

As he spoke the last sentence, the humour slowly faded from his face, and the anxious mother saw back of those patient gray eyes the sudden gleam of the courage and conscious power of a lion.

He dismissed them with instructions to return the next day for his final orders and walked over to the War Department alone.

The Secretary of War was in one of his ugliest moods, and made no effort to conceal it when asked his reasons for the refusal to execute the order.

"The grounds for my action are very simple," he said with bitter emphasis. "The execution of this traitor is part of a carefully considered policy of justice on which the future security

of the Nation depends. If I am to administer this office, I will not be hamstrung by constant Executive interference. Besides, in this particular case, I was urged that justice be promptly executed by the most powerful man in Congress. I advise you to avoid a quarrel with old Stoneman at this crisis in our history."

The President sat on a sofa with his legs crossed, relapsed into an attitude of resignation, and listened in silence until the last sentence, when suddenly he sat bolt upright, fixed his deep gray eyes intently on Stanton and said:

"Mr. Secretary, I reckon you will have to execute that order."

"I cannot do it," came the firm answer. "It is an interference with justice, and I will not execute it."

Mr. Lincoln held his eyes steadily on Stanton and slowly said:

"Mr. Secretary, it will have to be done."

Stanton wheeled in his chair, seized a pen and wrote very rapidly a few lines to which he fixed his signature. He rose with the paper in his hand, walked to his chief, and with deep emotion said:

"Mr. President, I wish to thank you for your constant friendship during the trying years I have held this office. The war is ended, and my work is done. I hand you my resignation."

Mr. Lincoln's lips came suddenly together, he slowly rose, and looked down with surprise into the flushed angry face.

He took the paper, tore it into pieces, slipped one of his long arms around the Secretary, and said in low accents:

"Stanton, you have been a faithful public servant, and it is not

for you to say when you will no longer be needed. Go on with your work. I will have my way in this matter; but I will attend to it personally."

Stanton resumed his seat, and the President returned to the White House.

CHAPTER IV
A Clash of Giants

Elsie secured from the Surgeon-General temporary passes for the day, and sent her friends to the hospital with the promise that she would not leave the White House until she had secured the pardon.

The President greeted her with unusual warmth. The smile that had only haunted his sad face during four years of struggle, defeat, and uncertainty had now burst into joy that made his powerful head radiate light. Victory had lifted the veil from his soul, and he was girding himself for the task of healing the Nation's wounds.

"I'll have it ready for you in a moment, Miss Elsie," he said, touching with his sinewy hand a paper which lay on his desk, bearing on its face the red seal of the Republic. "I am only waiting to receive the passes."

"I am very grateful to you, Mr. President," the girl said feelingly.

"But tell me," he said, with quaint, fatherly humour, "why you, of all our girls, the brightest, fiercest little Yankee in town, so take to heart a rebel boy's sorrows?"

Elsie blushed, and then looked at him frankly with a saucy smile.

"I am fulfilling the Commandments."

"Love your enemies?"

"Certainly. How could one help loving the sweet, motherly face you saw yesterday."

The President laughed heartily. "I see – of course, of course!"

"The Honourable Austin Stoneman," suddenly announced a clerk at his elbow.

Elsie started in surprise and whispered:

"Do not let my father know I am here. I will wait in the next room. You'll let nothing delay the pardon, will you, Mr. President?"

Mr. Lincoln warmly pressed her hand as she disappeared through the door leading into Major Hay's room, and turned to meet the Great Commoner who hobbled slowly in, leaning on his crooked cane.

At this moment he was a startling and portentous figure in the drama of the Nation, the most powerful parliamentary leader in American history, not excepting Henry Clay.

No stranger ever passed this man without a second look. His clean-shaven face, the massive chiselled features, his grim eagle look, and cold, colourless eyes, with the frosts of his native Vermont sparkling in their depths, compelled attention.

His walk was a painful hobble. He was lame in both feet, and one of them was deformed. The left leg ended in a mere bunch of flesh, resembling more closely an elephant's hoof than the foot of a man.

He was absolutely bald, and wore a heavy brown wig that

seemed too small to reach the edge of his enormous forehead.

He rarely visited the White House. He was the able, bold, unscrupulous leader of leaders, and men came to see him. He rarely smiled, and when he did it was the smile of the cynic and misanthrope. His tongue had the lash of a scorpion. He was a greater terror to the trimmers and time-servers of his own party than to his political foes. He had hated the President with sullen, consistent, and unyielding venom from his first nomination at Chicago down to the last rumour of his new proclamation.

In temperament a fanatic, in impulse a born revolutionist, the word conservatism was to him as a red rag to a bull. The first clash of arms was music to his soul. He laughed at the call for 75,000 volunteers, and demanded the immediate equipment of an army of a million men. He saw it grow to 2,000,000. From the first, his eagle eye had seen the end and all the long, blood-marked way between. And from the first, he began to plot the most cruel and awful vengeance in human history.

And now his time had come.

The giant figure in the White House alone had dared to brook his anger and block the way; for old Stoneman was the Congress of the United States. The opposition was too weak even for his contempt. Cool, deliberate, and venomous alike in victory or defeat, the fascination of his positive faith and revolutionary programme had drawn the rank and file of his party in Congress to him as charmed satellites.

The President greeted him cordially, and with his habitual

deference to age and physical infirmity hastened to place for him an easy chair near his desk.

He was breathing heavily and evidently labouring under great emotion. He brought his cane to the floor with violence, placed both hands on its crook, leaned his massive jaws on his hands for a moment, and then said:

"Mr. President, I have not annoyed you with many requests during the past four years, nor am I here to-day to ask any favours. I have come to warn you that, in the course you have mapped out, the executive and legislative branches have come to the parting of the ways, and that your encroachments on the functions of Congress will be tolerated, now that the Rebellion is crushed, not for a single moment!"

Mr. Lincoln listened with dignity, and a ripple of fun played about his eyes as he looked at his grim visitor. The two men were face to face at last – the two men above all others who had built and were to build the foundations of the New Nation – Lincoln's in love and wisdom to endure forever, the Great Commoner's in hate and madness, to bear its harvest of tragedy and death for generations yet unborn.

"Well, now, Stoneman," began the good-humoured voice, "that puts me in mind – "

The old Commoner lifted his hand with a gesture of angry impatience:

"Save your fables for fools. Is it true that you have prepared a proclamation restoring the conquered province of North

Carolina to its place as a State in the Union with no provision for negro suffrage or the exile and disfranchisement of its rebels?"

The President rose and walked back and forth with his hands folded behind him before answering.

"I have. The Constitution grants to the National Government no power to regulate suffrage, and makes no provision for the control of 'conquered provinces.'"

"Constitution!" thundered Stoneman. "I have a hundred constitutions in the pigeonholes of my desk!"

"I have sworn to support but one."

"A worn-out rag – "

"Rag or silk, I've sworn to execute it, and I'll do it, so help me God!" said the quiet voice.

"You've been doing it for the past four years, haven't you!" sneered the Commoner. "What right had you under the Constitution to declare war against a 'sovereign' State? To invade one for coercion? To blockade a port? To declare slaves free? To suspend the writ of *habeas corpus*? To create the State of West Virginia by the consent of two states, one of which was dead, and the other one of which lived in Ohio? By what authority have you appointed military governors in the 'sovereign' States of Virginia, Tennessee, and Louisiana? Why trim the hedge and lie about it? We, too, are revolutionists, and you are our executive. The Constitution sustained and protected slavery. It *was* 'a league with death and a covenant with hell,' and our flag 'a polluted rag!'"

"In the stress of war," said the President, with a far-away look, "it was necessary that I do things as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy to save the Union which I have no right to do now that the Union is saved and its Constitution preserved. My first duty is to re-establish the Constitution as our supreme law over every inch of our soil."

"The Constitution be d – d!" hissed the old man. "It was the creation, both in letter and spirit, of the slaveholders of the South."

"Then the world is their debtor, and their work is a monument of imperishable glory to them and to their children. I have sworn to preserve it!"

"We have outgrown the swaddling clothes of a babe. We will make new constitutions!"

"'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,'" softly spoke the tall, self-contained man.

For the first time the old leader winced. He had long ago exhausted the vocabulary of contempt on the President, his character, ability, and policy. He felt as a shock the first impression of supreme authority with which he spoke. The man he had despised had grown into the great constructive statesman who would dispute with him every inch of ground in the attainment of his sinister life purpose.

His hatred grew more intense as he realized the prestige and power with which he was clothed by his mighty office.

With an effort he restrained his anger, and assumed an

argumentative tone.

"Can't you see that your so-called States are now but conquered provinces? That North Carolina and other waste territories of the United States are unfit to associate with civilized communities?"

"We fought no war of conquest," quietly urged the President, "but one of self-preservation as an indissoluble Union. No State ever got out of it, by the grace of God and the power of our arms. Now that we have won, and established for all time its unity, shall we stultify ourselves by declaring we were wrong? These States must be immediately restored to their rights, or we shall betray the blood we have shed. There are no 'conquered provinces' for us to spoil. A nation cannot make conquest of its own territory."

"But we are acting outside the Constitution," interrupted Stoneman.

"Congress has no existence outside the Constitution," was the quick answer.

The old Commoner scowled, and his beetling brows hid for a moment his eyes. His keen intellect was catching its first glimpse of the intellectual grandeur of the man with whom he was grappling. The facility with which he could see all sides of a question, and the vivid imagination which lit his mental processes, were a revelation. We always underestimate the men we despise.

"Why not out with it?" cried Stoneman, suddenly changing his tack. "You are determined to oppose negro suffrage?"

"I have suggested to Governor Hahn of Louisiana to consider the policy of admitting the more intelligent and those who served in the war. It is only a suggestion. The State alone has the power to confer the ballot."

"But the truth is this little 'suggestion' of yours is only a bone thrown to radical dogs to satisfy our howlings for the moment! In your soul of souls you don't believe in the equality of man if the man under comparison be a negro?"

"I believe that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which will forever forbid their living together on terms of political and social equality. If such be attempted, one must go to the wall."

"Very well, pin the Southern white man to the wall. Our party and the Nation will then be safe."

"That is to say, destroy African slavery and establish white slavery under negro masters! That would be progress with a vengeance."

A grim smile twitched the old man's lips as he said:

"Yes, your prim conservative snobs and male waiting-maids in Congress went into hysterics when I armed the negroes. Yet the heavens have not fallen."

"True. Yet no more insane blunder could now be made than any further attempt to use these negro troops. There can be no such thing as restoring this Union to its basis of fraternal peace with armed negroes, wearing the uniform of this Nation, tramping over the South, and rousing the basest passions of

the freedmen and their former masters. General Butler, their old commander, is now making plans for their removal, at my request. He expects to dig the Panama Canal with these black troops."

"Fine scheme that – on a par with your messages to Congress asking for the colonization of the whole negro race!"

"It will come to that ultimately," said the President firmly. "The negro has cost us $5,000,000,000, the desolation of ten great States, and rivers of blood. We can well afford a few million dollars more to effect a permanent settlement of the issue. This is the only policy on which Seward and I have differed – "

"Then Seward was not an utterly hopeless fool. I'm glad to hear something to his credit," growled the old Commoner.

"I have urged the colonization of the negroes, and I shall continue until it is accomplished. My emancipation proclamation was linked with this plan. Thousands of them have lived in the North for a hundred years, yet not one is the pastor of a white church, a judge, a governor, a mayor, or a college president. There is no room for two distinct races of white men in America, much less for two distinct races of whites and blacks. We can have no inferior servile class, peon or peasant. We must assimilate or expel. The American is a citizen king or nothing. I can conceive of no greater calamity than the assimilation of the negro into our social and political life as our equal. A mulatto citizenship would be too dear a price to pay even for emancipation."

"Words have no power to express my loathing for such twaddle!" cried Stoneman, snapping his great jaws together and pursing his lips with contempt.

"If the negro were not here would we allow him to land?" the President went on, as if talking to himself. "The duty to exclude carries the right to expel. Within twenty years we can peacefully colonize the negro in the tropics, and give him our language, literature, religion, and system of government under conditions in which he can rise to the full measure of manhood. This he can never do here. It was the fear of the black tragedy behind emancipation that led the South into the insanity of secession. We can never attain the ideal Union our fathers dreamed, with millions of an alien, inferior race among us, whose assimilation is neither possible nor desirable. The Nation cannot now exist half white and half black, any more than it could exist half slave and half free."

"Yet 'God hath made of one blood all races,'" quoted the cynic with a sneer.

"Yes – but finish the sentence – 'and fixed the bounds of their habitation.' God never meant that the negro should leave his habitat or the white man invade his home. Our violation of this law is written in two centuries of shame and blood. And the tragedy will not be closed until the black man is restored to his home."

"I marvel that the minions of slavery elected Jeff Davis their chief with so much better material at hand!"

"His election was a tragic and superfluous blunder. I am the President of the United States, North and South," was the firm reply.

"Particularly the South!" hissed Stoneman. "During all this hideous war they have been your pets – these rebel savages who have been murdering our sons. You have been the ever-ready champion of traitors. And you now dare to bend this high office to their defence – "

"My God, Stoneman, are you a man or a savage!" cried the President. "Is not the North equally responsible for slavery? Has not the South lost all? Have not the Southern people paid the full penalty of all the crimes of war? Are our skirts free? Was Sherman's march a picnic? This war has been a giant conflict of principles to decide whether we are a bundle of petty sovereignties held by a rope of sand or a mighty nation of freemen. But for the loyalty of four border Southern States – but for Farragut and Thomas and their two hundred thousand heroic Southern brethren who fought for the Union against their own flesh and blood, we should have lost. You cannot indict a people – "

"I do indict them!" muttered the old man.

"Surely," went on the even, throbbing voice, "surely, the vastness of this war, its titanic battles, its heroism, its sublime earnestness, should sink into oblivion all low schemes of vengeance! Before the sheer grandeur of its history our children will walk with silent lips and uncovered heads."

"And forget the prison pen at Andersonville!"

"Yes. We refused, as a policy of war, to exchange those prisoners, blockaded their ports, made medicine contraband, and brought the Southern Army itself to starvation. The prison records, when made at last for history, will show as many deaths on our side as on theirs."

"The murderer on the gallows always wins more sympathy than his forgotten victim," interrupted the cynic.

"The sin of vengeance is an easy one under the subtle plea of justice," said the sorrowful voice. "Have we not had enough bloodshed? Is not God's vengeance enough? When Sherman's army swept to the sea, before him lay the Garden of Eden, behind him stretched a desert! A hundred years cannot give back to the wasted South her wealth, or two hundred years restore to her the lost seed treasures of her young manhood – "

"The imbecility of a policy of mercy in this crisis can only mean the reign of treason and violence," persisted the old man, ignoring the President's words.

"I leave my policy before the judgment bar of time, content with its verdict. In my place, radicalism would have driven the border States into the Confederacy, every Southern man back to his kinsmen, and divided the North itself into civil conflict. I have sought to guide and control public opinion into the ways on which depended our life. This rational flexibility of policy you and your fellow radicals have been pleased to call my vacillating imbecility."

"And what is your message for the South?"

"Simply this: 'Abolish slavery, come back home, and behave yourself.' Lee surrendered to our offers of peace and amnesty. In my last message to Congress I told the Southern people they could have peace at any moment by simply laying down their arms and submitting to National authority. Now that they have taken me at my word, shall I betray them by an ignoble revenge? Vengeance cannot heal and purify: it can only brutalize and destroy."

Stoneman shuffled to his feet with impatience.

"I see it is useless to argue with you. I'll not waste my breath. I give you an ultimatum. The South is conquered soil. I mean to blot it from the map. Rather than admit one traitor to the halls of Congress from these so-called States I will shatter the Union itself into ten thousand fragments! I will not sit beside men whose clothes smell of the blood of my kindred. At least dry them before they come in. Four years ago, with yells and curses, these traitors left the halls of Congress to join the armies of Catiline. Shall they return to rule?"

"I repeat," said the President, "you cannot indict a people. Treason is an easy word to speak. A traitor is one who fights and loses. Washington was a traitor to George III. Treason won, and Washington is immortal. Treason is a word that victors hurl at those who fail."

"Listen to me," Stoneman interrupted with vehemence. "The life of our party demands that the negro be given the ballot

and made the ruler of the South. This can be done only by the extermination of its landed aristocracy, that their mothers shall not breed another race of traitors. This is not vengeance. It is justice, it is patriotism, it is the highest wisdom and humanity. Nature, at times, blots out whole communities and races that obstruct progress. Such is the political genius of these people that, unless you make the negro the ruler, the South will yet reconquer the North and undo the work of this war."

"If the South in poverty and ruin can do this, we deserve to be ruled! The North is rich and powerful – the South a land of wreck and tomb. I greet with wonder, shame, and scorn such ignoble fear! The Nation cannot be healed until the South is healed. Let the gulf be closed in which we bury slavery, sectional animosity, and all strifes and hatreds. The good sense of our people will never consent to your scheme of insane vengeance."

"The people have no sense. A new fool is born every second. They are ruled by impulse and passion."

"I have trusted them before, and they have not failed me. The day I left for Gettysburg to dedicate the battlefield, you were so sure of my defeat in the approaching convention that you shouted across the street to a friend as I passed: 'Let the dead bury the dead!' It was a brilliant sally of wit. I laughed at it myself. And yet the people unanimously called me again to lead them to victory."

"Yes, in the past," said Stoneman bitterly, "you have triumphed, but mark my word: from this hour your star grows dim. The slumbering fires of passion will be kindled. In the fight

we join to-day I'll break your back and wring the neck of every dastard and time-server who fawns at your feet."

The President broke into a laugh that only increased the old man's wrath.

"I protest against the insult of your buffoonery!"

"Excuse me, Stoneman; I have to laugh or die beneath the burdens I bear, surrounded by such supporters!"

"Mark my word," growled the old leader, "from the moment you publish that North Carolina proclamation, your name will be a by-word in Congress."

"There are higher powers."

"You will need them."

"I'll have help," was the calm reply, as the dreaminess of the poet and mystic stole over the rugged face. "I would be a presumptuous fool, indeed, if I thought that for a day I could discharge the duties of this great office without the aid of One who is wiser and stronger than all others."

"You'll need the help of Almighty God in the course you've mapped out!"

"Some ships come into port that are not steered," went on the dreamy voice. "Suppose Pickett had charged one hour earlier at Gettysburg? Suppose the *Monitor* had arrived one hour later at Hampton Roads? I had a dream last night that always presages great events. I saw a white ship passing swiftly under full sail. I have often seen her before. I have never known her port of entry, or her destination, but I have always known her Pilot!"

The cynic's lips curled with scorn. He leaned heavily on his cane, and took a shambling step toward the door.

"You refuse to heed the wishes of Congress?"

"If your words voice them, yes. Force your scheme of revenge on the South, and you sow the wind to reap the whirlwind."

"Indeed! and from what secret cave will this whirlwind come?"

"The despair of a mighty race of world-conquering men, even in defeat, is still a force that statesmen reckon with."

"I defy them," growled the old Commoner.

Again the dreamy look returned to Lincoln's face, and he spoke as if repeating a message of the soul caught in the clouds in an hour of transfiguration:

"And I'll trust the honour of Lee and his people. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when touched again, as they surely will be, by the better angels of our nature."

"You'll be lucky to live to hear that chorus."

"To dream it is enough. If I fall by the hand of an assassin now, he will not come from the South. I was safer in Richmond, this week, than I am in Washington, to-day."

The cynic grunted and shuffled another step toward the door.

The President came closer.

"Look here, Stoneman; have you some deep personal motive in this vengeance on the South? Come, now, I've never in my life

known you to tell a lie."

The answer was silence and a scowl.

"Am I right?"

"Yes and no. I hate the South because I hate the Satanic Institution of Slavery with consuming fury. It has long ago rotted the heart out of the Southern people. Humanity cannot live in its tainted air, and its children are doomed. If my personal wrongs have ordained me for a mighty task, no matter; I am simply the chosen instrument of Justice!"

Again the mystic light clothed the rugged face, calm and patient as Destiny, as the President slowly repeated:

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives me to see the right, I shall strive to finish the work we are in, and bind up the Nation's wounds."

"I've given you fair warning," cried the old Commoner, trembling with rage, as he hobbled nearer the door. "From this hour your administration is doomed."

"Stoneman," said the kindly voice, "I can't tell you how your venomous philanthropy sickens me. You have misunderstood and abused me at every step during the past four years. I bear you no ill will. If I have said anything to-day to hurt your feelings, forgive me. The earnestness with which you pressed the war was an invaluable service to me and to the Nation. I'd rather work with you than fight you. But now that we have to fight, I'd as well tell you I'm not afraid of you. I'll suffer my right arm to be severed from my body before I'll sign one measure of ignoble

revenge on a brave, fallen foe, and I'll keep up this fight until I win, die, or my country forsakes me."

"I have always known you had a sneaking admiration for the South," came the sullen sneer.

"I love the South! It is a part of this Union. I love every foot of its soil, every hill and valley, mountain, lake, and sea, and every man, woman, and child that breathes beneath its skies. I am an American."

As the burning words leaped from the heart of the President the broad shoulders of his tall form lifted, and his massive head rose in unconscious heroic pose.

"I marvel that you ever made war upon your loved ones!" cried the cynic.

"We fought the South because we loved her and would not let her go. Now that she is crushed and lies bleeding at our feet – you shall not make war on the wounded, dying, and the dead!"

Again the lion gleamed in the calm gray eyes.

CHAPTER IV
The Battle of Love

Elsie carried Ben Cameron's pardon to the anxious mother and sister with her mind in a tumult. The name on these fateful papers fascinated her. She read it again and again with a curious personal joy that she had saved a life!

She had entered on her work among the hospitals a bitter partisan of her father's school, with the simple idea that all Southerners were savage brutes. Yet as she had seen the wounded boys from the South among the men in blue, more and more she had forgotten the difference between them. They were so young, these slender, dark-haired ones from Dixie – so pitifully young! Some of them were only fifteen, and hundreds not over sixteen. A lad of fourteen she had kissed one day in sheer agony of pity for his loneliness.

The part her father was playing in the drama on which Ben Cameron's life had hung puzzled her. Was his the mysterious arm back of Stanton? Echoes of the fierce struggle with the President had floated through the half-open door.

She had implicit faith in her father's patriotism and pride in his giant intellect. She knew that he was a king among men by divine right of inherent power. His sensitive spirit, brooding over a pitiful lameness, had hidden from the world behind a frowning brow like a wounded animal. Yet her hand in hours of love, when

no eye save God's could see, had led his great soul out of its dark lair. She loved him with brooding tenderness, knowing that she had gotten closer to his inner life than any other human being – closer than her own mother, who had died while she was a babe. Her aunt, with whom she and Phil now lived, had told her the mother's life was not a happy one. Their natures had not proved congenial, and her gentle Quaker spirit had died of grief in the quiet home in southern Pennsylvania.

Yet there were times when he was a stranger even to her. Some secret, dark and cold, stood between them. Once she had tenderly asked him what it meant. He merely pressed her hand, smiled wearily, and said:

"Nothing, my dear, only the Blue Devils after me again."

He had always lived in Washington in a little house with black shutters, near the Capitol, while the children had lived with his sister, near the White House, where they had grown from babyhood.

A curious fact about this place on the Capitol hill was that his housekeeper, Lydia Brown, was a mulatto, a woman of extraordinary animal beauty and the fiery temper of a leopardess. Elsie had ventured there once and got such a welcome she would never return. All sorts of gossip could be heard in Washington about this woman, her jewels, her dresses, her airs, her assumption of the dignity of the presiding genius of National legislation and her domination of the old Commoner and his life. It gradually crept into the newspapers and magazines, but he

never once condescended to notice it.

Elsie begged her father to close this house and live with them.

His reply was short and emphatic:

"Impossible, my child. This club foot must live next door to the Capitol. My house is simply an executive office at which I sleep. Half the business of the Nation is transacted there. Don't mention this subject again."

Elsie choked back a sob at the cold menace in the tones of this command, and never repeated her request. It was the only wish he had ever denied her, and, somehow, her heart would come back to it with persistence and brood and wonder over his motive.

The nearer she drew, this morning, to the hospital door, the closer the wounded boy's life and loved ones seemed to hers. She thought with anguish of the storm about to break between her father and the President – the one demanding the desolation of their land, wasted, harried, and unarmed! – the President firm in his policy of mercy, generosity, and healing.

Her father would not mince words. His scorpion tongue, set on fires of hell, might start a conflagration that would light the Nation with its glare. Would not his name be a terror for every man and woman born under Southern skies? The sickening feeling stole over her that he was wrong, and his policy cruel and unjust.

She had never before admired the President. It was fashionable to speak with contempt of him in Washington. He had little following in Congress. Nine tenths of the politicians

hated or feared him, and she knew her father had been the soul of a conspiracy at the Capitol to prevent his second nomination and create a dictatorship, under which to carry out an iron policy of reconstruction in the South. And now she found herself heart and soul the champion of the President.

She was ashamed of her disloyalty, and felt a rush of impetuous anger against Ben and his people for thrusting themselves between her and her own. Yet how absurd to feel thus against the innocent victims of a great tragedy! She put the thought from her. Still she must part from them now before the brewing storm burst. It would be best for her and best for them. This pardon delivered would end their relations. She would send the papers by a messenger and not see them again. And then she thought with a throb of girlish pride of the hour to come in the future when Ben's big brown eyes would be softened with a tear when he would learn that she had saved his life. They had concealed all from him as yet.

She was afraid to question too closely in her own heart the shadowy motive that lay back of her joy. She read again with a lingering smile the name "Ben Cameron" on the paper with its big red Seal of Life. She had laughed at boys who had made love to her, dreaming a wider, nobler life of heroic service. And she felt that she was fulfilling her ideal in the generous hand she had extended to these who were friendless. Were they not the children of her soul in that larger, finer world of which she had dreamed and sung? Why should she give them up now for brutal

politics? Their sorrow had been hers, their joy should be hers, too. She would take the papers herself and then say good-bye.

She found the mother and sister beside the cot. Ben was sleeping with Margaret holding one of his hands. The mother was busy sewing for the wounded Confederate boys she had found scattered through the hospital.

At the sight of Elsie holding aloft the message of life she sprang to meet her with a cry of joy.

She clasped the girl to her breast, unable to speak. At last she released her and said with a sob:

"My child, through good report and through evil report my love will enfold you!"

Elsie stammered, looked away, and tried to hide her emotion. Margaret had knelt and bowed her head on Ben's cot. She rose at length, threw her arms around Elsie in a resistless impulse, kissed her and whispered:

"My sweet sister!"

Elsie's heart leaped at the words, as her eyes rested on the face of the sleeping soldier.

CHAPTER VI
The Assassination

Elsie called in the afternoon at the Camerons' lodgings, radiant with pride, accompanied by her brother.

Captain Phil Stoneman, athletic, bronzed, a veteran of two years' service, dressed in his full uniform, was the ideal soldier, and yet he had never loved war. He was bubbling over with quiet joy that the end had come and he could soon return to a rational life. Inheriting his mother's temperament, he was generous, enterprising, quick, intelligent, modest, and ambitious. War had seemed to him a horrible tragedy from the first. He had early learned to respect a brave foe, and bitterness had long since melted out of his heart.

He had laughed at his father's harsh ideas of Southern life gained as a politician, and, while loyal to him after a boy's fashion, he took no stock in his Radical programme.

The father, colossal egotist that he was, heard Phil's protests with mild amusement and quiet pride in his independence, for he loved this boy with deep tenderness.

Phil had been touched by the story of Ben's narrow escape, and was anxious to show his mother and sister every courtesy possible in part atonement for the wrong he felt had been done them. He was timid with girls, and yet he wished to give Margaret a cordial greeting for Elsie's sake. He was not prepared for the

shock the first appearance of the Southern girl gave him.

When the stately figure swept through the door to greet him, her black eyes sparkling with welcome, her voice low and tender with genuine feeling, he caught his breath in surprise.

Elsie noted his confusion with amusement and said:

"I must go to the hospital for a little work. Now, Phil, I'll meet you at the door at eight o'clock."

"I'll not forget," he answered abstractedly, watching Margaret intently as she walked with Elsie to the door.

He saw that her dress was of coarse, unbleached cotton, dyed with the juice of walnut hulls and set with wooden hand-made buttons. The story these things told of war and want was eloquent, yet she wore them with unconscious dignity. She had not a pin or brooch or piece of jewellery. Everything about her was plain and smooth, graceful and gracious. Her face was large – the lovely oval type – and her luxuriant hair, parted in the middle, fell downward in two great waves. Tall, stately, handsome, her dark rare Southern beauty full of subtle languor and indolent grace, she was to Phil a revelation.

The coarse black dress that clung closely to her figure seemed alive when she moved, vital with her beauty. The musical cadences of her voice were vibrant with feeling, sweet, tender, and homelike. And the odour of the rose she wore pinned low on her breast he could swear was the perfume of her breath.

Lingering in her eyes and echoing in the tones of her voice, he caught the shadowy memory of tears for the loved and lost that

gave a strange pathos and haunting charm to her youth.

She had returned quickly and was talking at ease with him.

"I'm not going to tell you, Captain Stoneman, that I hope to be a sister to you. You have already made yourself my brother in what you did for Ben."

"Nothing, I assure you, Miss Cameron, that any soldier wouldn't do for a brave foe."

"Perhaps; but when the foe happens to be an only brother, my chum and playmate, brave and generous, whom I've worshipped as my beau-ideal man – why, you know I must thank you for taking him in your arms that day. May I, again?"

Phil felt the soft warm hand clasp his, while the black eyes sparkled and glowed their friendly message.

He murmured something incoherently, looked at Margaret as if in a spell, and forgot to let her hand go.

She laughed at last, and he blushed and dropped it as though it were a live coal.

"I was about to forget, Miss Cameron. I wish to take you to the theatre to-night, if you will go?"

"To the theatre?"

"Yes. It's to be an occasion, Elsie tells me. Laura Keene's last appearance in 'Our American Cousin,' and her one-thousandth performance of the play. She played it in Chicago at McVicker's, when the President was first nominated, to hundreds of the delegates who voted for him. He is to be present to-night, so the *Evening Star* has announced, and General and Mrs. Grant with

him. It will be the opportunity of your life to see these famous men – besides, I wish you to see the city illuminated on the way."

Margaret hesitated.

"I should like to go," she said with some confusion. "But you see we are old-fashioned Scotch Presbyterians down in our village in South Carolina. I never was in a theatre – and this is Good Friday – "

"That's a fact, sure," said Phil thoughtfully. "It never occurred to me. War is not exactly a spiritual stimulant, and it blurs the calendar. I believe we fight on Sundays oftener than on any other day."

"But I'm crazy to see the President since Ben's pardon. Mamma will be here in a moment, and I'll ask her."

"You see, it's really an occasion," Phil went on. "The people are all going there to see President Lincoln in the hour of his triumph, and his great General fresh from the field of victory. Grant has just arrived in town."

Mrs. Cameron entered and greeted Phil with motherly tenderness.

"Captain, you're so much like my boy! Had you noticed it, Margaret?"

"Of course, Mamma, but I was afraid I'd tire him with flattery if I tried to tell him."

"Only his hair is light and wavy, and Ben's straight and black, or you'd call them twins. Ben's a little taller – excuse us, Captain Stoneman, but we've fallen so in love with your little sister we

feel we've known you all our lives."

"I assure you, Mrs. Cameron, your flattery is very sweet. Elsie and I do not remember our mother, and all this friendly criticism is more than welcome."

"Mamma, Captain Stoneman asks me to go with him and his sister to-night to see the President at the theatre. May I go?"

"Will the President be there, Captain?" asked Mrs. Cameron.

"Yes, Madam, with General and Mrs. Grant – it's really a great public function in celebration of peace and victory. To-day the flag was raised over Fort Sumter, the anniversary of its surrender four years ago. The city will be illuminated."

"Then, of course, you can go. I will sit with Ben. I wish you to see the President."

At seven o'clock Phil called for Margaret. They walked to the Capitol hill and down Pennsylvania Avenue.

The city was in a ferment. Vast crowds thronged the streets. In front of the hotel where General Grant stopped the throng was so dense the streets were completely blocked. Soldiers, soldiers, soldiers, at every turn, in squads, in companies, in regimental crowds, shouting cries of victory.

The display of lights was dazzling in its splendour. Every building in every street, in every nook and corner of the city, was lighted from attic to cellar. The public buildings and churches vied with each other in the magnificence of their decorations and splendour of illuminations.

They turned a corner, and suddenly the Capitol on the

throne of its imperial hill loomed a grand constellation in the heavens! Another look, and it seemed a huge bonfire against the background of the dark skies. Every window in its labyrinths of marble, from the massive base to its crowning statue of Freedom, gleamed and flashed with light – more than ten thousand jets poured their rays through its windows, besides the innumerable lights that circled the mighty dome within and without.

Margaret stopped, and Phil felt her soft hand grip his arm with sudden emotion.

"Isn't it sublime!" she whispered.

"Glorious!" he echoed.

But he was thinking of the pressure of her hand on his arm and the subtle tones of her voice. Somehow he felt that the light came from her eyes. He forgot the Capitol and the surging crowds before the sweeter creative wonder silently growing in his soul.

"And yet," she faltered, "when I think of what all this means for our people at home – their sorrow and poverty and ruin – you know it makes me faint."

Phil's hand timidly sought the soft one resting on his arm and touched it reverently.

"Believe me, Miss Margaret, it will be all for the best in the end. The South will yet rise to a nobler life than she has ever lived in the past. This is her victory as well as ours."

"I wish I could think so," she answered.

They passed the City Hall and saw across its front, in giant letters of fire thirty feet deep, the words:

"UNION, SHERMAN, AND GRANT"

On Pennsylvania Avenue the hotels and stores had hung every window, awning, cornice, and swaying tree-top with lanterns. The grand avenue was bridged by tri-coloured balloons floating and shimmering ghostlike far up in the dark sky. Above these, in the blacker zone toward the stars, the heavens were flashing sheets of chameleon flames from bursting rockets.

Margaret had never dreamed such a spectacle. She walked in awed silence, now and then suppressing a sob for the memory of those she had loved and lost. A moment of bitterness would cloud her heart, and then with the sense of Phil's nearness, his generous nature, the beauty and goodness of his sister, and all they owed to her for Ben's life, the cloud would pass.

At every public building, and in front of every great hotel, bands were playing. The wild war strains, floating skyward, seemed part of the changing scheme of light. The odour of burnt powder and smouldering rockets filled the warm spring air.

The deep bay of the great fort guns now began to echo from every hilltop commanding the city, while a thousand smaller guns barked and growled from every square and park and crossing.

Jay Cooke & Co's. banking-house had stretched across its front, in enormous blazing letters, the words:

"THE BUSY B'S – BALLS, BALLOTS, AND BONDS"

Every telegraph and newspaper office was a roaring whirlpool of excitement, for the same scenes were being enacted in every centre of the North. The whole city was now a fairy dream, its

dirt and sin, shame and crime, all wrapped in glorious light.

But above all other impressions was the contagion of the thunder shouts of hosts of men surging through the streets – the human roar with its animal and spiritual magnetism, wild, resistless, unlike any other force in the universe!

Margaret's hand again and again unconsciously tightened its hold on Phil's arm, and he felt that the whole celebration had been gotten up for his benefit.

They passed through a little park on their way to Ford's Theatre on 10th Street, and the eye of the Southern girl was quick to note the budding flowers and full-blown lilacs.

"See what an early spring!" she cried. "I know the flowers at home are gorgeous now."

"I shall hope to see you among them some day, when all the clouds have lifted," he said.

She smiled and replied with simple earnestness:

"A warm welcome will await your coming."

And Phil resolved to lose no time in testing it.

They turned into 10th Street, and in the middle of the block stood the plain three-story brick structure of Ford's Theatre, an enormous crowd surging about its five doorways and spreading out on the sidewalk and half across the driveway.

"Is that the theatre?" asked Margaret.

"Yes."

"Why, it looks like a church without a steeple."

"Exactly what it really is, Miss Margaret. It was a Baptist

church. They turned it into a playhouse, by remodelling its gallery into a dress-circle and balcony and adding another gallery above. My grandmother Stoneman is a devoted Baptist, and was an attendant at this church. My father never goes to church, but he used to go here occasionally to please her. Elsie and I frequently came."

Phil pushed his way rapidly through the crowd with a peculiar sense of pleasure in making a way for Margaret and in defending her from the jostling throng.

They found Elsie at the door, stamping her foot with impatience.

"Well, I must say, Phil, this is prompt for a soldier who had positive orders," she cried. "I've been here an hour."

"Nonsense, Sis, I'm ahead of time," he protested.

Elsie held up her watch.

"It's a quarter past eight. Every seat is filled, and they've stopped selling standing-room. I hope you have good seats."

"The best in the house to-night, the first row in the balcony dress-circle, opposite the President's box. We can see everything on the stage, in the box, and every nook and corner of the house."

"Then I'll forgive you for keeping me waiting."

They ascended the stairs, pushed through the throng standing, and at last reached the seats.

What a crowd! The building was a mass of throbbing humanity, and, over all, the hum of the thrilling wonder of peace and victory!

The women in magnificent costumes, officers in uniforms flashing with gold, the show of wealth and power, the perfume of flowers and the music of violin and flutes gave Margaret the impression of a dream, so sharp was the contrast with her own life and people in the South.

The interior of the house was a billow of red, white, and blue. The President's box was wrapped in two enormous silk flags with gold-fringed edges gracefully draped and hanging in festoons.

Withers, the leader of the orchestra, was in high feather. He raised his baton with quick, inspired movement. It was for him a personal triumph, too. He had composed the music of a song for the occasion. It was dedicated to the President, and the programme announced that it would be rendered during the evening between the acts by a famous quartet, assisted by the whole company in chorus. The National flag would be draped about each singer, worn as the togas of ancient Greece and Rome.

It was already known by the crowd that General and Mrs. Grant had left the city for the North and could not be present, but every eye was fixed on the door through which the President and Mrs. Lincoln would enter. It was the hour of his supreme triumph.

What a romance his life! The thought of it thrilled the crowd as they waited. A few years ago this tall, sad-faced man had floated down the Sangamon River into a rough Illinois town, ragged, penniless, friendless, alone, begging for work. Four years before he had entered Washington as President of the United

States – but he came under cover of the night with a handful of personal friends, amid universal contempt for his ability and the loud expressed conviction of his failure from within and without his party. He faced a divided Nation and the most awful civil convulsion in history. Through it all he had led the Nation in safety, growing each day in power and fame, until to-night, amid the victorious shouts of millions of a Union fixed in eternal granite, he stood forth the idol of the people, the first great American, the foremost man of the world.

There was a stir at the door, and the tall figure suddenly loomed in view of the crowd. With one impulse they leaped to their feet, and shout after shout shook the building. The orchestra was playing "Hail to the Chief!" but nobody heard it. They saw the Chief! They were crying their own welcome in music that came from the rhythmic beat of human hearts.

As the President walked along the aisle with Mrs. Lincoln, accompanied by Senator Harris' daughter and Major Rathbone, cheer after cheer burst from the crowd. He turned, his face beaming with pleasure, and bowed as he passed.

The answer of the crowd shook the building to its foundations, and the President paused. His dark face flashed with emotion as he looked over the sea of cheering humanity. It was a moment of supreme exaltation. The people had grown to know and love and trust him, and it was sweet. His face, lit with the responsive fires of emotion, was transfigured. The soul seemed to separate itself from its dreamy, rugged dwelling-place and flash its inspiration

from the spirit world.

As around this man's personality had gathered the agony and horror of war, so now about his head glowed and gleamed in imagination the splendours of victory.

Margaret impulsively put her hand on Phil's arm:

"Why, how Southern he looks! How tall and dark and typical his whole figure!"

"Yes, and his traits of character even more typical," said Phil. "On the surface, easy friendly ways and the tenderness of a woman – beneath, an iron will and lion heart. I like him. And what always amazes me is his universality. A Southerner finds in him the South, the Western man the West, even Charles Sumner, from Boston, almost loves him. You know I think he is the first great all-round American who ever lived in the White House."

The President's party had now entered the box, and as Mr. Lincoln took the armchair nearest the audience, in full view of every eye in the house, again the cheers rent the air. In vain Withers' baton flew, and the orchestra did its best. The music was drowned as in the roar of the sea. Again he rose and bowed and smiled, his face radiant with pleasure. The soul beneath those deep-cut lines had long pined for the sunlight. His love of the theatre and the humorous story were the protest of his heart against pain and tragedy. He stood there bowing to the people, the grandest, gentlest figure of the fiercest war of human history – a man who was always doing merciful things stealthily as others do crimes. Little sunlight had come into his life, yet to-night he

felt that the sun of a new day in his history and the history of the people was already tingeing the horizon with glory.

Back of those smiles what a story! Many a night he had paced back and forth in the telegraph office of the War Department, read its awful news of defeat, and alone sat down and cried over the list of the dead. Many a black hour his soul had seen when the honours of earth were forgotten and his great heart throbbed on his sleeve. His character had grown so evenly and silently with the burdens he had borne, working mighty deeds with such little friction, he could not know, nor could the crowd to whom he bowed, how deep into the core of the people's life the love of him had grown.

As he looked again over the surging crowd his tall figure seemed to straighten, erect and buoyant, with the new dignity of conscious triumphant leadership. He knew that he had come unto his own at last, and his brain was teeming with dreams of mercy and healing.

The President resumed his seat, the tumult died away, and the play began amid a low hum of whispered comment directed at the flag-draped box. The actors struggled in vain to hold the attention of the audience, until finally Hawk, the actor playing Dundreary, determined to catch their ear, paused and said:

"Now, that reminds me of a little story, as Mr. Lincoln says – "

Instantly the crowd burst into a storm of applause, the President laughed, leaned over and spoke to his wife, and the electric connection was made between the stage, the box, and the

people.

After this the play ran its smooth course, and the audience settled into its accustomed humour of sympathetic attention.

In spite of the novelty of this, her first view of a theatre, the President fascinated Margaret. She watched the changing lights and shadows of his sensitive face with untiring interest, and the wonder of his life grew upon her imagination. This man who was the idol of the North and yet to her so purely Southern, who had come out of the West and yet was greater than the West or the North, and yet always supremely human – this man who sprang to his feet from the chair of State and bowed to a sorrowing woman with the deference of a knight, every man's friend, good-natured, sensible, masterful and clear in intellect, strong, yet modest, kind and gentle – yes, he was more interesting than all the drama and romance of the stage!

He held her imagination in a spell. Elsie, divining her abstraction, looked toward the President's box and saw approaching it along the balcony aisle the figure of John Wilkes Booth.

"Look," she cried, touching Margaret's arm. "There's John Wilkes Booth, the actor! Isn't he handsome? They say he's in love with my chum, a senator's daughter whose father hates Mr. Lincoln with perfect fury."

"He is handsome," Margaret answered. "But I'd be afraid of him, with that raven hair and eyes shining like something wild."

"They say he is wild and dissipated, yet half the silly girls in

town are in love with him. He's as vain as a peacock."

Booth, accustomed to free access to the theatre, paused near the entrance to the box and looked deliberately over the great crowd, his magnetic face flushed with deep emotion, while his fiery inspiring eyes glittered with excitement.

Dressed in a suit of black broadcloth of faultless fit, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet he was physically without blemish. A figure of perfect symmetry and proportion, his dark eyes flashing, his marble forehead crowned with curling black hair, agility and grace stamped on every line of his being – beyond a doubt he was the handsomest man in America. A flutter of feminine excitement rippled the surface of the crowd in the balcony as his well-known figure caught the wandering eyes of the women.

He turned and entered the door leading to the President's box, and Margaret once more gave her attention to the stage.

Hawk, as Dundreary, was speaking his lines and looking directly at the President instead of at the audience:

"Society, eh? Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old woman, you darned old sockdologing man trap!"

Margaret winced at the coarse words, but the galleries burst into shouts of laughter that lingered in ripples and murmurs and the shuffling of feet.

The muffled crack of a pistol in the President's box hushed the laughter for an instant.

No one realized what had happened, and when the assassin

suddenly leaped from the box, with a blood-marked knife flashing in his right hand, caught his foot in the flags and fell to his knees on the stage, many thought it a part of the programme, and a boy, leaning over the gallery rail, giggled. When Booth turned his face of statuesque beauty lit by eyes flashing with insane desperation and cried, "*Sic semper tyrannis*," they were only confirmed in this impression.

A sudden, piercing scream from Mrs. Lincoln, quivering, soul harrowing! Leaning far out of the box, from ashen cheeks and lips leaped the piteous cry of appeal, her hand pointing to the retreating figure:

"The President is shot! He has killed the President!"

Every heart stood still for one awful moment. The brain refused to record the message – and then the storm burst!

A wild roar of helpless fury and despair! Men hurled themselves over the footlights in vain pursuit of the assassin. Already the clatter of his horse's feet could be heard in the distance. A surgeon threw himself against the door of the box, but it had been barred within by the cunning hand. Another leaped on the stage, and the people lifted him up in their arms and over the fatal railing.

Women began to faint, and strong men trampled down the weak in mad rushes from side to side.

The stage in a moment was a seething mass of crazed men, among them the actors and actresses in costumes and painted faces, their mortal terror shining through the rouge. They passed

water up to the box, and some tried to climb up and enter it.

The two hundred soldiers of the President's guard suddenly burst in, and, amid screams and groans of the weak and injured, stormed the house with fixed bayonets, cursing, yelling, and shouting at the top of their voices:

"Clear out! Clear out! You sons of hell!"

One of them suddenly bore down with fixed bayonet toward Phil.

Margaret shrank in terror close to his side and tremblingly held his arm.

Elsie sprang forward, her face aflame, her eyes flashing fire, her little figure tense, erect, and quivering with rage:

"How dare you, idiot, brute!"

The soldier, brought to his senses, saw Phil in full captain's uniform before him, and suddenly drew himself up, saluting. Phil ordered him to guard Margaret and Elsie for a moment, drew his sword, leaped between the crazed soldiers and their victims and stopped their insane rush.

Within the box the great head lay in the surgeon's arms, the blood slowly dripping down, and the tiny death bubbles forming on the kindly lips. They carried him tenderly out, and another group bore after him the unconscious wife. The people tore the seats from their fastenings and heaped them in piles to make way for the precious burdens.

As Phil pressed forward with Margaret and Elsie through the open door came the roar of the mob without, shouting its cries:

"The President is shot!"

"Seward is murdered!"

"Where is Grant?"

"Where is Stanton?"

"To arms! To arms!"

The peal of signal guns could now be heard, the roll of drums and the hurried tramp of soldiers' feet. They marched none too soon. The mob had attacked the stockade holding ten thousand unarmed Confederate prisoners.

At the corner of the block in which the theatre stood they seized a man who looked like a Southerner and hung him to the lamp-post. Two heroic policemen fought their way to his side and rescued him.

If the temper of the people during the war had been convulsive, now it was insane – with one mad impulse and one thought – vengeance! Horror, anger, terror, uncertainty, each passion fanned the one animal instinct into fury.

Through this awful night, with the lights still gleaming as if to mock the celebration of victory, the crowds swayed in impotent rage through the streets, while the telegraph bore on the wings of lightning the awe-inspiring news. Men caught it from the wires, and stood in silent groups weeping, and their wrath against the fallen South began to rise as the moaning of the sea under a coming storm.

At dawn black clouds hung threatening on the eastern horizon. As the sun rose, tingeing them for a moment with scarlet and

purple glory, Abraham Lincoln breathed his last.

Even grim Stanton, the iron-hearted, stood by his bedside and through blinding tears exclaimed:

"Now he belongs to the ages!"

The deed was done. The wheel of things had moved. Vice-President Johnson took the oath of office, and men hailed him Chief; but the seat of Empire had moved from the White House to a little dark house on the Capitol hill, where dwelt an old club-footed man, alone, attended by a strange brown woman of sinister animal beauty and the restless eyes of a leopardess.

CHAPTER VII
The Frenzy of a Nation

Phil hurried through the excited crowds with Margaret and Elsie, left them at the hospital door, and ran to the War Department to report for duty. Already the tramp of regiments echoed down every great avenue.

Even as he ran, his heart beat with a strange new stroke when he recalled the look of appeal in Margaret's dark eyes as she nestled close to his side and clung to his arm for protection. He remembered with a smile the almost resistless impulse of the moment to slip his arm around her and assure her of safety. If he had only dared!

Elsie begged Mrs. Cameron and Margaret to go home with her until the city was quiet.

"No," said the mother. "I am not afraid. Death has no terrors for me any longer. We will not leave Ben a moment now, day or night. My soul is sick with dread for what this awful tragedy will mean for the South! I can't think of my own safety. Can any one undo this pardon now?" she asked anxiously.

"I am sure they cannot. The name on that paper should be mightier dead than living."

"Ah, but will it be? Do you know Mr. Johnson? Can he control Stanton? He seemed to be more powerful than the President himself. What will that man do now with those who fall into his

hands."

"He can do nothing with your son, rest assured."

"I wish I knew it," said the mother wistfully.

A few moments after the President died on Saturday morning, the rain began to pour in torrents. The flags that flew from a thousand gilt-tipped peaks in celebration of victory drooped to half-mast and hung weeping around their staffs. The litter of burnt fireworks, limp and crumbling, strewed the streets, and the tri-coloured lanterns and balloons, hanging pathetically from their wires, began to fall to pieces.

Never in all the history of man had such a conjunction of events befallen a nation. From the heights of heaven's rejoicing to be suddenly hurled to the depths of hell in piteous helpless grief! Noon to midnight without a moment between. A pall of voiceless horror spread its shadows over the land. Nothing short of an earthquake or the sound of the archangel's trumpet could have produced the sense of helpless consternation, the black and speechless despair. The people read their papers in tears. The morning meal was untouched. By no other single feat could death have carried such peculiar horror to every home. Around this giant figure the heartstrings of the people had been unconsciously knit. Even his political enemies had come to love him.

Above all, in just this moment he was the incarnation of the Triumphant Union on the altar of whose life every house had laid the offering of its first-born. The tragedy was stupefying – it was

unthinkable – it was the mockery of Fate!

Men walked the streets of the cities, dazed with the sense of blind grief. Every note of music and rejoicing became a dirge. All business ceased. Every wheel in every mill stopped. The roar of the great city was hushed, and Greed for a moment forgot his cunning.

The army only moved with swifter spring, tightening its mighty grip on the throat of the bleeding prostrate South.

As the day wore on its gloomy hours, and men began to find speech, they spoke to each other at first in low tones of Fate, of Life, of Death, of Immortality, of God – and then as grief found words the measureless rage of baffled strength grew slowly to madness.

On every breeze from the North came the deep-muttered curses.

Easter Sunday dawned after the storm, clear and beautiful in a flood of glorious sunshine. The churches were thronged as never in their history. All had been decorated for the double celebration of Easter and the triumph of the Union. The preachers had prepared sermons pitched in the highest anthem key of victory – victory over death and the grave of Calvary, and victory for the Nation opening a future of boundless glory. The churches were labyrinths of flowers, and around every pulpit and from every Gothic arch hung the red, white, and blue flags of the Republic.

And now, as if to mock this gorgeous pageant, Death had in the night flung a black mantle over every flag and wound a

strangling web of crape round every Easter flower.

When the preachers faced the silent crowds before them, looking into the faces of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and lovers whose dear ones had been slain in battle or died in prison pens, the tide of grief and rage rose and swept them from their feet! The Easter sermon was laid aside. Fifty thousand Christian ministers, stunned and crazed by insane passion, standing before the altars of God, hurled into the broken hearts before them the wildest cries of vengeance – cries incoherent, chaotic, unreasoning, blind in their awful fury!

The pulpits of New York and Brooklyn led in the madness.

Next morning old Stoneman read his paper with a cold smile playing about his big stern mouth, while his furrowed brow flushed with triumph, as again and again he exclaimed: "At last! At last!"

Even Beecher, who had just spoken his generous words at Fort Sumter, declared:

"Never while time lasts, while heaven lasts, while hell rocks and groans, will it be forgotten that Slavery, by its minions, slew him, and slaying him made manifest its whole nature. A man cannot be bred in its tainted air. I shall find saints in hell sooner than I shall find true manhood under its accursed influences. The breeding-ground of such monsters must be utterly and forever destroyed."

Dr. Stephen Tyng said:

"The leaders of this rebellion deserve no pity from any

human being. Now let them go. Some other land must be their home. Their property is justly forfeited to the Nation they have attempted to destroy!"

In big black-faced type stood Dr. Charles S. Robinson's bitter words:

"This is the earliest reply which chivalry makes to our forbearance. Talk to me no more of the same race, of the same blood. He is no brother of mine and of no race of mine who crowns the barbarism of treason with the murder of an unarmed husband in the sight of his wife. On the villains who led this rebellion let justice fall swift and relentless. Death to every traitor of the South! Pursue them one by one! Let every door be closed upon them and judgment follow swift and implacable as death!"

Dr. Theodore Cuyler exclaimed:

"This is no time to talk of leniency and conciliation! I say before God, make no terms with rebellion short of extinction. Booth wielding the assassin's weapon is but the embodiment of the bowie-knife barbarism of a slaveholding oligarchy."

Dr. J. P. Thompson said:

"Blot every Southern State from the map. Strip every rebel of property and citizenship, and send them into exile beggared and infamous outcasts."

Bishop Littlejohn, in his impassioned appeal, declared:

"The deed is worthy of the Southern cause which was conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity, and consummated in crime. This murderous hand is the same hand which lashed the

slave's bared back, struck down New England's senator for daring to speak, lifted the torch of rebellion, slaughtered in cold blood its thousands, and starved our helpless prisoners. Its end is not martyrdom, but dishonour."

Bishop Simpson said:

"Let every man who was a member of Congress and aided this rebellion be brought to speedy punishment. Let every officer educated at public expense, who turned his sword against his country, be doomed to a traitor's death!"

With the last note of this wild music lingering in the old Commoner's soul, he sat as if dreaming, laughed cynically, turned to the brown woman and said:

"My speeches have not been lost after all. Prepare dinner for six. My cabinet will meet here to-night."

While the press was reëchoing these sermons, gathering strength as they were caught and repeated in every town, village, and hamlet in the North, the funeral procession started westward. It passed in grandeur through the great cities on its journey of one thousand six hundred miles to the tomb. By day, by night, by dawn, by sunlight, by twilight, and lit by solemn torches, millions of silent men and women looked on his dead face. Around the person of this tall, lonely man, rugged, yet full of sombre dignity and spiritual beauty, the thoughts, hopes, dreams, and ideals of the people had gathered in four years of agony and death, until they had come to feel their own hearts beat in his breast and their own life throb in his life. The assassin's bullet had crashed into

their own brains, and torn their souls and bodies asunder.

The masses were swept from their moorings, and reason destroyed. All historic perspective was lost. Our first assassination, there was no precedent for comparison. It had been over two hundred years in the world's history since the last murder of a great ruler, when William of Orange fell.

On the day set for the public funeral twenty million people bowed at the same hour.

When the procession reached New York the streets were lined with a million people. Not a sound could be heard save the tramp of soldiers' feet and the muffled cry of the dirge. Though on every foot of earth stood a human being, the silence of the desert and of death! The Nation's living heroes rode in that procession, and passed without a sign from the people.

Four years ago he drove down Broadway as President-elect, unnoticed and with soldiers in disguise attending him lest the mob should stone him.

To-day, at the mention of his name in the churches, the preachers' voices in prayer wavered and broke into silence while strong men among the crowd burst into sobs. Flags flew at half-mast from their steeples, and their bells tolled in grief.

Every house that flew but yesterday its banner of victory was shrouded in mourning. The flags and pennants of a thousand ships in the harbour drooped at half-mast, and from every staff in the city streamed across the sky the black mists of crape like strange meteors in the troubled heavens.

For three days every theatre, school, court, bank, shop, and mill was closed.

And with muttered curses men looked Southward.

Across Broadway the cortège passed under a huge transparency on which appeared the words:

“A Nation bowed in grief

Will rise in might to exterminate

The leaders of this accursed Rebellion.”

Farther along swung the black-draped banner:

“Justice to Traitors

is

Mercy to the People.”

Another flapped its grim message:

“The Barbarism of Slavery

Can Barbarism go Further?”

Across the Ninth Regiment Armoury, in gigantic letters, were the words:

"Time for Weeping

But Vengeance is not Sleeping!"

When the procession reached Buffalo, the house of Millard Fillmore was mobbed because the ex-President, stricken on a bed of illness, had neglected to drape his house in mourning. The procession passed to Springfield through miles of bowed heads dumb with grief. The plough stopped in the furrow, the smith dropped his hammer, the carpenter his plane, the merchant closed his door, the clink of coin ceased, and over all hung brooding silence with low-muttered curses, fierce and incoherent.

No man who walked the earth ever passed to his tomb through such a storm of human tears. The pageants of Alexander, Cæsar, and Wellington were tinsel to this. Nor did the spirit of Napoleon, the Corsican Lieutenant of Artillery who once presided over a congress of kings whom he had conquered, look down on its like even in France.

And now that its pomp was done and its memory but bitterness and ashes, but one man knew exactly what he wanted and what he meant to do. Others were stunned by the blow. But the cold eyes of the Great Commoner, leader of leaders, sparkled, and

his grim lips smiled. From him not a word of praise or fawning sorrow for the dead. Whatever he might be, he was not a liar: when he hated, he hated.

The drooping flags, the city's black shrouds, processions, torches, silent seas of faces and bared heads, the dirges and the bells, the dim-lit churches, wailing organs, fierce invectives from the altar, and the perfume of flowers piled in heaps by silent hearts – to all these was he heir.

And more – the fierce unwritten, unspoken, and unspeakable horrors of the war itself, its passions, its cruelties, its hideous crimes and sufferings, the wailing of its women, the graves of its men – all these now were his.

The new President bowed to the storm. In one breath he promised to fulfil the plans of Lincoln. In the next he, too, breathed threats of vengeance.

The edict went forth for the arrest of General Lee.

Would Grant, the Commanding General of the Army, dare protest? There were those who said that if Lee were arrested and Grant's plighted word at Appomattox smirched, the silent soldier would not only protest, but draw his sword, if need be, to defend his honour and the honour of the Nation. Yet – would he dare? It remained to be seen.

The jails were now packed with Southern men, taken unarmed from their homes. The old Capitol Prison was full, and every cell of every grated building in the city, and they were filling the rooms of the Capitol itself.

Margaret, hurrying from the market in the early morning with her flowers, was startled to find her mother bowed in anguish over a paragraph in the morning paper.

She rose and handed it to the daughter, who read:

"Dr. Richard Cameron, of South Carolina, arrived in Washington and was placed in jail last night, charged with complicity in the murder of President Lincoln. It was discovered that Jeff Davis spent the night at his home in Piedmont, under the pretence of needing medical attention. Beyond all doubt, Booth, the assassin, merely acted under orders from the Arch Traitor. May the gallows have a rich and early harvest!"

Margaret tremblingly wound her arms around her mother's neck. No words broke the pitiful silence – only blinding tears and broken sobs.

Book II – The Revolution

CHAPTER I
The First Lady of the Land

The little house on the Capitol hill now became the centre of fevered activity. This house, selected by its grim master to become the executive mansion of the Nation, was perhaps the most modest structure ever chosen for such high uses.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.