

MacGrath Harold

# The Best Man



Harold MacGrath

**The Best Man**

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**THE BEST MAN**

**I**

CARRINGTON folded the document and thoughtfully balanced it on his palm. What an ironical old world it was! There was a perpendicular wrinkle about his nose, and his lips had thinned into a mere line which drooped at the corners. The drone of a type-writer in the adjoining room sounded above the rattle-tattle of the street below. Through the opened windows came a vague breath of summer redolent of flowers and grasses; for it was but eleven o'clock of the morning, and the smell of sun-baked brick and asphalt had not yet risen through the air. Far beyond the smoking, ragged sky-line Carrington could see the shifting, glittering river and the great ships going down to the sea. Presently the ashes from his dead cigar fell in a gray cascade down his coat and tumbled across his knees, but he gave no heed.

Ironical old world indeed! Here, suddenly and unexpectedly, he found himself upon the battlefield of love and duty, where all honest men find themselves, sooner or later. To pit the heart against the conscience, impulse against calculation! Heigh-ho! Duty is an implacable goddess, and those who serve her most loyally are most ruthlessly driven. She buffets us into this corner and into that, digs pitfalls for the hesitant foot, and crushes the vacillating.

As all men will, Carrington set about to argue down his conscience; the heart is so insistent a counselor. Why should he give up the woman he loved, simply because duty demanded he should? After all, was not duty merely social obligation? What was it to him that the sheep were sheared? Was it right that he, of all men, should divide the house, throw the black pall of dishonesty over it, destroy his own happiness and hers, when so simple a thing as a match would crumble into nothingness this monument to one man's greed and selfishness? The survival of the fittest; if he put aside Self, who would thank him? Few, and many would call him a fool or a meddler. So many voices spoke that he seemed to hear none distinctly.

He alone had made these astonishing discoveries; he alone had followed the cunningly hidden trail of the serpent. He could stop where he was and none would be the wiser. To be sure, it was only a question of time when the scandal would become public through other channels; but in that event he would not be held responsible for bringing about the catastrophe. Besides, the ways of the serpent are devious and many, and other investigators might not come so close to the trail.

He had gone about his investigations without the least idea where they would lead him. At the beginning he had believed that the guilty ones were none higher than petty officials; but presently he found himself going over their heads, higher and higher, until, behold! he was at the lair of the old serpent himself. A client had carelessly dropped a bit of information, and it had taken seed with this surprising result. Henry Cavanaugh, millionaire promoter, financier, trust magnate, director in a hundred money-gathering concerns; Henry Cavanaugh, the father of the girl he loved and who loved him! Could it be he, indeed? It seemed incredible.

It was not a case of misappropriation of funds, such as a man may be guilty of when temporarily hard pressed. It was a bold and fraudulent passing of dividends that rightfully belonged to the investors; of wrongfully issuing statements of bolstered expenses, lack of markets, long strikes (promoted by Cavanaugh and his associates!), insufficient means of transportation. An annual dividend of seven per cent. on many millions had been dishonestly passed over. The reports that there would be no dividends encouraged a slump in the listed price of the stock, and many had sold under par value, thereby netting to Cavanaugh and others several millions. And the proof of all this lay in his hand!

It had been a keen hunt. Many and many a blind trail had he followed, only to come back to the start again. All that now remained for him to do was to pass this document on to the hands of the intrepid district attorney, and justice would be meted out to the guilty.

Her father! The picture of him rose suddenly and distinctly in his mind. Tall, powerfully built, a hooked nose, keen blue eyes, an aggressive chin, a repellent mouth, Henry Cavanaugh was the personification of the modern Cræsus. Immutable in purpose, dogged in perseverance, a relentless enemy, a Jesuit in that the end always justified the means, he stood a pillar in the world of finance, where there is sometimes justice but never any mercy. Thirty-five years before he had been a messenger in a stock-broker's office. Of his antecedents nothing was known until he broke one of the famous gold corners in the seventies, when a handsome, ruddy-cheeked little Irishman bobbed up serenely from nowhere in particular and claimed to be the great Cavanaugh's father. But his proofs were not convincing, and when the son showed a decided contempt for him, he gently subsided into oblivion and was heard of no more. From time to time Carrington gathered a small crumb of information regarding his sweetheart's grandfather; but whenever he broached the subject, however tactfully, everybody concerned headed the conversation for a different port.

Carrington had never laid eyes on the old gentleman, and, for all he knew to the contrary, he might be a myth. He reasoned that in all probability the grandfather was illiterate, uncouth, and rather an awkward piece of family furniture to handle, when the family proper were ingratiating themselves into the Chippendales of society. Unfortunately, Mother Cavanaugh, good-hearted and amiable in her way, had been stung by the bee of the climbers, and her one ambition was to establish herself and daughters in society; and had not he, Carrington, come of an aristocratic family (poor, it is true), the doors of the Cavanaugh manor would never have opened to his knock. Even as it was, he was *persona non grata* to the millionaire, who was mad for a duke in the family. Besides, Cavanaugh had his suspicions of any lawyer who grubbed outside the breastworks.

Some doves circled above a church-spire a few streets over the way, breaking the sunbeams against their polished wings. Finally they settled on the slate roof and fell to strutting and waddling and swelling their breasts pompously. Carrington opened and refolded the document, but he did not take his eyes from the doves. What should he do? What ill wind had blown this thing into his doorway? Nothing had warned him of the impending tangle. Until two days ago Cavanaugh was at the other end of the world, so far as his investigations at that time were concerned.

He struck a match. The sliver of pine flared palely in the sunshine, writhed and dropped, black and charred, to the floor. He shrugged his shoulders. Chivalry of this sort was not the order of the day. There was something stronger than the voice of duty, something stronger than the voice of the heart; it was the voice of pity, which urged its appeal for the hundreds of men and women who had invested their all in the Cavanaugh concerns. The thought of their ultimate ruin, should Cavanaugh be permitted to pursue his course unchecked, bore heavily upon him. No, he could not do it. He must fight, even if he lost his all in the battle. It is a fine thing to right a wrong. All the great victories in the world have been won for others than the victors. That Cavanaugh was the father of the girl he loved must have no weight on the scales of justice.

Resolutely he thrust the document into his coat pocket, closed his desk and relighted his cigar. In that moment he had mapped out his plan of action. That very night he would lay the whole thing

very clearly before the girl herself, and whatever decision she made, he would stand or fall by it, for he knew her to be the soul of honor.

Poor girl! It was a heart-breaking business. How in the world should he begin, and where should he stop? Ah, that was it! He would lay the matter before her in a manner that would conceal the vital nearness of the case, as if it were some client of his who was unknown to her. And when she had judged the case, he would speak the bald truth. It would be a cruel blow, but nevertheless he must deal it. She loved her father, and after his own peculiar fashion her father loved her. She was the only one in the family who could wheedle him out of a purpose; to the rest of the family his word was law immutable. It was very hard, sighed Carrington. For the father he had neither pity nor sympathy; there were many ugly tales about his financial dealings; but his whole heart went out unreservedly to the girl.

When Carrington had gone to Cavanaugh, his heart in his throat, to speak to him relative to his daughter's hand, he unwittingly knocked off the top of a volcano.

"Marry my daughter?" Cavanaugh roared, emphasizing his wrath and disapproval with a bang of fist upon palm. "My daughter shall marry only among her equals, not among her inferiors. A king is not good enough for my Kate." There was another bang of the fist, decided and final. "A lawyer? Not if I know myself. I wouldn't trust a lawyer out of sight," bluntly. "Kate shall marry a duke or a prince, if I can find one suitable."

Carrington would have smiled had the moment been less serious.

"No man can possibly appreciate her worth more readily than I, sir," he replied, "or love her more dearly."

"Love?" with a snort. "Twaddle out of story-books!"

"But you yourself love her."

"I'm her father," Cavanaugh returned complacently, adding a gesture which had the effect of describing the fact that it was perfectly logical for a father to love his daughter, but that it wasn't logical at all for any other male biped to love her.

"I am sorry," said the disheartened suitor, rising. "I suppose that after this unpleasant interview ..."

"Oh, you're a decent sort," interrupted Cavanaugh generously; "and if you are of a mind to behave yourself hereafter, you will always find a chair at my table. But my daughter is not for you, sir, emphatically not. That is all, sir;" and Cavanaugh picked up his evening paper.

After such a rebuff, most young men would have given up; but Carrington never gave up till there was no possibility of winning. Immediately after the interview he went to the higher court with his appeal.

"Let us have patience," the girl whispered. "I'll undertake to bring him to reason."

But Carrington went home that night without his love for the father increasing any.

And so the matter stood at the present time. The affair had gone neither forward nor backward.

Ah, were he less honest, how easily he could bring the old curmudgeon to terms! There was that in his pocket which would open the way to the altar, quickly enough. But Carrington was manly and honest to the core, and to him blackmail stood among the basest of crimes. Many times during the past forty-eight hours the tempter had whispered in his ear that here was a way out of his difficulties; but the young man had listened unmoved.

During the summer and autumn months of the year the Cavaughns lived at their country place over in New Jersey, and there Carrington spent the week-ends. There were horses to ride, golf and tennis, and a Saturday night dance at the Country Club. To be with the girl you love, even if you can't have her, is some compensation. Cavanaugh never joined the fêtes and sports of the summer colonists, but he offered no objections to the feminine members of his household for selecting Carrington as their escort for the week-ends. Indeed, by now he began to consider Carrington as a harmless, sensible, well-groomed young man, who relieved him of all the painful duties to the frivolous. If the

colonists insisted on coupling his daughter's name with Carrington's, let them do so; when the proper moment came he would disillusionize them. For himself, he always had some good old crony down to while away the dull Sundays; and together they consummated plans that gave the *coup de grâce* to many a noble business galleon. This particular summer there were no dukes or princes floating around unattached, and Cavanaugh agreed that it was a commendable time to lay devices by which to ambush the winter money.

There were nights when Cavanaugh did not sleep very well; but of this, more anon.

Shortly after his determination to tell Kate half a truth, Carrington left the office and made an early train into New Jersey. All the way over to the Cavanaugh station he was restless and uneasy. The fatal papers still reposed in his pocket. He had not dared to leave them in the office safe; his partner, who had had no hand in the investigation, might stumble across them, and that was the last thing in the world he desired. He knew not exactly what to do with them; for they burned like fire in his pocket, and seemed to scorch his fingers whenever he touched them to learn if they were still there. A thousand and one absurd suppositions assailed him. Supposing, for instance, there should be a wreck; supposing he should be robbed; supposing he should leave his vest on the links; and so forth and so forth. It was very depressing. If only he stood in the open, unhandicapped; if only he might throw the gauntlet at Cavanaugh's feet the moment they met!

Ah, if he had only attended to his own affairs! But he hadn't; and his inquisitiveness had plunged him into a Chinese tangle from which there seemed to be no exit. But there was an exit; only, if at that moment Cassandra had whispered the secret into his ear, it would have appealed to him as the most improbable thing under the sun. However, there are no trustworthy Cassandras these sordid days; a single look into the future costs a dollar; and as for Greek choruses, they trundle push-carts on the East Side.

He had broken bread and eaten salt at Cavanaugh's table; and now it was decreed that he must betray him. It was not a pleasant thought. And still less pleasant was the thought of telling Kate (in a roundabout fashion, it is true) that her father was not an honest man. According to financial ethics, what Cavanaugh did was simply keen business instinct; nothing more. If you or I should happen to bend an odd cornice of the majestic pillar of law, we'd be haled off to the county jail forthwith; but if we possessed the skill to smash the whole fabric or rather, to continue the metaphor, the whole pillar, the great world would sit up and admire us. What are old laws for, anyhow? Build you never so wisely your law, there will always be some one to come along and tack on a nice little amendment, subtly undoing in a moment what it took years of labor to accomplish. In this instance, Cavanaugh had been careless; he had forgotten to introduce his amendment. An infinitesimal grain of sand will stop the best regulated clock. The infallible invariably die on the heels of their first victory.

On leaving the train, Carrington espied the Cavanaugh station carriage. The coachman was talking to a little wiry old man, whose gray eyes twinkled and whose complexion was mottled and withered like a wind-fall apple. Seeing Carrington draw nigh, the coachman touched his hat respectfully, while the little old man, who was rather shabbily dressed, stepped quickly around the corner of the platform. Evidently he did not wish to be inspected at close range. Carrington threw his suit-case and golf-bag into the carriage, and followed them. Thereupon the coachman touched the horses lightly, and they started westward at a brisk trot.

"Who's your friend?" asked Carrington, who, though never familiar, was always friendly toward his inferiors.

"He's no friend of mine, sir," answered the coachman, with well-bred contempt. "Miss Cavanaugh directed me to drive you straight to the club, sir."

"Very well," replied Carrington, lighting a cigar and settling back among the cushions.

Immediately he forgot all about the shabby old man, and began to inventory his troubles. He must hide the papers somewhere. All the evidence he had, together with the names of the witnesses, was on his person; for in making the whole he had prudently destroyed the numerous scraps. If this

document fell into alien hands, the trouble would double itself. He puffed quickly, and the heat of the cigar put a smart on his tongue. He had nothing to do but wait.

On the steps of the club's porte-cochère he was greeted by Miss Cavanaugh, who was simply and tastefully dressed in white. If there was a sudden cardiac disturbance in Carrington's breast, the girl's tender beauty certainly justified it. The fresh color on her cheeks and lips, the shining black hair that arched a white forehead, the darkly fringed blue eyes, the slender, rounded figure, the small feet and shapely hands, all combined to produce a picture of feminine loveliness warranted to charm any masculine eye. Let the curious question Cavanaugh's antecedents, if they were so inclined, thought Carrington; here was abundant evidence of what a certain old poet called the splendid corpuscle of aristocracy.

Her sister went by the sonorous name of Norah. She was seventeen, a bit of a tomboy, but of the same build and elegant carriage that distinguished Kate from ordinary mortals; only Norah's eyes were hazel-tinted and her hair was that warm brown of the heart of a chestnut-bur. She was of merry temperament, quick to like or to dislike, and like her sister, loyal to those she loved. Both girls possessed that uncommon gift in women, the perfect sense of justice. You never heard them gossiping about anybody; and when a veranda conversation drifted toward scandal, the Cavanaugh girls invariably drifted toward the farther end of the veranda. All the men admired them; they were such good fellows.

The mother of the girls was, as I have remarked, good-natured and amiable, inclined toward stoutness, and a willing listener to all that was going on. She considered it her bounden duty to keep informed regarding the doings of her intimate friends, but with total lack of malice. At this moment she occupied her favorite corner on the club veranda, and was engaged in animated tittle-tattle. She nodded and smiled at Carrington.

Norah was playing tennis. She waved her racket at the new arrival. Carrington was her beau-ideal.

He hurried into the dressing-room and shortly returned in his golf flannels. He was a sturdy chap, not at all handsome, but possessing a countenance full of strong lines. He inspired your trust and confidence, which is far better than inspiring your admiration.

"I am not going to play to-day," said Kate, "so I'll follow over the course and watch you play. I haven't seen you for a whole week; and I can't talk and play, too," smiling.

"Forward, then!" cried Carrington, beckoning to his caddy.

He played a nervous, fidgety game that afternoon. Every time he teed his ball the document spoke from his pocket with an ominous crackle. There was not one brilliant stroke to his credit. This puzzled the girl, for only the previous week he had been runner-up in the annual tournament for crack amateurs. He made the ninth hole indifferently, then turned to the girl, smiling whimsically.

"You are not playing up to your form to-day, John," she observed.

"I admit it," he replied, tossing his club to the caddy, who, well versed in worldly affairs, serenely shouldered the bag and made off toward the club house. "My heart isn't in the game, Kate. The fact is, I'm in a peck of trouble." He determined to tell her at once. There might not be another opportunity like this.

"Why, John!" reproachfully.

"Oh, it came only yesterday. I haven't been hiding it. I'm in a kind of pocket, and can't exactly see my way out. I want your advice; and you must be the jury and judge rolled into one."

They were standing on a hill, and far away they could see the pale line where the shimmering summer sea met the turquoise bowl of heaven.

"Tell me what your difficulty is, John, and I will judge it the best I know how."

He never knew what a simple, beautiful name John was till it fell from the lips of this girl. Many called him Jack; but only his mother and this girl called him John. He motioned toward the sandbox, and they sat down. The other players were well scattered about, out of hearing. He made out his case

skilfully enough, giving his plaintiff and defendant fictitious names. The thing grew so real to him, as he went on, that toward the end he rose to the dramatics. The girl listened, but with never a glance at him. Rather her gaze roved over the dancing gray waters and followed the lonely white sail that stood out to sea. And when he reached the climax, silence of some duration fell upon them.

"Should this man be punished?" he asked at length.

"He is guilty; he has broken two laws, the civic and human. Oh, the poor people!" pathetically. "They are never at peace; the wolf harries them, and the jackal; they are robbed, beaten and spurned. They are like sheep, not knowing how to fight. They arrest a man for his poverty; they applaud him for his greed. It is all very wrong."

The sail fell under the shadow of a cloud, and they both watched it till it flashed into the sunlight again.

"A woman's intuition is sometimes abnormally keen. You are strong enough to fight such things without the advice of a woman. Is there not something vital to me in all this? Is it not ... is it not my father, John?"

## II

CARRINGTON faced her swiftly. He had not expected this. There was something in her handsome eyes that barred the way to subterfuge. The lie died unspoken, and he dropped his gaze and began to dig up the turf with the toe of his shoe.

"Is it my father, John?"

"Yes. Oh, Kate," with a despairing gesture, "I'm the most miserable fellow alive! To think that this should fall into my hands, of all hands in the world!"

"Perhaps it is better so," quietly. "Nothing is without purpose. It might have come to test your honesty. But you are sure, John; it is not guess-work?"

"All the evidence is in my pocket. Say the word, and the wind shall carry it down to the sea. Say the word, heart o' mine!"

He made a quick movement toward his pocket, but she caught his arm.

"Do nothing foolish or hasty, John. Tearing up the evidence would not undo what is done. Sooner or later murder will out. If my father is culpable, if in his thoughtless greed for money he has robbed the poor, he must be made to restore what he has taken. I know my father; what he has done appears perfectly legitimate to him. Can he be put in prison?"

"It all depends upon how well he defends himself," evasively.

She went on. "I have been dreading something like this; so it is no great surprise to me. He is money-mad, money-mad; and he hears, sees, thinks nothing but money. But it hurts, John; I am a proud woman. My grandfather..." Her lips shut suddenly. "Money!" with a passionate wave of the hand. "How I hate the name of it, the sound of it, the thought of it! I love my father," with a defiant pride; "he has always been tender and kind to me; and I should not be of his flesh and blood had I not the desire to shield and protect him."

"The remedy is simple and close at hand," suggested Carrington gently.

"Simple, but worthy of neither of us. I abhor anything that is not wholly honest. It is one of those strange freaks of nature (who holds herself accountable to no one) to give to me honesty that is the sum total of what should have been evenly distributed among my ancestors. If I were to tell all I know, all I have kept locked in my heart..."

"Don't do it, girl; it wouldn't matter in the least. You are you; and that is all there is to love. Why, I could not love you less if your great-great-grandfather was a pirate," lightly. "Love asks no questions; and ancestors worry me not at all; they are all comfortably dead."

"Not always. But if my perception of honor were less keen, I should laugh at what you call your evidence."

"Laugh?"

"Yes, indeed. I very well understand the tremendous power of money."

"Not more than I," sadly.

She laughed brokenly. "More than you. I can picture to you just what will happen." She rose. "There will, of course, be a great newspaper clamor; the interstate commissioners will put their heads together; there will be investigations by the government. That will be the attack. The keenest lawyers are on the side of corporations; that is because the state is niggard with her pay. Let me outline the defense. Father will resign from his high office, to be reelected later when the public cools off! A new directorate will fill the place of the present one. Suddenly falsified entries will be discovered; the head bookkeeper will have disappeared. All fingers will point to him. He will be in South America, having been paid several thousand to go there. All this will make the passing of the dividend perfectly logical. The matter will never be tried in court. Money will do all this."

"My dear little woman, you reason like Pythagoras; but," Carrington added gravely, "when I undertook to untangle this affair, I realized its huge proportions. For every redoubt your father has, I have an assault, for every wall a catapult, for every gate a petard. But, as I said before, you have only to say the word, and for the present nobody will be any the wiser."

"If I permitted you to do this, I should destroy my faith in both of us. It would erect a barrier which would be insurmountable. That is not the way out."

"I have weighed all these things," discouragedly.

He took the document from his pocket and caught it in a way that indicated how easily it might be ripped into halves, the halves into quarters, the quarters into infinitesimal squares of meaningless letters.

"Once more, shall I, Kate?"

"No, John. That would only make our difficulties greater. But I do ask this one favor; put your evidence into the hands of a strange attorney, have nothing to do with the prosecution; for my sake."

"I must have the night to think it over. Most of my attacks are not herein written; I dared keep them only in my head."

"I am very unhappy," said the girl.

He took her hand and kissed it reverently. He longed to console her, but no words he had in mind seemed adequate.

"Fore!" came lazily over the knoll. They were no longer alone. So together they wandered slowly back to the club-house. Tea was being served, and Carrington drank his abstractedly. From time to time he joined the conversation, but without any heart. Some of the busier ladies whispered that it looked this time as though Kate had given the young man his *cong e*.

On the way home Norah, with her humorous comment on the weekly budget of gossip, saved the situation from any possible *contretemps*. Mrs. Cavanaugh was easy-going, but for all that she possessed remarkably observant eyes; and her eldest daughter was glad that they were occupied elsewhere.

Kate was very unhappy; her father was not honest, and the man she loved had come into the knowledge of the fact. Ah, how quickly shadow can darken sunshine!

"What did you make it in to-day, Mr. Carrington?" asked Norah.

"Make what?" he counter-questioned absently.

"The course, Mr. Goose! What did you think I meant?"

"Oh," lamely, "I made a bad play at the beginning, and gave it up."

By this time they had arrived at the gates, and everybody was thankful; Mrs. Cavanaugh, because her nose smarted with sunburn; Norah, because the gown she was to wear at the dance that night was new; Kate, because she wanted to be alone; and Carrington, because he wanted to learn whether the Angel threw Jacob or Jacob threw the Angel. The driver and the horses were glad to arrive because they were hungry.

It took the young lawyer some time to dress for dinner that night. His usually direct mind vacillated between right and wrong, wrong and right; and he floated from one to the other like an unattached cork. He made a dozen annoying blunders in dressing. And when finally the pier-glass reflected an irreproachable and finished picture, he searched his cast-off vest for his growing monster and transferred it to the pocket of his coat. Monster! Here was no story-monster, like the creature of a Frankenstein; it was genuine, and was like to turn upon him at any moment and rend him. He shrugged and proceeded down the stairs. There are soliloquies that sometimes leave an unpleasant taste behind. So he pinned his faith to the banner of the late genial and hopeful Micawber: something might turn up for the benefit of all concerned.

The hall and living-room at the Cavanaugh manor were one and the same. There were bookcases ranging along the walls, window-seats, a reading-table and an ancient chimney-seat. As Carrington turned the first landing he stopped.

"Father, I think it positively dreadful the way you treat poor grandpa." This was Norah.

There was a crackle of a newspaper.

"Never mind, Norah, darling; your grandpa is used to it. It doesn't matter at all."

It was the sight of the last speaker that brought Carrington to a stand. Norah's grandpa was no less a person than the shabbily dressed old man he had seen at the station that afternoon. What kind of family skeleton in the closet was he that they kept him *en camera*? He coughed and went on.

Norah was plucky, whole-hearted, frank and encouraging.

"Mr. Carrington," she said immediately, "this is my grandpa."

Carrington did not hesitate a moment, but smiled and thrust out his hand, which the other grasped with a questioning air of diffidence.

"Glad to meet you, sir," said Carrington.

Cavanaugh *filed* glanced over the top of his paper, scowled, and resumed his reading. Kate hadn't come down yet, so she missed this scene. When she did appear, there was no visible sign of any previous agitation. She and Norah were thoroughbreds.

"Why, grandpa!" she cried, extending her hand.

The old man bowed over it and kissed it, and his action was lacking neither in grace nor gallantry.

"I happened to be down this way on business," said the old man with a covert glance at his son, "and thought I'd drop in."

"Dinner is served," said the splendid butler, as he slid back the doors to the dining-room.

The old man looked about him questioningly, and Norah slipped her arm through his. "You'll have to take me in, grandpa," she laughed.

The old man's eyes shone for a moment, and he patted her hand.

"I'm as proud as a king, Norah."

Now, Carrington could read between the lines. It was manifestly plain that grandpa was not welcome to Cavanaugh. But why? Mrs. Cavanaugh scarcely tolerated him. While the girls seldom if ever spoke of him, it was evident that both held him in their affections. There were many strange things going on in the Cavanaugh manor; and Carrington entered the dining-room in a subdued state of mind.

By degrees Norah succeeded in drawing the pariah out of himself. Carrington was soon listening to an amazing range of adventures. The old man had seen Cuba in the filibusters' time, he had fought the Canadian constabulary as a Fenian, he had been a sailor, and had touched the shores of many strange lands. Grandpa Cavanaugh was anything but illiterate. Quite often there was a flash of wit, a well-turned phrase, a quotation. He had, besides, a comprehensive grasp of the politics of all countries.

Carrington saw at once that his half-formed opinion was a house of cards. There was no reason in the world why they should be ashamed of him, shunt him off into the side-track of obscurity,

and begrudge him a plate at the table. Carrington realized that he was very close to some peculiar mystery, and that the old man's bitterest enemy was his son.

Throughout the meal the millionaire preserved a repelling silence. From time to time, when there was laughter, he scowled. Once or twice Mrs. Cavanaugh essayed to pass an observation across the table to him, but a curt nod was all she received for her pains. Presently Cavanaugh dropped his knife on his plate, and the pariah retreated meekly into his shell. In fact, he looked frightened, as if the thought had come to him that he had made an irreparable blunder in warming under his grandchildren's smiles.

"Carrington," said Midas, balling his napkin and tossing it on the table, "your particular branch is corporation law, isn't it?"

"Yes. The firm has some reputation in that branch." Carrington glanced curiously at his host. What was coming now? Was it possible that Cavanaugh had in some way learned of his discoveries and was about to placate him?

"I believe you handled successfully the D. & M. railroad deal?"

"We won in three courts."

"Well," continued Cavanaugh, "I've been thinking of you to-day. The P. & O. counsel has had to give up on account of poor health, and Matthewson spoke to me yesterday, asking if I knew a man who could fill his place. It pays seventeen thousand the year." He paused as if to let this magnificent salary sink into the deepest crevice of Carrington's soul. "What would you say to a permanent berth like that?" Cavanaugh positively beamed.

Kate stared at her father in astonishment. Was it possible that he was beginning to look favorably upon Carrington? Her glance traveled to Carrington. His expression she found puzzling.

"Seventeen thousand!" murmured the pariah, rubbing his hands, while his eyes sparkled.

Carrington deliberated for a space. He was hard put. He did not want to refuse this peace-offering, but nothing would make him accept it.

"This is very fine of you. Two years ago I should have jumped at the chance. But my agreement with my partner makes it impossible. I can not honestly break my contract within five years." He waited for the storm to burst, for Cavanaugh was not a patient man.

"Are you mad?" whispered Kate. A flush of anger swept over her at the thought of Carrington's lightly casting aside this evident olive-branch.

"Would you have me accept it?" he returned, in a whisper lower than hers.

She paled. "I had forgotten," she said, with the pain of quick recollection.

The dinner came to its end, and everybody rose gratefully, for there seemed to be something tense in the air.

"Seventeen thousand honest dollars!" murmured the pariah, tagging along at the millionaire's heels.

Carrington threw him a swift penetrating glance; but the old man was looking ecstatically at the tinted angels on the ceiling. The old man might be perfectly guileless; but Carrington scented the faintly bitter aroma of irony.

Just before the carriage arrived to convey Carrington and the ladies to the club dance, grandpa appeared, hat in hand and a humble smile on his face. It was a very attractive face, weather-beaten though it was, penciled by the onset of seventy years.

"You are not going, are you, grandpa?" asked Norah.

"Yes, my child. I should be very lonesome here alone with your estimable father. I'll drop in to-morrow for Sunday dinner; that is, if you are not going to have company. I am glad that I met you, Mr. Carrington."

"Poor old grandpa!" sighed Norah, when the door closed upon him. "He has the ridiculous idea that he isn't wanted."

Nobody pursued the subject and Norah began to preen herself.

An idea came to Carrington. He wanted to be rid of his document. He spoke to Kate, who nodded comprehensively. She led him into the dining-room. In one corner, protected by a low screen, was a small safe. This she threw open, and Carrington put the envelope into one of the pigeon-holes. The safe was absolutely empty, a fact which puzzled him not a little.

"We seldom use this," said the girl, reading the vague unspoken question in his eyes. "The jewel safe is up-stairs in my room."

"It doesn't matter in the least," he replied, smiling, "so long as I may safely rid myself of these obnoxious papers. And if you do not mind, I'll leave them there till Monday morning. I've thought it all out, Kate. A man's only human, after all. I could never prosecute the case myself; I'd be thinking of you and the bread I have eaten. I'll turn the matter over to Challoner, and let him do as he thinks best. Of course, I shall be called as a witness when the case comes up in court, if it ever does."

She did not reply, but shut the door of the safe and rose from her knees.

The south side of the dining-room was made up of long colonial windows that opened directly upon the lawn. They were more like doors than windows. She locked each one carefully and drew the curtain.

"Norah is probably growing impatient for us," she said.

With an indescribable impulse he suddenly drew her into his arms and kissed her. It might be the last he could ever claim.

"John!" she murmured, gently disengaging herself.

"I love you," he said, "and I could not help it. Everything looks so dark."

The clock in the hall chimed the quarter hour after eleven. Cavanaugh was in his den. His desk was littered with sheets of paper, upon which were formidable columns of figures and dollar signs. He sat back in his chair and listened. He thought he heard a door or window close; he wasn't certain. It was probably one of the servants. He bit off the end of a fresh cigar and resumed his work. Let the young people play golf, if they wanted to, and dance and frivol away the precious hours; they would never know the joy of seeing one become two, two become four, and so on, till the adding grew into the ransoms of many kings. Ay, this was to live. Oh, the beautiful numerals! Brigade after brigade, corps after corps, they marched at a sign from him; an army greater than that of kings. To sit in a little room, as in a puppet-booth, and juggle the policies of the nations! Yes, Kate should have a duke and Norah a prince; he would show them all some day. Recollecting Carrington, he frowned. Did the fellow know anything, that he felt the power to refuse an offer such as he had made at the dinner-table? Bah! It would be like crushing some insect. He determined that this should be Carrington's last visit. His pen moved once more, and presently he became lost in his dreams of calculation.

But Cavanaugh's ears had not deceived him, however, for he had heard the sound of a closing window. A window had been closed, but none of the servants had been at hand.

At precisely eleven a man came swiftly but cautiously across the lawn. When he reached the long windows of the dining-room he paused, but not irresolutely. There was a sharp rasping sound, followed by the uncertain glare that makes the light of a dark-lantern separate and individual, and a window swung noiselessly inward. The room was in total darkness. The man wore a short mask, a soft felt hat well down over his eyes. He cupped his hand to his ear and strained to catch any sound. Silence. Then he dropped behind the screen, consulted a slip of paper by the light of his lantern, and with a few quick turns of the combination-knob opened the door of the safe. He extracted the envelope and thrust it into his pocket, without so much as a glance at its contents. In making his exit, the window stuck on the sill. In pressing it the lock snapped loudly. This was the sound Cavanaugh heard. The burglar ran lightly across the lawn and disappeared beyond the hedges. And none too soon.

The Cavanaugh drag rolled over the hill and went clattering up to the porte-cochère.

On the way home Carrington, his mind still wavering between this expedient and that, decided that, after all, he would take charge of the papers himself. It didn't seem quite fair that Cavanaugh's safe should protect his ultimate disgrace. So, upon entering the house, he confided his desire to Kate,

who threw aside her wraps and led him into the dining-room. She had her own reasons for wishing the papers out of the safe. She turned on the lights and swirled the combination-knob. At this moment Norah came in.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Mr. Carrington left some valuable papers in the safe, and he wants them."

Carrington wondered why Norah gazed from him to her sister with so wild an expression.

"Papers?" she murmured.

Kate opened the door. She sprang to her feet in terror and dismay.

"What is it?" cried Carrington, who saw by her expression that something extraordinary had happened.

"They ... it is not there!"

Norah sat down and hid her face on her arms.

Carrington rushed over to the safe, stooped and made a hasty examination. It had been opened by some one who knew the combination! He stood up, a cold chill wrinkling his spine. He saw it all distinctly. Cavanaugh knew. He had known all along. Cavanaugh had overheard him speak to Kate, and had opened the safe after their departure for the club. It was all very cleverly done. He knew that Kate was utterly blameless. Then it dawned upon him that, they appeared as though they accepted the catastrophe as not wholly unexpected! To what did this labyrinth lead?

A rattle of the curtain-rings wheeled them about. They beheld Cavanaugh himself standing in the doorway.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, eyeing Carrington suspiciously.

Carrington answered him icily. "I left some legal documents of great value in this safe; they are no longer there."

Cavanaugh's jaw dropped. He stared at Kate, then at Norah. If ever there was written on a face unfeigned dismay and astonishment, it was on the millionaire's. A moment before Carrington would have sworn that he was guilty; now he knew not what to believe. He grew bewildered. There had certainly been a burglar; but who was he?

"Mr. Carrington," said Cavanaugh, pulling himself together with an effort, "you need have no worry whatever. I will undertake to restore your documents. I offer you no explanations." He left them abruptly.

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