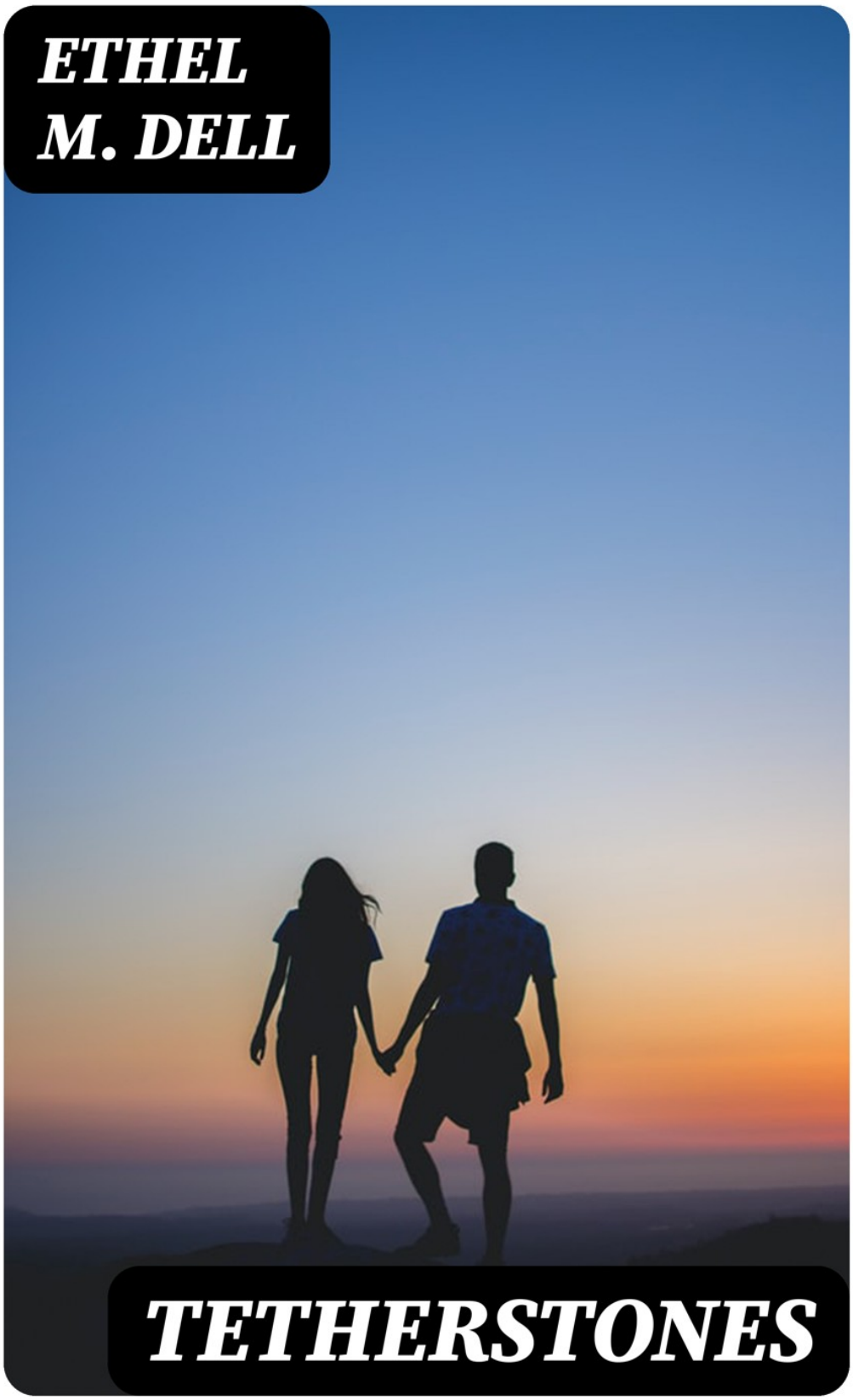
ETHEL M. DELL

TETHERSTONES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PART I

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CHAPTER I
THE MACHINE

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Twelve deep notes sounded from the clock-tower of the Cathedral, and the Bishop’s secretary dropped her hands from her typewriter and turned her face to the open window with a quick sigh. The Bishop’s garden lay sleeping in the sunshine—the pure white of lilies and royal blue of delphiniums mingling together as the wrought silks on the fringe of an altar-cloth. The age-worn stone of the Cathedral rose beyond it, and the arch of the cloisters gave a glimpse of the quiet burial-ground within. A great cluster of purple stone-crop rioted over one corner of the arch, and the secretary’s tired eyes rested upon it with a touch of wistfulness as though the splendour of it were somewhat overwhelming. She herself was so slight, so insignificant, so altogether negligible a quality, a being wholly out of place in the midst of such glorious surroundings. But yet she loved them, and her happiest hours were those she spent with her little sketching-block in various corners of that wonderful garden. It was only that the purple flower seemed somehow to be the symbol to her of all that was out of reach. Her youth was slipping from her, and she had never lived.

The tired lines about the brown eyes were growing daily more marked. The little tender curve about the lips was becoming a droop. The brown hair that grew so softly about her forehead gleamed unexpectedly white here and there.

“Yes, I’m getting old,” said Frances Thorold. “Old and tired and dull.” She stretched up her arms with a sudden

movement, and for a second her hands were clenched. Then they fell to her sides.

“I suppose we are all slaves,” she said, “of one kind or another. But only the rebels know it.”

She turned again to her work, and for a space only the sharp click of the machine disturbed the summer silence. It had an unmistakably indignant sound as though its manipulator were out of sympathy with the words so deftly printed on the white page. The secretary’s mouth became very firm as she proceeded, the brown eyes narrowed and grew hard.

Suddenly she lettered an impatient exclamation and looked up. “Oh, these platitudes!” she said. “How are they going to help men and women to live?”

For a moment she had almost a desperate look, and then abruptly she laughed.

“Perhaps it isn’t all your fault,” she said to the manuscript by her side, “that you give us stones for bread. You have lived on them all your life and don’t know the difference.”

“How do you know?” said a voice at the window.

The secretary gave a start. Her eyes met the eyes of a man who stood against the clematis-covered window-frame looking in upon her—a careless, lounging figure as supremely at ease as a cat stretched in the sunshine.

He marked her brief confusion with a smile. “Do tell me how you know!” he said.

Her eyes fenced with his for a moment, then were proudly lowered. It was as if she drew a veil over her face.

“His lordship is not here,” she remarked in a tone that was strictly official.

“So I have already observed,” rejoined the new-comer, with his easy tolerance that was somehow quite distinct from familiarity. “In fact, at the present moment, I believe his lordship is in the thick of an argument with the Dean as to whether Shakespeare or Bacon wrote the Bible. It’s rather an important point, you know. Have you any theories on the subject, might one ask?”

A little quiver that could hardly be described as a smile passed over the secretary’s thin features, but her eyes remained upon her work.

“I don’t go in for theories,” she said, “or arguments. I am far too busy.”

“By Jove!” he commented. “How you hate it!”

She raised her brows very slightly,—delicate brows, one of them a shade more tilted than the other, giving a quaint look of humour to a face that seldom smiled.

“I hate nothing,” she said with precision, “I have no time.”

“By Jove!” he said again, and chuckled as at some hidden joke.

The exasperating click of the typewriter put an end to all discussion, but it did not dislodge the intruder as was obviously intended. He merely propped himself against the grey stone-work of the window and took out his cigarette-case. His eyes dwelt with artistic appreciation upon the stately glories of the old garden, the arch of the cloisters against the summer blue, the wealth of purple flower adorning it. His face had the lines and the weather-tan of

the man who has travelled far and wide, has looked upon the wonders of life and death with a certain cynical amusement, and returned almost to the starting-point with very little of value in his pack.

As the click of the typewriter persisted, he turned from his deliberate survey and gave his attention to a calm study of the woman seated behind it. His gaze was speculative, faintly humorous. There was something in that face of passive severity that aroused his curiosity. An insignificant type, it was true; but behind the insignificance there lurked something unusual that drew his interest. He wondered how long she would manage to ignore him.

On and on clicked the typewriter. The typist's lips were firmly closed, her eyes resolutely fixed upon her work. The watcher summoned his own resolution to wait upon opportunity, meditatively smoking the while.

Opportunity came at the end of some minutes of persistent clicking that might well have exasperated the most patient. The end of the page was reached, and there came a check. The secretary reached a thin, nervous hand for another sheet.

"Still more platitudes?" queried the man who leaned against the window-frame.

It would not have greatly surprised him had she made no response, but the sudden flashing upwards of her eyes came as a revelation. He straightened himself, almost as if he expected a blow.

"I am sorry," said the secretary very evenly, her eyes unswervingly upon him, "but you are disturbing me. I must ask you to go away."

He stood looking at her in frank astonishment. No woman had ever made him so simple and so compelling a request before. This from the secretary, the insignificant adjunct, the wholly undesirable and unknown etcetera of his uncle's household! There certainly was more here than met the eye!

He collected himself with an unwonted feeling of being at a disadvantage and instantly determined to save the situation at all costs. He leaned towards her, meeting the grave insistence of her look with a disarming smile. "Miss—Thorold, I haven't offended you?"

"No," said Frances Thorold briefly. "I am busy, that's all."

Her tone was official rather than ungracious, her eyes questioning rather than hostile, her whole attitude too impersonal for resentment. And yet it aroused resentment in the man. His smile vanished.

"I am sorry," he said stiffly, "to have appeared intrusive. That was not my intention. I only spoke to you because I heard your voice and imagined the hour for recreation had arrived. Pray accept my apologies!"

The firm lips relaxed a little, and a short sigh came through them. "There is no need for apology," she said. "No one apologizes to—a machine. But it has got to keep working, and it mustn't be interrupted."

"You can't work all day!" he protested.

She nodded. "I can. I do. And why not? It's what I'm here for."

Her voice had a note of challenge. Her eyes had gone beyond him. They rested upon the wealth of purple flower that crowned the coping of the cloister-arch in the hot

sunshine, and again they held that wistful look as of baffled longing for the unattainable.

The man's eyes were upon her. They saw the longing. His anger passed.

"No machine will go for ever," he said, "if left to itself. The very best of them need occasional rest for adjustment and lubrication. Otherwise they run down and wear out before their time."

He was aware of the gleam of appreciation that crossed her intent face, and for the first time he marked the wary lines about her eyes. Then he met them again, and knew that he had scored a point.

She spoke in her brisk, official voice, returning to her work. "No doubt you are right. I shall have to oil it one of these days—when I have time."

"I shouldn't leave it too long," he said. "Take an engineer's advice! It's poor economy—may lead to a break-down in the end."

She adjusted the fresh page with deft care. "Thank you Mr. Rotherby. I shall remember your advice."

"And take it?" suggested Rotherby. Then, as she did not reply, "It may be dry bread, but it's better than stones, anyway."

He got what he angled for. She threw him a fleeting smile, and in a moment he caught the charm which up till then had eluded him.

It faded almost instantly as a picture fades from a screen. Only the official mask remained. Yet as he turned to depart, the gleam of satisfaction lingered in his eyes. He had made his small bid for amusement, and he had not bid in vain.

The monotonous clicking of the typewriter continued through the summer silence as the secretary pursued her task with erect head and compressed lips. With machine-like precision she tapped out the long, learned sentences, reading them mechanically, transmitting them with well-trained accuracy, aloof, uncritical, uninterested. She did not lift her eyes from her work again for a full hour.

Page after page was covered and laid aside. The Cathedral clock chimed and struck again. Then, in a quarter of an hour, there came the booming of a heavy gong through the house. Frances Thorold finished her sentence and ceased to work.

Her hands fell upon her lap, and for the moment her whole frame relaxed. She sat inert, as one utterly exhausted, her eyes closed, her head bowed.

Then, very sharply, as though at a word of rebuke, she straightened herself and began to set in order the fruits of her morning's work. She had laboured for five hours without a break, save for the brief interlude of Montague Rotherby's interruption.

At the opening of the door she rose to her feet, but continued her task without turning. The Bishop of Burminster had a well-known objection to any forms of deference from inferiors. He expressed it now as he came forward to the table at which she had worked for so long.

"Why do you rise, Miss Thorold? Pray continue your task. You waste time by these observances."

She straightened the last page and made quiet reply. "I think I have finished my task for this morning, my lord. In any case it is luncheon-time."

“You have finished?” He took up the pile of typescript with eagerness, but in a moment tossed it down again with exasperation. “You call that finished!”

“For this morning,” repeated Frances Thorold, in her quiet, unmoved voice. “It is a lengthy, and a difficult, piece of work. But I hope to finish it to-night.”

“It must be finished to-night,” said the Bishop with decision. “It is essential that it should be handed to me for revision by nine o’clock. Kindly make a note of this, Miss Thorold! I must say I am disappointed by your rate of progress. I had hoped that work so purely mechanical would have taken far less time.”

He spoke with curt impatience, but no shade of feeling showed upon his secretary’s face. She said nothing whatever in reply.

The Bishop, lean, ascetic, forbidding of aspect, pulled at his clean-shaven chin with an irritable gesture. He had a bundle of letters in his hand which he flapped down upon the table before her.

“I had hoped for better things,” he said. “There are these to be answered, and when is time to be found for them if your whole day is to be occupied in the typing of my treatise —a very simple piece of work, mere, rough copy, after all, which will have to be done again from beginning to end after my revision?”

“I will take your notes upon those this afternoon,” said Frances. “I will have them ready for your signature in time to catch the midnight post.”

“Absurd!” said the Bishop. “They must go before then.”

She heard him without dismay. “Then I will do them first, and type the rest of the treatise afterwards,” she said.

He made a sound of impatience. “A highly unsatisfactory method of procedure! I am afraid I cannot compliment you upon the business-like way in which you execute your duties.”

He did not expect a reply to this, but as if out of space it came.

“Yet I execute them,” said Frances Thorold steadily and respectfully.

He looked at her sharply, his cold grey eyes drawn to keen attention. “With very indifferent success,” he commented. “Pray remember that, Miss Thorold, should the position you occupy ever tempt you to feel uplifted!”

She made no answer, and her face of utter passivity revealed nothing to his unsparing scrutiny. He passed the matter by as unworthy of further consideration. If any impertinence had been intended, he had quelled it at the outset. He did not ask for deference from his subordinates, but he demanded—and he obtained—implicit submission. He had a gift for exacting this, regarding everyone whom he employed as a mere puppet made to respond to the pulling of a string. If at any time the puppet failed to respond, it was thrown aside immediately as worthless. He was a man who had but one aim and object in life, and this he followed with untiring and wholly ruthless persistence. Before all things he desired and so far as his powers permitted he meant to achieve, the establishment of the Church as a paramount and enduring force above all other forces. With the fervour and the self-abnegation of a Jesuit, he followed

unswervingly this one great idea, trampling down all lesser things, serving only the one imperative need. It was his idol, his fetish—this dream of power, and he worshipped it blindly, not realising that the temple he sought to erect was already dedicated to personal ambition rather than to the glory of God.

He worked unceasingly, with crude, fanatical endeavour—a man born out of his generation, belonging to a sterner age, and curiously at variance with the world in which he lived.

To him Frances Thorold was only a small cog-wheel of that machine which he was striving to drive for the accomplishment of his ends. The failure of such a minute portion of mechanism was of small importance to him. She had her uses, undoubtedly, but she could be replaced at almost any moment. She suited his purpose perhaps a shade better than most, but another could be very quickly fitted to the same end. He was an adept at moulding and bending the various portions of his machine to his will. Not one of them ever withstood him for long.

The rosy-faced Dean, with his funny Shakespearean hobby-horse, was as putty in his hands, and it never struck him that that same pink-cheeked curiosity was a tool infinitely more fit for the Master’s use than he himself could ever be. Neither did he ever dream of the fiery scorn that burned so deeply in his secretary’s silent soul as she bent herself to the burden he daily laid upon her. It would not have interested him had he known. The welfare of the dogs under the table had never been any concern of the Bishop of Burminster. They were lucky to eat of the crumbs.

And so he passed her by as unworthy of notice, merely glancing through her script and curtly noting a fault here and there, finally tossing the pages down and turning from her with a brief, “You will lunch with me, but pray be as speedy as possible and return to your work as soon as you have finished!”

That was his method of exacting the utmost from her. Under those hard grey eyes she would spend no more than the allotted half-hour out of the office-chair.

And the sun still shone upon that garden of dreams, while the bees hummed lazily among the blue and purple flowers. And all was peace and beauty—save for the fierce fanaticism in the man’s heart, and the bitter, smouldering resentment in the woman’s.

CHAPTER II
THE BREAK-DOWN

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Four people sat at the old oak table in the oak-raftered dining-room of the Bishop’s palace that day, and no greater contrast than they presented could well have existed among beings of the same race.

Dr. Rotherby—the Bishop—sat in pre-occupied silence scanning an ecclesiastical paper while he ate. He never encouraged conversation at any meal save dinner, and his sister, Miss Rotherby, nervous, pinched, and dyspeptic, supported him dutifully in this as in every other whim. She sat with her knitting on the table beside her ready to be picked up at every spare moment, on the principle that every second was of value—a short-sighted, unimaginative woman whose whole attention was concentrated upon the accomplishment of her own salvation.

Montague Rotherby, the sunburnt man of travel, sat between the two, and wondered what he was doing there. He had just wandered home from an expedition in Central Africa, and he had come hither with the half-formed intention of writing a book on his experiences. He wanted peace and quiet for the purpose, and these surroundings had seemed ideal. The Bishop and his sister had given him welcome, and he had believed himself to be fulfilling a family duty by visiting them. But he had begun already to realize that there was something very vital lacking in the atmosphere of the Palace. The place was stiff with

orthodoxy, and he himself as much a stranger as he had ever been in the most desert corner of his travels.

“Can’t stand this much longer,” was his thought, as he sat before the polished board on this the fourth day of his sojourn.

And then his look fell upon the secretary seated opposite to him, and his interest stirred again.

She sat, remote and silent, in the shadow of a heavy green curtain against which the pallor of her face took a ghastly hue. Her eyes were downcast, the brows above them slightly drawn, conveying somehow an impression of mute endurance to the observant onlooker. He watched her narrowly, having nothing else to occupy him, and the impression steadily grew as the meal proceeded. She scarcely touched the food before her, remaining almost statuesque in her immobility, had her obvious insignificance not precluded so stately a term. To the man who watched her, her attitude expressed more than mere passivity. She was a figure of tragedy, and as it were in spite of itself his careless soul was moved to an unwonted compassion. In silence he awaited developments.

They came, more swiftly than even he anticipated. Very suddenly the Bishop looked up from his paper.

“Miss Thorold, you have work to do. I beg you will not linger here if you have finished.”

His voice came with the rasp of authority through the sultry summer quiet. The secretary started as if at the piercing of a nerve and instantly rose to leave the table. She pushed in her chair methodically, but oddly at that point her intention seemed to fail her. She stood swaying as one

stricken with a curious uncertainty, gazing straight upwards with dazed eyes that ever travelled farther and farther back as if they marked the flight of an invisible bird.

Rotherby sprang to his feet, but he was too late. Even as he did so, she threw up her hands like a baffled swimmer and fell straight backwards on the polished floor. The sound of her fall mingled with the furious exclamation that leapt to Rotherby's lips—an exclamation which he certainly would not have uttered in a more reasoned moment—and he was round the table and by her side almost before the two other spectators had realized what was taking place.

"Oh, good gracious!" gasped the Bishop's sister, pushing back her chair with the gesture of one seeking to avoid contact with something obnoxious. "What is it? What is the matter?"

"It is only a faint." Curt and contemptuous came the Bishop's reply. He also pushed back his chair and rose, but with considerably more of annoyance than agitation. "Lay her in that chair, Montague! She will soon recover. She is only overcome by the heat."

"Overcome!" growled Montague, and he said it between his teeth. In that moment, cool man of the world though he was, he was angry, even furious, for the white face with its parted, colourless lips somehow excited more than pity. "She's worn out—driven to death by that accursed typewriting. Why, she's nothing but skin and bone!"

He raised the slight, inert figure with the words, holding it propped against his knee while with one hand on the dark head he pressed it forward. It was a device which he had not thought would fail, but it had no effect upon the

unconscious secretary, and a sharp misgiving went through him as he realized the futility of his efforts.

He flung a brief command upwards, instinctively assuming the responsibility. “Get some brandy—quick!”

“There is no brandy in the house,” said the Bishop. “But this is nothing. It will pass. Have you never seen a woman faint before?”

“Damnation!” flared forth Montague. “Do you want her to die on your hands? There is brandy in a flask in my room. Send one of the servants for it!”

“This is dreadful!” wailed Miss Rotherby hysterically. “I haven’t so much as a bottle of smelling-salts in the place! She has never behaved in this extraordinary way before! What can be the matter?”

“Don’t be foolish!” said the Bishop, and firmly rang the bell. “She will be herself again in five minutes. If not, we will have a doctor.”

“Better send for one at once,” said Montague with his fingers seeking a pulse that was almost imperceptible.

“Very well,” said the Bishop stiffly. “Perhaps it would be the wisest course. Why do you kneel there? She would be far better in a chair.”

“Because I won’t take the responsibility of moving her,” said Montague.

“This is very painful,” said Miss Rotherby tremulously, gathering up her knitting. “Is there nothing to be done? You are sure she isn’t dead?”

“I am not at all sure,” said Montague. “I shouldn’t stay if I were you. But get someone to bring me that brandy at once!”

He had his way, for there was about him a force that would not be denied. In moments of emergency he was accustomed to assert himself, but how it came about that when the brandy arrived, the Bishop himself had gone to telephone for a doctor and the Bishop’s sister had faded away altogether, lamenting her inability to be of use in so serious a crisis, even Montague could not very easily have said. He was still too angry and too anxious to take much note of anything beyond the ghastly face that rested against his arm.

Impatiently he dismissed the servant who was inclined to hang over him with futile suggestions, and then realized with a grimace that he was left in sole charge of a woman whom he scarcely knew, who might die at any moment, if indeed she were not already dead.

“Damn it, she shan’t!” he said to himself with grim resolution as this thought forced itself upon him. “If these miserable worms can’t do anything to save her, I will.”

And he applied himself with the dexterity of a steady nerve to the task of coaxing a spoonful of brandy between the livid lips.

He expected failure, but a slight tremor at the throat and then a convulsive attempt to swallow rewarded him. He lifted her higher, muttering words of encouragement of which he was hardly aware.

“That’s all right. Stick to it! You’re nearly through. It’s good stuff that. Damn it, why didn’t that fool give me the water?”

“Yes, it—does—burn!” came faintly from the quivering lips.

“It won’t hurt you,” declared Montague practically. “Feeling better, what? Don’t move yet! Let the brandy go down first!”

Her eyelids were trembling painfully as though she sought to lift them, but could not.

“Don’t try!” he advised. “You’ll be all right directly.”

She stirred a groping hand. “Give me—something—to hold on to!” she whispered piteously.

He gripped the cold fingers closely in his own. “That’s it. Now you’ll be all right. I know this sort of game—played it myself in my time. Take it easy! Don’t be in a hurry! Ah, that’s better. Have a cry! Best thing you can do!”

The white throat was working again, and two tears came slowly from between the closed lids and ran down the drawn face. A sob, all the more agonizing because she strove with all her strength to suppress it, escaped her, and then another and another. She turned her face into the supporting arm with a desperate gesture.

“Do forgive me! I can’t help it—I can’t help it!”

“All right. It’s all right,” he said, and put his hand again on the dark head. “Don’t keep it in! It’ll do you more good than brandy.”

She uttered a broken laugh in the midst of her anguish, and the man’s eyes kindled a little. He liked courage.

He held her for a space while she fought for self-control, and when at length she turned her face back again, he was ready with a friendly smile of approval; for he knew that her tears would be gone.

“That’s right,” he said. “You’re better now.”

“Will you help me up?” she said.

“Of course.” He raised her steadily, closely watching the brown eyes, drawn with pain, that looked up to his. He saw them darken as she found her feet and was prepared for the sudden nervous clutch of her hand on his arm.

“Don’t let go of me!” she said hurriedly.

He helped her to a chair by the French window. “Sit here till you feel better! It’s a fairly cool corner. Is that all right?”

Her hand relaxed and fell. She lay back with a sigh. “Just for two minutes—not longer. I must get back to my work.”

“It’s that damned work that’s done it,” said Montague Rotherby, with unexpected force. “You’ll have to go on sick leave—for this afternoon at least.”

“Oh no,” said the secretary in her voice of quiet decision. “I have no time to be ill.”

Rotherby said no more, but after a pause he brought her a glass of water. She thanked him and drank, but the drawn look remained in her eyes and she moved as if afraid to turn her head.

He watched her narrowly. “You’ll have a bad break-down if you don’t take a rest,” he said.

She smiled faintly. “Oh no. I shall be all right. It’s just—the heat.”

“It’s nothing of the kind,” he returned. “It’s overwork, and you know it. You’ll either kill yourself or go stark staring mad if you keep on.”

She laughed again at that, and though faint, her laughter had a ring of indomitable resolution. “Oh, indeed I shall not. I know exactly what my capabilities are. I have been unlucky to-day, but I am in reality much stronger than I seem.”

He turned from her with the hint of a shrug. “No doubt you know your own business best, and of course I fully recognise that it is no part of mine to give advice.”

“Oh, please!” she said gently.

That was all; but spoken in a tone that brought him back to her with a sharp turn. He looked at her, and was amazed at himself because the faint smile in her tired eyes gave him a new sensation.

“Wasn’t that what you meant?” he said, after a moment.

“No,” she made quiet answer. “I never mean that to the people who show me kindness. It happens—much too seldom.”

She spoke with a dignity that was above pathos, but none the less was he touched. It was as if she had lifted the official mask to give him a glimpse of her soul, and in that glimpse he beheld something which he certainly had not expected to see. Again, almost against his will, was he stirred to a curious reverence.

“You must have had a pretty rotten time of it,” he said.

To which she made no reply, though in her silence he found no sign of ungraciousness, and was more attracted than repelled thereby.

He remained beside her without speaking until the irritable, uneven tread of feet in the corridor warned them of the Bishop’s return; then again he looked at her and found her eyes upon him.

“Thank you very much for all your kindness,” she said. “Please—will you go now?”

“You wish it?” he said.

“Yes.” Just the one word, spoken with absolute simplicity!

He lingered on the step. “I shall see you again?”

He saw her brows move upwards very slightly. “Quite possibly,” she said.

He turned from her with finality. “I shall,” he said, and passed out without a backward glance into the hot sunshine of the Palace garden.

CHAPTER III
A BUSINESS PROPOSITION

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There was a sheet of water in the Palace garden, fed by a bubbling spring. Cypress and old yew trees grew along its banks, and here and there the crumbling ruins of an old monastery that had once adjoined the Cathedral showed ivy-covered along the path that wound beside it. It was said that the frocked figure of an ancient friar was wont to pace this path in the moonlight, but none who believed the superstition ever had the courage to verify it.

Montague Rotherby, wandering thither late that night after the rest of the household had retired, had no thought for apparitions of any description. He was wrapt in his own meditations, and neither the beauty of the place nor its eeriness appealed to him. He was beginning to realize that he had come to the wrong quarter for the peace his soul desired. A few brief, wholly dispassionate, words from his uncle’s lips had made it quite clear to him that it was possible even for a man of his undeniable position in the world to outstay his welcome, and, being possessed of a considerable amount of pride, Montague needed no second hint to be gone.

But very curiously he found an inner influence at war with his resolution. He knew very well what had actuated the Bishop in giving him that very decided hint, and that very motive was now strangely urging him in the opposite direction.

To admit that he was attracted by that very insignificant and wholly unimportant person, the Bishop's secretary, was of course too preposterous for a man of his standing. The bare idea brought a cynical twist to his lips. But she had undeniably awakened his compassion—a matter for wonder but not for repudiation. Insignificant she might be, but the dumb endurance of her had aroused his admiration. He wanted to stop and see fair play.

Pacing to and fro beside the dark waters, he reviewed the situation. It was no business of his, of course, and perhaps he was a fool to suffer himself to take an interest in so comparatively slight a matter. It was not his way to waste time over the grievances of outsiders. But this woman—somehow this woman with her dark, tragic eyes had taken hold of his imagination. Scoff though he might, he could not thrust the thought of her out of his mind. Possibly her treatment of himself was one of the chief factors in her favour. For Montague Rotherby was accustomed to deference from those whom he regarded as social inferiors. It was true that he had taken her at a disadvantage that morning, but the very fact of his notice was generally enough to gain him a standing wherever he sought for one. To be held at a distance by one so obviously beneath him was a novel sensation that half-piqued and half-amused him. And she needed a champion too, yet scorned to enlist him on her side. It was wholly against her will that she had gained his sympathy. Though perfectly courteous, she had made it abundantly clear that she had no desire to be placed under any obligation to him. And, mainly for that reason, he was conscious of a wish to help her.

“She’ll sink if I don’t,” he muttered to himself, and forgot to question as to what on earth it mattered to him whether she sank or swam.

This was the problem that vexed his soul as he paced up and down in the moonlight on that summer night, and as he walked the resolution grew up within him not to leave until he had had the chance of speech with her again. She might refuse to grant it to him, might seek to avoid him. Instinct told him that she would; but he was a man to whom opposition was as a draught of wine, and it had never been his experience to be withstood for long by a woman. It would amuse him to overcome her resistance.

So ran his thoughts, and he smiled to himself as he began to retrace his steps. In a contest such as this might prove to be, the issue was assured and could not take long of achievement; but it looked as if he might have to put a strain on the Bishop’s hospitality for a few days even yet. Somehow that reflection appealed to his cynical sense of humour. It seemed then that he was to sacrifice his pride to this odd will-o’-the-wisp that had suddenly gleamed at him from the eyes of a woman in whom he really took no interest whatever—one, moreover, who would probably resent any attempt on his part to befriend her. Recalling her low words of dismissal, he decided that this attitude was far the most likely one for her to adopt, but the probability did not dismay him. A hunter of known repute, he was not easily to be diverted from his quarry, and, sub-consciously he was aware of possibilities in the situation that might develop into actualities undreamed-of at the commencement.

In any case he intended to satisfy himself that the possibilities no longer existed before he abandoned the quest. With no avowed end in view, he determined to follow his inclination wherever it might lead. She had given him a new sensation and—though perhaps it was not wholly a pleasant one—he desired to develop it further. To a man of his experience new sensations were scarce.

The effect of the moonlight, filtering through the boughs of the yew and striking upon the dark water, sent a thrill of artistic pleasure through his soul. He stood still to appreciate it with all the home-coming joy of the wanderer. What a picture for an artist’s brush! He possessed a certain gift in that direction himself, but he had merely cultivated it as a refuge from boredom and it had never carried him very far. But to-night the romance and the beauty appealed to him with peculiar force, and he stood before it with something of reverence. Then, very softly chiming, there came the sound of the Cathedral clock, followed after a solemn pause by eleven deep strokes.

He counted them mechanically till the last one died away, then turned to retrace his steps, realizing with a shrug the lateness of the hour.

It was thus that he saw her standing in the moonlight—a slender figure, oddly girlish considering the impression she had made upon him that day, the face in profile, clear-cut, with a Madonna-like purity of outline that caught his artistic sense afresh. He realized in an instant that she was unaware of him, and stood motionless, watching her, afraid to move lest he should disturb her.