Sharp Ink

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HALF A ROGUE

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Chapter I

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It was Warrington's invariable habit—when no business or social engagement pressed him to go elsewhere—to drop into a certain quaint little restaurant just off Broadway for his dinners. It was out of the way; the throb and rattle of the great commercial artery became like the far-off murmur of the sea, restful rather than annoying. He always made it a point to dine alone, undisturbed. The proprietor nor his silent-footed waiters had the slightest idea who Warrington was. To them he was simply a profitable customer who signified that he dined there in order to be alone. His table was up stairs. Below, there was always the usual dinner crowd till theater time; and the music had the faculty of luring his thoughts astray, being, as he was, fonder of music than of work. As a matter of fact, it was in this little restaurant that he winnowed the day's ideas, revamped scenes, trimmed the rough edges of his climaxes, revised this epigram or rejected this or that line; all on the backs of envelopes and on the margins of newspapers. In his den at his bachelor apartments, he worked; but here he dreamed, usually behind the soothing, opalescent veil of Madame Nicotine.

What a marvelous thing a good after-dinner cigar is! In the smoke of it the poor man sees his ships come in, the poet sees his muse beckoning with hands full of largess, the millionaire reverts to his early struggles, and the lover sees his divinity in a thousand graceful poses.

To-night, however, Warrington's cigar was without magic. He was out of sorts. Things had gone wrong at the rehearsal that morning. The star had demanded the removal of certain lines which gave the leading man an opportunity to shine in the climax of the third act. He had labored a whole month over this climax, and he revolted at the thought of changing it to suit the whim of a capricious woman.

Everybody had agreed that this climax was the best the young dramatist had yet constructed. A critic who had been invited to a reading had declared that it lacked little of being great. And at this late hour the star wanted it changed in order to bring her alone in the lime-light! It was preposterous. As Warrington was on the first wave of popularity, the business manager and the stage manager both agreed to leave the matter wholly in the dramatist's hands. He resolutely declined to make a single alteration in the scene. There was a fine storm. The star declared that if the change was not made at once she would leave the company. In making this declaration she knew her strength. Her husband was rich; a contract was nothing to her. There was not another actress of her ability to be found; the season was too late. There was not another woman available, nor would any other manager lend one. As the opening performance was but two weeks hence, you will realize why Warrington's mood this night was anything but amiable.

He scowled at his cigar. There was always something, some sacrifice to make, and seldom for art's sake. It is all very well to witness a play from the other side of the footlights; everything appears to work out so smoothly,

easily and without effort. To this phenomenon is due the amateur dramatist—because it looks simple. A play is not written; it is built, like a house. In most cases the dramatist is simply the architect. The novelist has comparatively an easy road to travel. The dramatist is beset from all sides, now the business manager—that is to say, the box-office—now the stage manager, now the star, now the leading man or woman. Jealousy's green eyes peer from behind every scene. The dramatist's ideal, when finally presented to the public, resembles those mutilated marbles that decorate the museums of Rome and Naples. Only there is this difference: the public can easily imagine what the sculptor was about, but seldom the dramatist.

Warrington was a young man, tolerably good-looking, noticeably well set up. When they have good features, a cleft chin and a generous nose, clean-shaven men are good to look at. He had fine eyes, in the corners of which always lurked mirth and mischief; for he possessed above all things an inexhaustible fund of dry humor. His lines seldom provoked rough laughter; rather, silent chuckles.

Warrington's scowl abated none. In business, women were generally nuisances; they were always taking impossible stands. He would find some way out; he was determined not to submit to the imperious fancies of an actress, however famous she might be.

"Sir, will you aid a lady in distress?" The voice was tremulous, but as rich in tone as the diapason of an organ.

Warrington looked up from his cigar to behold a handsome young woman standing at the side of his table. Her round, smooth cheeks were flushed, and on the lower

lids of her splendid dark eyes tears of shame trembled and threatened to fall. Behind her stood a waiter, of impassive countenance, who was adding up the figures on a check, his movement full of suggestion.

The dramatist understood the situation at once. The young lady had ordered dinner, and, having eaten it, found that she could not pay for it. It was, to say the least, a trite situation. But what can a man do when a pretty woman approaches him and pleads for assistance? So Warrington rose.

"What may the trouble be?" he asked coldly, for all that he instantly recognized her to be a person of breeding and refinement.

"I—I have lost my purse, and I have no money to pay the waiter." She made this confession bravely and frankly.

He looked about. They were alone. She interpreted his glance rather shrewdly.

"There were no women to appeal to. The waiter refused to accept my word, and I really can't blame him. I had not even the money to send a messenger home."

One of the trembling tears escaped and rolled down the blooming cheek. Warrington surrendered. He saw that this was an exceptional case. The girl was truly in distress. He knew his New York thoroughly; a man or woman without funds is treated with the finished cruelty with which the jovial Romans amused themselves with the Christians. Lack of money in one person creates incredulity in another. A penniless person is invariably a liar and a thief. Only one sort of person is pitied in New York: the person who has more money than she or he can possibly spend.

The girl fumbled in her hand-bag and produced a card, which she gave to Warrington—"Katherine Challoner." He looked from the card to the girl and then back to the card. Somehow, the name was not wholly unfamiliar, but at that moment he could not place it.

"Waiter, let me see the check," he said. It amounted to two dollars and ten cents. Warrington smiled. "Scarcely large enough to cause all this trouble," he added reassuringly. "I will attend to it."

The waiter bowed and withdrew. So long as the check was paid he did not care who paid it.

"Oh, it is so horribly embarrassing! What must you think of me?" She twisted her gloves with a nervous strength which threatened to rend them.

"May I give you a bit of friendly advice?" he asked.

She nodded, hiding the fall of the second tear.

"Well, never dine alone in public; at any rate, in the evening. It is not wise for a woman to do so. She subjects herself to any number of embarrassments."

She did not reply, and for a moment he believed that she was about to break down completely. He aimlessly brushed the cigar ashes from the tablecloth. He hated a scene in public. In the theater it was different; it was a part of the petty round of business to have the leading lady burst into tears when things didn't suit her. What fools women are in general! But the girl surprised him by holding up determinedly, and sinking her white teeth into her lips to smother the sob which rose in her throat.

"Be seated," he said, drawing out the opposite chair.

A wave of alarm spread over her face. She clasped her hands.

"Sir, if you are a gentleman—"

Warrington interrupted her by giving her his card, which was addressed. She glanced at it through a blur of tears, then sat down. He shrugged his shoulders slightly; his vanity was touched. There was, then, a young woman in New York who had not heard of Richard Warrington.

"In asking you to be seated," he explained, "it was in order that you might wait in comfort while I despatched a messenger to your home. Doubtless you have a brother, a father, or some male relative, who will come at once to your assistance." Which proved that Warrington was prudent.

But instead of brightening as he expected she would, she straightened in her chair, while her eyes widened with horror, as if she saw something frightful in perspective.

What the deuce could be the matter now? he wondered, as he witnessed this inexplicable change.

"No, no! You must not send a messenger!" she protested.

"But—"

"No, no!" tears welling into her beautiful eyes again. They were beautiful, he was forced to admit.

"But," he persisted, "you wished the waiter to do so. I do not understand." His tone became formal again.

"I have reasons. Oh, heavens! I am the most miserable woman in all the world!" She suddenly bowed her head upon her hands and her shoulders rose and fell with silent sobs.

Warrington stared at her, dumfounded. NOW what? He glanced cautiously around as if in search of some avenue of

escape. The waiter, ever watchful, assumed that he was wanted, and made as though to approach the table; but Warrington warned him off. All distrust in the girl vanished. Decidedly she was in great trouble of some sort, and it wasn't because she could not pay a restaurant check. Women—and especially New York women—do not shed tears when a stranger offers to settle for their dinner checks.

"If you will kindly explain to me what the trouble is," visibly embarrassed, "perhaps I can help you. Have you run away from home?" he asked.

A negative nod.

"Are you married?"

Another negative nod.

Warrington scratched his chin. "Have you done anything wrong?"

A decided negative shake of the head. At any other time the gesticulation of the ostrich plume, so close to his face, would have amused him; but there was something eminently pathetic in the diapasm which drifted toward him from the feather.

"Come, come; you may trust me thoroughly. If you are afraid to return home alone—"

He was interrupted by an affirmative nod this time. Possibly, he conjectured, the girl had started out to elope and had fortunately paused at the brink.

"Will it help you at all if I go home with you?" he asked.

His ear caught a muffled "Yes."

Warrington beckoned to the waiter.

"Order a cab at once," he said.

The waiter hurried away, with visions of handsome tips.

Presently the girl raised her head and sat up. Her eyes, dark as shadows in still waters, glistened.

"Be perfectly frank with me; and if I can be of service to you, do not hesitate to command me." He eyed her thoughtfully. Everything attached to her person suggested elegance. Her skin was as fine as vellum; her hair had a dash of golden bronze in it; her hands were white and shapely, and the horn on the tips of the fingers shone rosily. Now, what in the world was there to trouble a young woman who possessed these favors, who wore jewels on her fingers and sable on her shoulders? "Talk to me just as you would to a brother," he added presently.

"You will take this ring," she said irrelevantly. She slipped a fine sapphire from one of her fingers and pushed it across the table.

"And for what reason?" he cried.

"Security for my dinner. I can not accept charity," with a hint of hauteur which did not in the least displease him.

"But, my dear young woman, I can not accept this ring. You have my address. You may send the sum whenever you please. I see no reason why, as soon as you arrive home, you can not refund the small sum of two dollars and ten cents. It appears to me very simple."

"There will be no one at home, not even the servants," wearily.

Warrington's brows came together. Was the girl fooling him, after all? But for what reason?

"You have me confused," he admitted. "I can do nothing blindly. Tell me what the trouble is."

"How can I tell you, an absolute stranger? It is all so frightful, and I am so young!"

Frightful? Young? He picked up his half-finished cigar, but immediately let it fall. He stole a look at his watch; it was seven.

"Oh, I know what you must think of me," despairingly. "Nobody believes in another's real misfortune in this horrid city. There are so many fraudulent methods used to obtain people's sympathies that every one has lost trust. I had no money when I entered here; but outside it was so dark. Whenever I stopped, wondering where I should go, men turned and stared at me. Once a policeman peered into my face suspiciously. And I dared not return home, I dared not! No, no; I promise not to embarrass you with any more tears." She brushed her eyes with a rapid movement.

Warrington's success as a dramatist was due largely to his interest in all things that passed under his notice. Nothing was too trivial to observe. The tragic threads of human life, which escaped the eyes of the passing many or were ignored by them, always aroused his interest and attention; and more than once he had picked up one of these threads and followed it to the end. Out of these seemingly insignificant things he often built one of those breathless, nerve-gripping climaxes which had, in a few years' time, made him famous. In the present case he believed that he had stumbled upon something worthy his investigation. This handsome young woman, richly dressed, who dared not go home, who had jewels but no money—there was some mystery surrounding her, and he determined to find out what it was. And then, besides, for all

that he was worldly, he was young and still believed in his Keats.

"If, as you say, there is no one at your home, why do you fear to go there?" he asked, with some remnant of caution.

"It is the horror of the place," shuddering; "the horror!" And indeed, at that moment, her face expressed horror.

"Is it some one dead?" lowering his voice.

"Dead?" with a flash of cold anger in her eyes. "Yes—to me, to truth, to honor; dead to everything that should make life worth the living. Oh, it is impossible to say more in this place, to tell you here what has happened this day to rob me of all my tender illusions. This morning I awoke happy, my heart was light; now, nothing but shame and misery!" She hid her eyes for a space behind the back of her hand.

"I will take you home," he said simply.

"You trust me?"

"Why not? I am a man, and can take care of myself."

"Thank you!"

What a voice! It possessed a marvelous quality, low and penetrating, like the voices of great singers and actresses. Any woman with such a voice ...

Here the waiter returned to announce that a cab awaited them in the street below. Warrington paid the two checks, dropped a liberal tip, rose and got into his coat. The girl also rose, picked up his card, glanced carelessly at it, and put it into her hand-bag—a little gold-link affair worth many dinners. It was the voice and these evidences of wealth, more than anything else, that determined Warrington. Frauds were always perpetrated for money, and this exquisite creature had a small fortune on her fingers.

Silently they left the restaurant, entered the cab, and went rolling out into Broadway. Warrington, repressing his curiosity, leaned back against the cushions. The girl looked dully ahead.

What manner of tragedy was about to unfold itself to his gaze?

The house was situated in Central Park, West. It was of modern architecture, a residence such as only rich men can afford to build. It was in utter gloom; not a single light could be seen at any window. It looked, indeed, as if tragedy sat enthroned within. Warrington's spine wrinkled a bit as he got out of the cab and offered his hand to the girl.

Mute and mysterious as a sphinx, the girl walked to the steps, not even looking around to see if he was coming after her. Perhaps she knew the power of curiosity. Without hesitance she mounted the steps; he followed, a step behind. At the door, however, she paused. He could hear her breath coming in quick gasps. Oddly enough, the recollection of some detective stories flashed through his mind.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing, nothing; only I am afraid."

She stooped; there was a grating sound, a click, and the door opened. Warrington was a man of courage, but he afterward confessed that it took all his nerve force to move his foot across the threshold.

"Do not be frightened," she said calmly; "there is nothing but ghosts here to frighten any one."

"Ghosts?"

"Yes."

"Have you brought me here to tell me a ghost story?" with an effort at lightness. What misery the girl's tones conveyed to his ears!

"The ghosts of things that ought to, and should, have been; are not those the most melancholy?" She pressed a button and flooded the hallway with light.

His keen eyes roving met nothing but signs of luxury. She led him into the library and turned on the lights. Not a servant anywhere in sight; the great house seemed absolutely empty. Not even the usual cat or dog came romping inquisitively into the room. The shelves of books stirred his sense of envy; what a den for a literary man to wander in! There were beautiful marbles, splendid paintings, taste and refinement visible everywhere.

Warrington stood silently watching the girl as she took off her hat and carelessly tossed it on the reading-table. The Russian sables were treated with like indifference. The natural abundance of her hair amazed him; and what a figure, so elegant, rounded, and mature! The girl, without noticing him, walked the length of the room and back several times. Once or twice she made a gesture. It was not addressed to him, but to some conflict going on in her mind.

He sat down on the edge of a chair and fell to twirling his hat, a sign that he was not perfectly at his ease.

"I am wondering where I shall begin," she said.

Warrington turned down his coat-collar, and the action seemed to relieve him of the sense of awkwardness.

"Luxury!" she began, with a sweep of her hand which was full of majesty and despair. "Why have I chosen you out of all the thousands? Why should I believe that my story

would interest you? Well, little as I have seen of the world, I have learned that woman does not go to woman in cases such as mine is." And then pathetically: "I know no woman to whom I might go. Women are like daws; their sympathy comes but to peck. Do you know what it is to be alone in a city? The desert is not loneliness; it is only solitude. True loneliness is to be found only in great communities. To be without a single friend or confidant, when thousand of beings move about you; to pour your sorrows into cold, unfeeling ears; to seek sympathy in blind eyes—that is loneliness. That is the loneliness that causes the heart to break."

Warrington's eyes never left hers; he was fascinated.

"Luxury!" she repeated bitterly. "Surrounding me with all a woman might desire—paintings that charm the eye, books that charm the mind, music that charms the ear. Money!"

"Philosophy in a girl!" thought Warrington. His hat became motionless.

"It is all a lie, a lie!" The girl struck her hands together, impotent in her wrath.

It was done so naturally that Warrington, always the dramatist, made a mental note of the gesture.

"I was educated in Paris and Berlin; my musical education was completed in Dresden. Like all young girls with music-loving souls, I was something of a poet. I saw the beautiful in everything; sometimes the beauty existed only in my imagination. I dreamed; I was happy. I was told that I possessed a voice such as is given to few. I sang before the Emperor of Austria at a private musicale. He complimented me. The future was bright indeed. Think of it; at twenty I

retained all my illusions! I am now twenty-three, and not a single illusion is left. I saw but little of my father and mother, which is not unusual with children of wealthy parents. The first shock that came to my knowledge was the news that my mother had ceased to live with my father. I was recalled. There were no explanations. My father met me at the boat. He greeted my effusive caresses—caresses that I had saved for years!—with careless indifference. This was the second shock. What did it all mean? Where was my mother? My father did not reply. When I reached home I found that all the servants I had known in my childhood days were gone. From the new ones I knew that I should learn nothing of the mystery which, like a pall, had suddenly settled down upon me."

She paused, her arms hanging listless at her sides, her gaze riveted upon a pattern in the rug at her feet. Warrington sat like a man of stone; her voice had cast a spell upon him.

"I do not know why I tell you these things. It may weary you. I do not care. Madness lay in silence. I had to tell some one. This morning I found out all. My mother left my father because he was ... a thief!"

"A thief!" fell mechanically from Warrington's lips.

"A thief, bold, unscrupulous; not the petty burglar, no. A man who has stolen funds intrusted to him for years; a man who has plundered the orphan and the widow, the most despicable of all men. My mother died of shame, and I knew nothing. My father left last night for South America, taking with him all the available funds, leaving me a curt note of explanation. I have neither money, friends, nor home. The

newspapers as yet know nothing; but to-morrow, to-morrow! The banks have seized everything."

She continued her story. Sometimes she was superb in her wrath; at others, abject in her misery. She seemed to pass through the whole gamut of the passions.

And all this while it ran through Warrington's head —"What a theme for a play! What a voice!"

He pitied the girl from the bottom of his heart; but what could he do for her other than offer her cold sympathy? He was ill at ease in the face of this peculiar tragedy.

All at once the girl stopped and faced him, There was a smile on her lips, a smile that might be likened to a flash of sunlight on a wintry day. Directly the smile melted into a laugh, mellow, mischievous, reverberating.

Warrington sat up stiffly in his chair.

"I beg your pardon!" he said.

The girl sat down before a small writing-table. She reached among some papers and finally found what she sought.

"Mr. Warrington, all this has been in very bad taste; I frankly confess it. There are two things you may do: leave the house in anger, or remain to forgive me this imposition."

"I fail to understand." He was not only angered, but bewildered.

"I have deceived you."

"You mean that you have lured me here by trick? That you have played upon my sympathies to gratify ..."

"Wait a moment," she interrupted proudly, her cheeks darkening richly. "A trick, it is true; but there are extenuating circumstances. What I have told you HAS

happened, only it was not to-day nor yesterday. Please remain seated till I have done. I AM poor; I WAS educated in the cities I have named; I have to earn my living."

She rose and came over to his chair. She gave him a letter.

"Read this; you will fully understand."

Warrington experienced a mild chill as he saw a letter addressed to him, and his rude scribble at the bottom of it.

Miss Challoner—I beg to state that I have neither the time nor the inclination to bother with amateur actresses. Richard Warrington.

"It was scarcely polite, was it?" she asked, with a tinge of irony. "It was scarcely diplomatic, either, you will admit. I simply asked you for work. Surely, an honest effort to obtain employment ought not to be met with insolence."

He stared dumbly at the evidence in his hand. He recalled distinctly the rage that was in his heart when he penned this note. The stage manager had lost some valuable manuscript that had to be rewritten from memory, the notes having been destroyed.

"For weeks," said the girl, "I have tried to get a hearing. Manager after manager I sought; all refused to see me. I have suffered a hundred affronts, all in silence. Your manager I saw, but he referred me to you, knowing that probably I should never find you. But I was determined. So I wrote; that was your answer. I confess that at the time I was terribly angry, for courtesy is a simple thing and within reach of every one."

To receive a lesson in manners from a young woman, when that young woman is handsome and talented, is not a

very pleasant experience. But Warrington was, a thorough gentleman, and he submitted with grace.

"I know that you are a busy man, that you are besieged with applications. You ought, at least, to have formal slips, such as editors have. I have confidence in my ability to act, the confidence which talent gives to all persons. After receiving your letter I was more than ever determined to see you. So I resorted to this subterfuge. It was all very distasteful to me; but I possess a vein of wilfulness. This is not my home. It is the home of a friend who was kind enough to turn it over to me this night, relying upon my wit to bring about this meeting."

"It was neatly done," was Warrington's comment. He was not angry now at all. In fact, the girl interested him tremendously. "I am rather curious to learn how you went about it."

"You are not angry?"

"I was."

This seemed to satisfy her.

"Well, first I learned where you were in the habit of dining. All day long a messenger has been following you. A telephone brought me to the restaurant. The rest you know. It was simple."

"Very simple," laconically.

"You listened and believed. I have been watching you. You believed everything I have told you. You have even been calculating how this scene might go in a play. Have I convinced you that I have the ability to act?"

Warrington folded the letter and balanced it on his palm.

"You have fooled me completely; that ought to be sufficient recommendation."

"Thank you." But her eyes were eager with anxiety.

"Miss Challoner, I apologize for this letter. I do more than that. I promise not to leave this house till you agree to call at the theater at ten to-morrow morning." He was smiling, and Warrington had a pleasant smile. He had an idea besides. "Good fortune put it into my head to follow you here. I see it all now, quite plainly. I am in a peculiar difficulty, and I honestly believe that you can help me out of it. How long would it take you to learn a leading part? In fact, the principal part?"

"A week."

"Have you had any experience?"

"A short season out west in a stock company."

"Good!"

"And I love work."

"Do not build any great hopes," he warned, "for your chance depends upon the whim of another woman. But you have my word and my good offices that something shall be put in your way. You will come at ten?" drawing on his gloves.

"Promptly."

"I believe that we both have been wise to-night; though it is true that a man dislikes being a fool and having it made manifest."

"And how about the woman scorned?" with an enchanting smile.

"It is kismet," he acknowledged.

Chapter II

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Warrington laid down his pen, brushed his smarting eyes, lighted his pipe, and tilted back his chair. With his hands clasped behind his head, he fell into a waking dream, that familiar pastime of the creative mind. It was half after nine, and he had been writing steadily since seven. The scenario was done; the villain had lighted his last cigarette, the hero had put his arms protectingly around the heroine, and the irascible rich uncle had been brought to terms. All this, of course, figuratively speaking; for no one ever knew what the plot of that particular play was, insomuch as Warrington never submitted the scenario to his manager, an act which caused almost a serious rupture between them. But to-night his puppets were moving hither and thither across the stage, pulsing with life; they were making entrances and exits; developing this climax and that; with wit and satire, humor and pathos. It was all very real to the dreamer.

The manuscript lay scattered about the top of his broad flat desk, and the floor beside the waste-basket was flaked with the remains of various futile lines and epigrams. The ash-pan was littered with burnt matches, ends of cigars and pipe tobacco, while the ash-crumbs speckled all dark objects, not excepting the green rug under his feet. Warrington smoked incessantly while at work, now a cigarette, now a cigar, now a pipe. Specialists declare with cold authoritative positiveness that the use of tobacco blunts the thought, dulls the edge of invention; but Warrington knew better. Many a night he had thrown his

coat over his smoking-jacket and dashed down the street to the corner drug-store for a fresh supply of tobacco. He simply could not work without it. I do not know that he saw his heroes and heroines any plainer for the smoke; but I do know that when their creator held a cigar between his teeth, they frowned less, and the spirit of malice and irony, of which he was master, became subdued.

Warrington was thirty-five now. The grey hair at the temples and the freshness of his complexion gave him a singularly youthful appearance. His mouth was even-lipped and rather pleasure-loving, which, without the balance of a strong nose, would have appealed to you as effeminate. Warrington's was what the wise phrenologists call the fighting nose; not pugnacious, but the nose of a man who will fight for what he believes to be right, fight bitterly and fearlessly. To-day he was famous, but only yesterday he had been fighting, retreating, throwing up this redoubt, digging this trench; fighting, fighting. Poverty, ignorance and contempt he fought; fought dishonesty, and vice, and treachery, and discouragement.

Presently he leaned toward the desk and picked up a letter. He read it thoughtfully, and his brows drew together. A smile, whimsically sad, stirred his lips, and was gone. It was written by a girl or a very young woman. There was no signature, no address, no veiled request for an autograph. It was one of those letters which bring to the novelist or dramatist, or any man of talent, a real and singular pleasure. It is precious because honest and devoid of the tawdry gilt of flattery.

Richard Warrington—You will smile, I know, when you read this letter, doubtless so many like it are mailed to you day by day. You will toss it into the waste-basket, too, as it deserves to be. But it had to be written. However, I feel that I am not writing to a mere stranger, but to a friend whom I know well. Three times you have entered into my life, and on each occasion you have come by a different avenue. I was ill at school when you first appeared to me. It was a poem in a magazine. It was so full of the spirit of joyousness, so full of kindliness, so rich in faith and hope, that I cried over it, cut it out and treasured it, and re-read it often in the lonely hours when things discouraged me,—things which mean so little to women but so much to girls. Two years went by, and then came that brave book! It was like coming across a half-forgotten friend. I actually ran home with it, and sat up all night to complete it. It was splendid. It was the poem matured, broadened, rounded. And finally your first play! How I listened to every word, watched every move! I wrote you a letter that night, but tore it up, not having the courage to send it to you. How versatile you must be: a poem, a book, a play! I have seen all your plays these five years, plays merry and gay, sad and grave. How many times you have mysteriously told me to be brave! I envy and admire you. What an exquisite thing it must be to hear one's thoughts spoken across the footlights! Please do not laugh. It would hurt me to know that you could laugh at my honest admiration. You won't laugh, will you? I am sure you will value this letter for its honesty rather than for its literary quality. I have often wondered what you were like. But after all, that can not

matter, since you are good and kind and wise; for you can not be else, and write the lofty things you do.

Warrington put the letter away, placed it carefully among the few things he held of value. It would not be true to say that it left him unaffected. There was an innocent barb in this girlish admiration, and it pierced the quick of all that was good in him.

"Good and kind and wise," he mused. "If only the child knew! Heigh-ho! I am kind, sometimes I've been good, and often wise. Well, I can't disillusion the child, happily; she has given me no address."

He rose, wheeled his chair to a window facing the street, and opened it. The cool fresh April air rushed in, clearing the room of its opalescent clouds, cleansing his brain of the fever that beset it. He leaned with his elbows on the sill and, breathed noisily, gratefully. Above, heaven had decked her broad bosom with her flickering stars, and from the million lamps of the great city rose and floated a tarnished yellow haze. So many sounds go forth to make the voices of the night: somewhere a child was crying fretfully, across the way the faint tinkle of a piano, the far-off rattle of the elevated, a muffled laugh from a window, above, the rat-tat of a cab-horse, the breeze in the ivy clinging to the walls of the church next door, the quarrelsome chirp of the sleepy sparrows; and then, recurrence. Only the poet or the man in pain opens his ears to these sounds.

Over on Broadway a child of his fertile brain was holding the rapt attention of several hundred men and women; and across the broad land that night four other dramas were being successfully acted. People were discussing his

theories, denouncing or approving his conception of life. The struggle was past, his royalties were making him rich. And here he was this night, drinking the cup of bitterness, of unhappiness, the astringent draft of things that might and should have been. The coveted grape was sour, the desired apple was withered. Those who traverse the road with Folly as boon companion find only emptiness.

And so it was with Warrington. He had once been good, wholly good and kind and wise, lofty as a rural poet who has seen nothing of life save nature's pure and visible face. In the heat of battle he had been strong, but success had subtly eaten into the fibers and loosed his hold, and had swept him onward into that whirlpool out of which no man emerges wholly undefiled. It takes a great and strong man to withstand success, and Warrington was only a genius. It was not from lack of will power; rather it was because he was easy-going and loved pleasure for its own sake. He had fought and starved, and now for the jingle of the guinea in his pocket and the junkets of the gay! The prodigality of these creative beings is not fully understood by the laity, else they would forgive more readily the transgressions. Besides, the harbor of family ties is a man's moral bulwark; and Warrington drifted hither and thither with no harbor in view at all.

He had been an orphan since his birth; a mother meant simply a giver of life, and a father meant, even less. Until he had read the reverse and obverse sides of life, his sense of morality had lain dormant and untilled. Such was his misfortune. The solitary relative he laid claim to was an aged aunt, his father's sister. For her he had purchased a

beautiful place in the town of his birth, vaguely intending to live out his old age there.

There had been a fight for all he possessed. Good had not come easily, as it does to some particularly favored mortals. There was no family, aristocracy to back him up, no melancholy recollections of past grandeur to add the interest of romance to his endeavors. His father had been a poor man of the people, a farmer. And yet Warrington was by no means plebeian. Somewhere there was a fine strain. It had been a fierce struggle to complete a college education. In the summer-time he had turned his hand to all sorts of things to pay his winter's tuition. He had worked as clerk in summer hotels, as a surveyor's assistant in laying street-railways, he had played at private secretary, he had hawked vegetables about the streets at dawn. Happily, he had no false pride. Chance moves quite as mysteriously as the tides. On leaving college he had secured a minor position on one of the daily newspapers, and had doggedly worked his way up to the coveted position of star-reporter. Here the latent power of the story-teller, the poet and the dramatist was awakened; in any other pursuit the talent would have quietly died, as it has died in the breasts of thousands who, singularly enough, have not stood in the path of Chance.

Socially, Warrington was one of the many nobodies; and if he ever attended dinners and banquets and balls, it was in the capacity of reporter. But his cynical humor, which was manifest even in his youth, saved him the rancor and envy which is the portion of the outsider.

At length the great city called him, and the lure was strong. He answered, and the long battle was on.

Sometimes he dined, sometimes he slept; for there's an old Italian saying that he who sleeps dines. He drifted from one paper to another, lived in prosperity one week and in poverty the next; haggled with pawnbrokers and landladies, and borrowed money and lent it. He never saved anything; the dreamer never does. Then one day the end came to the long lane, as it always does to those who keep on. A book was accepted and published; and then followed the first play.

By and by, when his name began to figure in the dramatic news items, and home visitors in New York returned to boast about the Warrington "first nights," the up-state city woke and began to recollect things—what promise Warrington had shown in his youth, how clever he was, and all that. Nothing succeeds like success, and nobody is so interesting as the prophet who has shaken the dust of his own country and found honor in another. Human nature can't help itself: the women talked of his plays in the reading-clubs, the men speculated on the backs of envelopes what his royalties were, and the newspaper that had given him a bread-and-butter pittance for a man's work proudly took it upon itself to say that its columns had fostered the genius in the growing. This was not because the editors were really proud of their townsman's success; rather it was because it made a neat little advertisement of their own particular foresight, such as it was. In fact, in his own town (because he had refused to live in it!) Warrington was a lion of no small dimensions.

Warrington's novel (the only one he ever wrote) was known to few. To tell the truth, the very critics that were now

praising the dramatist had slashed the novelist cruelly. And thereby hangs a tale. A New York theatrical manager sent for Warrington one day and told him that he had read the book, and if the author would attempt a dramatic version, the manager would give it a fair chance. Warrington, the bitterness of failure in his soul, undertook the work, and succeeded. Praise would have made an indifferent novelist of him, for he was a born dramatist.

Regularly each year he visited his birthplace for a day or so, to pay in person his taxes. For all that he labored in New York, he still retained his right to vote in his native town.

A sudden desire seized him to-night to return to his home, to become a citizen in fact and deed. It was now the time of year when the spring torrents flood the lowlands, when the melting snows trickle down the bleak hillsides, when the dead hand of winter lies upon the bosom of awakening spring, and the seed is in travail. Heigh-ho! the world went very well in the springs of old; care was in bondage, and all the many gateways to the heart were bastioned and sentineled.

"Sir, a lady wishes to see you."

Warrington turned. His valet stood respectfully in the doorway.

"The name?" Warrington rose impatiently. Nobody likes to have his dreams disturbed.

"Miss Challoner, sir."

"Challoner!" in surprise; "and this time of night?" He stroked his chin. A moment passed. Not that he hesitated to admit her; rather he wished to make a final analysis of his