

doesn't seem to appreciate his blessings, does he?"

"That's all right," said Southwick, "but I do hate to be improved. She knows it as well as I do, and still she keeps right on trying to improve me. I've got a lovely disposition, and all that sort of rot, but if she thinks she's going to improve me against my worse instincts, why, she's wrong. I defy her to." He nodded confidentially to Burgess. "She wants me to go and be a useful citizen and all that democratic bunk." He looked down at the girl and shuddered effectively. "Look here, I don't believe Burgess is any more of a useful citizen than I am. You improve him a minute. I promised to play pool with Newcomb."

Miss Robinson laughed again. "If you can play with Mr. Newcomb you've improved in one direction, anyway."

Southwick waved his hand in deprecation. "Mere figure of speech. Technically I play with him; literally I sit and hold a cue while he plays pool in my presence. It's easy to watch, and I don't have to get up very often. . . . All the waltzes, though, Helen!"

Burgess turned to her and felt his assurance slipping. He was as much out of practice in small talk as he was in golf. "He's a joyous soul, isn't he? What on earth have you had to lecture him about?"

She evidently took him for an old friend of Southwick's and answered with corresponding frankness.

"He told you himself. I'm trying to reform him."

"Reform doesn't go with this climate," said Burgess. "So personally I'm ag'in it—I came down purposely to backslide."

She gave him a quick nod of appreciation. "That's exactly what I've been saying to him. I'm trying to persuade him to go north and get into some sort of business."

"I can imagine what a task it might be. Pinehurst is rather chronic. I feel it myself."

"Yes, but for a young man who's never done anything in his life but be supported—O, we're the best friends imaginable, but I want him to go and make himself important."

"I suppose he's pretty important here, isn't he?"

"That's just the trouble. All he does is to shoot and ride, and play golf and pool, and he does them all so badly. I don't believe I'd be half so insistent if he'd only be a shark at something. Anything. But he isn't. He's awfully popular, and he's a dear, but—please don't envy him." Her intonation betrayed a maternal interest in Southwick which should properly have made that gentleman very thoughtful.

"Then I won't," said Burgess without any great conviction.

From the far end of the corridor music was drifting out to them, and already a slow exodus had begun from the lobby. Burgess was suddenly confronted with an undesirable choice of action. He could remain where he was or he could ask Miss Robinson to dance. He hadn't danced for at least two seasons, and he wanted her to like him. He feared that if he proved awkward she wouldn't be so nice to him afterwards. On the other hand, if he didn't ask her some one else was certain to supply the deficiency, and that would leave him quite as isolated as ever.

Nor could he, in self-respect, explain to her that he hadn't been dancing lately. It is the lowest form of alibi, lower even than the alibi of tight shoes, or a sprained ankle—so low, indeed, that on the rare occasions when it spells truth it is predestined never to be believed.

He delayed too long. Over her shoulder, as she went off with a more aggressive cavalier, she sent him a smile of farewell, and Burgess, deserted and annoyed, managed a feeble response. He attempted to cajole himself with the reflection that he had discussed only one subject with her and found it not particularly interesting and that she might, in the end, prove to be actually a lemon; but in his secret soul he knew that this was a libel upon Miss Robinson and a sour-grape sort of philosophy for himself, and he dropped the pose with commendable promptness.

Nothing on earth, however, could have dragged him into the ballroom to display his loneliness by sitting aloof and watching those more fortunate than himself. He realized also that there was no possibility of sitting out a dance with Miss Robinson and that, after all, it would have been foolhardy to run the risk of alienating her by barking her insteps. He would practice first on some one less adorable. Tonight had brought him the introduction, and that would have to do for the present.

He read the New York newspapers, endeavoring to shut his ears to the music, and enjoyed deep gloom until a quarter of 11, when

sleep became a welcome idea. His room was in the annex; and to reach it he had to pass through the little ballroom. Temporarily he found the passage blocked because the last dance was in full progress. It was a waltz, and Southwick was the cheerful partner of Miss Robinson. As Burgess saw them his jaw dropped, and after one prolonged stare of amazement and chagrin he laughed audibly, so that bystanders were curious.

Southwick, who had monopolized all waltzes and taken them, unrebuked, was one of the poorest dancers Burgess had ever seen in his life. And Burgess, out of excess modesty, had wasted the evening with yesterday's newspapers.

"Why, I could give him lessons!" snapped Burgess, banging his door behind him.

On the following day he discovered, to his complete relief, that as sponsors Miss Robinson and Southwick left nothing to chance. From isolation he took one step and achieved prominence, and he was actually modest enough to believe that it was due primarily to the sponsors. But although he met a score of people whom he liked immensely yet Southwick and Miss Robinson held their places, unchallenged, in the first rank. He counted the day unsatisfactory unless he had divided the major portion of it between them; and, to his ever increasing happiness, there were few such days, and those by accident.

When he was in company with Southwick he sometimes wondered what his new friend—or his friend's friends—would think about him if they knew his history and his present status. Southwick had once remarked, in the cardroom, that the capital represented at the half dozen tables would average a million dollars.

"One of 'em must have two million, then," Burgess had said, "to even up for me."

Southwick had laughed amusedly. "That's all right. What do you think I am—an income tax collector?" And Burgess had felt uncomfortable—almost as though he were here under false pretenses. Southwick was the best comrade in a lifetime, but Southwick assumed that every one else was equally a plutocrat with himself. When Burgess used the word "afford" Southwick openly hooted at him and told him to stop joking. And Burgess now had possibly \$600 subject to check. That was his measure of Pinehurst and of the life that meant so much to him and so little to Southwick. After Pinehurst, a job somewhere. Somewhere? No—anywhere. Whatever he could get. He wondered if Southwick's easy familiarity would grow a trifle rigid if Southwick knew.

As to Miss Robinson, he had no similar suspicion, and this was rather extraordinary, because Miss Robinson was considerably more expensive than any other person he could remember. Even his man's perception told him that she had oceans of clothes and that they must have cost prodigiously. He had seen her buy at the jeweler's a gold mesh bag for a birthday gift, and she hadn't even inquired the price, except as an afterthought. The price was \$450, and Miss Robinson's eyelashes hadn't moved the fraction of an inch. The amount would have bought another month of paradise for Burgess, and yet he wasn't afraid of what Miss Robinson would think about him if she knew his penury.

He was so little afraid that once he almost told her. This was when he had come to the halfway mark of his vacation and she was fully established as his local confidante. The words were on his tongue, but at the last instant he withheld them and substituted a comparative statement. He confessed merely that he was "poor." She was very sweet about it and ready with philosophy, but, as he recalled afterwards, poverty is only comparative anyway. She probably thought he was worth about a hundred thousand dollars.

Regardless of his poverty, although this was never out of his mind, he fell in love with her, and when he was first aware of it he sat motionless, shocked, protesting desperately to himself that it was not his fault. From a sensible standpoint it was a situation which would have been unthinkable even when his income was at its zenith; today it was beyond reason. He tried to blame himself for his weakness, but in spite of his sincerity he could assume no shadow of guilt. The ambition was hopeless, but it was also involuntary.

The worst of it was that she favored him. He was reluctant to credit his senses, but secretly he had to admit that he trusted the barometer of his intelligence. He didn't pretend to estimate the depth of her interest, but he hoped—and in the next instant feared—that it was parallel to his own.

It occurred to him that the safest course would be for him to quit Pinehurst, while there was yet time; but his soul revolted at

the conception. He wondered if he were purely selfish to stay. He was storing up health and energy for the future, but he wondered how far he should offset this against potential tragedy. And when it finally came down to basic truth, he didn't want to go away from Helen. He would rather be near her and suffer than go north and suffer there. The main proposition was apparently to cause both of them as little sorrow and as little regret as he could.

Chivalry prescribed for him an altered manner towards her. He began to show a certain superficial lightness, which was manifested solely for the purpose of preventing both of them from being serious. Yet he was conscious that in taking this precaution he had tossed away a valuable privilege. She had begun, ever so gradually, to reveal to him that inward nature which was denied to mere acquaintances. That inward nature of hers was sunny, but serious. To protect himself, and her, it was necessary to rebuff the confidence which she was so willing to give him.

He was abashed, but he was also sensible of the great compliment she paid him when she told him that his attitude had hurt her.

"That's the last thing in the world I want to do," he said gravely.

"Why do you do it, then? Why do you act so—so flippant? You've hurt me dreadfully."

Burgess looked at the ground. "I suppose it's because I'm lucky enough to have just one atom of common sense."

"Are you sure it's that?"

He shook his head affirmatively. "It isn't particularly easy to talk about, but maybe I owe it to you. I'd hate to have you think I'm a plain rotter. . . . You've got some idea of the way I care for you, haven't you?"

She made no answer, but he drew the right conclusion from her silence.

"It's a funny sort of thing to say, but I think I want to tell you anyway. It's true; I haven't been nice to you lately. And it's only because I care so much. More than I ought to; more than I'll let myself. I can't be natural any more. I don't dare to."

She lifted her eyes to him, and Burgess shivered. "Do you always work on that principle—be rude to people as soon as you begin to like them?"

He put out his hand. "You can make it a lot easier for me, if you will. I can't be happy unless I'm seeing you, and hearing you, and loving you, but I can't ever ask you to marry me, and that's why I can't be—human."

"Is that a reason?" she asked presently.

Burgess held tightly to her hand. "You don't understand. I couldn't offer you anything but myself. I couldn't spend as much in a year as you spend in a week. Everybody else is here because they've earned it by success. I'm here because I've failed. There's nothing ahead. Nothing. You probably can't visualize that; you haven't any standard that would let you. But I can, and I know what it means. I—"

Her voice was so gentle that although she halted his speech he didn't take it as an interruption.

"I shouldn't have believed you have so little faith in the future."

Burgess laughed dryly. "I've been playing terrible golf lately. Why? I'm going out of my class. I've been trying to keep up with men who play better than I could in a thousand years. It makes me a heap worse than usual. It isn't a yellow streak, either. It's life. No matter what you want to believe, you know what your best game is—and you can't go beyond it, and when you try to you fall down hard. . . . I'm not a money maker. That's not my game. I like to do things too slowly and carefully. The Wall street crowd is different. I'm not in their class, and I never will be. That isn't self-depreciation; it's horse sense."

If his reactions had been a trifle more sensitive he would have gathered much information from the fact that she hadn't withdrawn her hand.

"I still don't see why you need to be rude to me."

"Rude to you!" he exclaimed. "Rude to you! Haven't I made it clear, Helen? Isn't it clear yet?" He bent toward her. "I've told you all there is to tell. If I'm rude to you it's because I've got a spark of consideration for you, and you ought to be thankful." He was in dead earnest, but the vaunted spark of consideration took this precise moment to burn out. "I love you," he said thickly. "I've loved you ever since the first. . . . O, I know it isn't any use. I hoped you'd never know. I wanted to spare you that. Well, I've told you. I'm a cad to do it. I've told you now. . . . What are you going to think? What are you going to say? What are you going to do about it?"

She looked up at him, and as swiftly

dropped her eyes again. And then again she was gazing at him, and her breath was coming faster, and she had gone pale. Burgess was amazed that she should appear so frightened and that her voice should have shrunk to such a curious whisper.

"There isn't anything to—do about it, Ned."

The moment was so unworldly that he questioned his own existence. He was wholly incapable of thought; his brain was paralyzed. The movements of his own arms had nothing to do with his muscles.

He was stupefied by the reality of his arms around her, and he was saying, over and over to himself, that it couldn't be true. It couldn't be his own personality which was involved. It was too incredible.

It was incredible, but it was still reality. Burgess was telling himself that he mustn't, he mustn't; and simultaneously his lips had touched her cheek. She caught her breath and Burgess forgot his scruples.

They had kissed each other, and they were sitting tense, bewildered. Burgess was the first to recover his balance and find his voice.

"I've done you a great wrong, Helen," he said brokenly. "It can't be forgiven. I can't forgive it." His tone was abject, but a supporting note of exaltation was there, too. "I'm sorry all the way through. I'm a skunk."

She was marvelously timid, but for the sake of his self-respect she managed a temporary courage.

"Are you sure you—care so much, dear?"

"I adore you," he said.

"Then do you think there's anything on earth . . . that would make me let you go?"

"I'm leaving," he said with grim inflexibility, "on the next train that has accommodations. Let's go back to the hotel."

He had parted from her at the hotel entrance, for a vast shyness had come upon her, and she wanted to go in alone. Burgess, making for his room, was dazed, but he didn't enjoy a single degree of triumph. On the contrary, he had never felt so humble and so unnecessary in all his life. It came to him, with a violent inrush of resentment, that he was deprived of what should rightfully have been the most exquisite of all possible memories. Deprived of it on account of money.

Money! She had insisted that money didn't matter, but that was because she was rich. Money never does matter except to those who haven't it. The recollection of his bank balance gave Burgess a shock which, if he had been a woman, would have meant hysteria. But at least he could send her a valedictory of flowers. He needn't consider longer that every penny of expense required a corresponding cut in his vacation. The vacation had ended. Self-respect had ended it, and he was going home.

The desk clerk spoke to him as he passed.

"O, Mr. Burgess! Just a moment, please. Little accident in your room this morning. Left a lighted cigaret on your dresser, didn't you, when you went out?"

Burgess, abruptly dragged down from his plane of thought, looked blank. "I don't think so. I may have. Why?"

The clerk shrugged his shoulders. "It fell off on the chair where your clothes were."

"Clothes?" said Burgess. "What clothes?"

"A sack suit and two golf suits. You'd told the valet to press 'em, he said. Anyhow, they were on a chair side of the dresser. One of the chambermaids smelled the smoke. You know how cloth smolders. I had 'em sent right over to the valet, but he can't do a thing with 'em. They're gone. Absolutely. He sent 'em back to your room, so you can see for yourself. I'm sorry, but—"

Burgess gave him a sickly smile, and wet his lips. The excellence of his wardrobe! Sack suits and golf clothes translated into terms of hotel bills. No—that wasn't the point at issue, now. The point was that he should have to stay over for a day or two, or go north in a dinner jacket. Until a few minutes ago he had thought that his pride wouldn't permit him to delay in Pinehurst; now it was doubtful whether his pride would permit him to leave.

"The valet said you only brought one sack suit, so I telephoned over to Montesanti in Southern Pines, Mr. Burgess. He's got a nice sack suit he was making for somebody that canceled the order. He thinks it'll fit you, and it'll be done Saturday, if you want it. A hundred and twenty-five, he wants for it. And he's got one ready made golf suit he can send on approval."

"Thank you," said Burgess, absently.

"Thank you very much." He went slowly down the corridor towards his room. A hundred and twenty-five dollars! Or else go north, on the first available