

"Well, to be brief, a sort of buoyancy of spirits clung to me throughout the day, and lightened my steps as I finally took my hat and started for home. As my feet touched the sidewalk, however, a hand was slipped familiarly through my arm, and a voice that seemed an echo from the past, sounded in my ear: 'Roy Mason, by all that's jolly,' it said, and I turned to clasp the hand of an old-time chum—as wild a blade as ever led the van of Satan. He had been absent from the city for months, and this was my first meeting with him since my marriage. I was glad to see him. He had much to tell me, and almost before I knew what I was doing I was standing beside a bar with him, making a perjured, lying scoundrel of myself by swallowing, in a glass of brandy, all my vows to the woman who had trusted me. And why did I do it? Not because I needed, or even desired, the brandy, that is certain; and not because my refusal to drink would have caused Harry Bray one tear or heart pang. Blake, I am something of an agnostic, and do not believe in much of anything that lies beyond the tangible of this world, but when I try to think what it is that leads a man on at such a moment, I'm almost tempted to pin my faith to the old-fashioned, orthodox devil.

"Well, to shorten my story and avoid easily imagined details, I will only say that I did not go home that evening. Where I did go matters now but little. Suffice it to say I followed Harry's lead with reckless abandon. The only event of that night that I distinctly remember, is one that was branded upon my heart in letters of fire. Some time in the small hours of morning I staggered out of a well known disreputable place, and found myself standing face to face with my wife.

"How she came to be there, in that locality, all alone, at dead of night, will remain one of the inscrutable mysteries to me forever. I never had a chance to ask her, for from that hour to this I have never looked upon her face. Oh, God! how I have striven to forget her poor little ashen face, as it looked in that awful moment! But I see it now, as plainly as though only moments, instead of years, had passed. Only for a moment she stood there, with that dreadful look in her eyes, that cut my very soul in twain; then she turned, and without a word or gesture, fled away like a hunted creature and vanished in the darkness. All my soul went after her, in the pity and tenderness of an awful remorse, but I dared not follow her. The look in her eyes had not only sobered me, but had showed me that my doom was sealed. I thought she would go home to our house, and I sent a nurse to her, and telegraphed her mother, twenty miles away, to come to her; but when daylight came, I learned that she had not gone home. She had wan-

dered about the cold streets until she had fallen, exhausted, in the darkness, where she lay until found by an officer in the gray dawn, who sent her to a hospital. I went to the door of the hospital to inquire about her, but did not dare ask to see her. They told me she was in the raving delirium of brain fever, and that, on account of exposure, trouble, and her delicate state of health, there was scarcely a shadow of hope for her.

"For five long weeks I was in a state of mind closely bordering on insanity, and haunted the hospital day and night. If I ate or slept during all that time, I have no recollection of it; and so weakened and worn was I with my vigil of remorse, that when, at last, they told me one morning that the crisis was passed and she might recover, I fell in a swoon, which lasted for hours. When consciousness had fully returned, I crept away to my deserted home, where I waited, day by day, for her final recovery. My one hope was that she would send for me, or, at least, send me some message that might hold out a hope for the future. But that hope died a sudden death, when, by chance, I one day met one of the hospital attendants, and learned that her mother had taken her home to C—, her native village, twenty miles distant. I wrote her a letter then, or rather a prayer, wrung from the depths of my miserable heart, and took it to C— myself, where I hired a messenger to carry it to her, instructing him to wait for a reply. He brought me this:

Mason paused here, and handed me an open letter, which I read. It was brief, terribly brief, and, it seemed to me, manlike in its merciless firmness. It ran thus:

ROY:—There is but one thing in the world that I ask at your hands now, and that I command rather than ask. It is that you go away at once, and put as many thousand miles between yourself and me as the breadth of the continent will allow. You have destroyed your own child, you have murdered the truest heart that ever throbbed with love, and you ask, now, the privilege of gazing upon your work. If you ever realize your wish, it will be when I lie cold and defenseless in death.

EDITH MASON.

I handed back the letter in silence, and neither of us spoke for some moments. His head was bowed, and he seemed lost in sad and bitter thought. At length he said—

"Well, Blake, all this took place more than four years ago, and since then I have been a wanderer on the face of the earth. What pangs of remorse I have endured, no human being can ever know. From the first, I have known that there is but one service that I can ever render her now, and that is to die and set her free. Nothing but my death can free her in her own eyes. She would scorn such freedom as the law could give. A hundred times I have been on the