

FETTERS

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"Wait," Coyle picked up the memorandum from the desk. "I have offered to sell twenty thousand shares of Consolidated Northern to Mannering & Company at 150—the market price. If my offer is accepted, a check for the difference between the price at which I bought the shares, and that at which I offer them—two million dollars, to be exact—will cancel the transaction."

"But I gather that my offer was not satisfactory. Did Mr. Mannering authorize you to propose terms to me? I should have thought the proposition would have come better from him, and during business hours at my office. But, being a coward, did he prefer to send you, that you could plead with me to grant him the mercy he does not deserve?"

"John—"

"He took you from me—while pretending to be my friend! And now, when I've got him down, beaten, under my feet, he is afraid to face me—he sends you to plead for mercy! Oh, he is a man to be proud of!"

She rose, trembling.

"I—I'll go now, John. I ought never to have come. I only meant—I wanted—"

"Wait! I'm not through yet. He knew that I loved you, that my life was bound up in you. Yet he plotted to win you from me; he lied, he connived—he did everything to get you. Just four years ago."

"And there has n't been a moment since that day when I have n't been scheming and planning and working to make him suffer, to make him pay for what he did to me. There was only one way to reach him—through his pocket! It's taken four years—four long hard years. And now—he's going to pay; he's going to suffer, as he made me suffer!"

"Suffer, John?" she faltered. I—"

Yes, suffer!" He cut her short, savagely. "Do you think it was easy for me to stand tamely by, and lose, at one blow, my friend and the woman I loved? To me, Henry Mannering was an honorable, upright man, a staunch, true friend. I would have staked my life on his loyalty. And he deceived me—outraged the very name of friendship."

"Do you think it was easy for me to know that his was the right to hold you in his arms, caress you—make you his own? Suffer? I suffered the torments of the damned! I—" He checked himself abruptly, rose and strode to the window, fighting for self-control.

"JOHN." She was standing close beside him, her wide eyes misty with tears, her hand on his arm. "John, will you listen to me for just a moment? I was very young four years ago; I did not understand. If you have suffered, John, my road has not been easy to travel. I gave up the man I loved—and I have been punished. I thought I could forget you—put you out of my life—I thought that I was giving up the make-believe for the real. But—and there was a little catch in her throat—"I found that I had given up the real for the make-believe."

"You mean, Madge—?" The old name fell naturally from his lips.

"I mean that I could n't forget. There has n't been a day, an hour, when I have n't thought of you, when I would n't have given my soul to have another chance."

"Are you"—he held himself in check by a visible effort—"are you telling me that you regret—that you—care for me still, Madge?"

"Will you do what he asks, John? Will you give him the shares—sell them to him—set me free? I've been bound, John, bound to a man I did not love—could not love. Will you—cut my fetters?" She came closer to him, and her voice thrilled with tenderness. "Will you do this, John—for me?"



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