

hands into his pockets and then ran them suddenly through his hair or together in swift friction.

"Of course not!" he chortled. "That will ain't been found! Old Gideon locked it up in a secret place in his laboratory, along with some other papers that he didn't want every prying hand to discover. And I was the only one that knew about it. I'll bet it's there yet. Why shouldn't it be?"

"Whoop-ee! Every doggone cent the old fellow left is mine! Judge, congratulate me! I'm a rich man!"

He was no longer the poor, sniveling wretch that had come in a few minutes before, every nerve quivering in fear. He exercised now a sort of jubilant authority; for his whole manner had changed, and his voice was loud and insolent in the midst of his ecstatic hand-rubbings.

He looked at the judge with squared shoulders and threw at him a mean defiance.

"Do you hear that?" he said. "The money is mine! That will is all regular and true. Say, listen! Can't we go down to the house and get it now? Eh?"

A few minutes later, seated in the judge's top buggy and behind the judge's newest mare, they were driving rapidly toward the grim, secretive house in which old Gideon Weeks had passed his last days.

"You say this will leaves everything to you," Thatcher asked, as they passed down the aisle of tall elms that lined the main thoroughfare of the village.

"He sure did—everything."

"Humph! I always thought the old man was queer—eccentric, his son called him, though I say he was queer, and more than that—but that there will was sure the queerest thing he ever did. What do you think made him do it?"

The irony of the speech was lost entirely upon Crewe, whose mind was then in rapturous musings.

But even if it had not been, his thick wit would never have grasped it.

"Well, he was plain disgusted with his son's marriage to the Maybie girl. If there was one man that Weeks hated, it was Maybie. They had an awful row once, and it made the old man terribly sore to think that of all persons his son should pick to marry it should be her. He never spoke to him after that, and some time later he told me he would never leave Sam a dollar."

"And that was why he left all his money to you?"

"Sure. And after I saw that will I felt pretty good toward the old man."

He said this as though it showed ample evidence of a kindly nature.

"But it was so lonely up there in that big house on the hill. And besides, little I'd 'a' seen of the money, with him spendin' it all on chemicals and costly experiments and such. He might have lived to be a hundred."

"And he was devilish cross at times; wouldn't think anything of throwin' a book or a inkstand at me if he was mad. I got sick of it all and thought I'd get the money while he had it and before he changed his mind. However, after I thought I had killed him, I got scared and ran off."

"Sam has been doin' nicely since he got the money," the judge remarked suddenly. "The kid goes to school now."

"Huh—Sam, the poor dub!"

Crewe chuckled.

"He's one of those kind of fellows that was naturally intended to be loaded with more kinds of hard luck than Job ever thought of. The old man certainly had it in for him. He told me I'd be fired if I ever mentioned his name."

"The poor boy has a wheel-chair now—cost \$45," continued Thatcher. "He doesn't have to lay on the sofa and stare out the window any more. He gets around considerable, too, in the thing. His wife is gettin' back some of the good looks she lost since she married him. It's because she hasn't got any worries now, I guess."

The judge dropped one leg reflectively over the side of the buggy.

"She was always thin and started looking," Crewe answered with a snort of disgust for such a contemptible failing.

"She was—that is, from the time of Sam's accident, and there was plenty of reason. No help ever came to them from old Gideon; he acted right mean. It was hard lines for them, and the little woman was workin' her purty fingers off tryin' to make things go. You know how she was—always doin' odd jobs at dressmakin' and washin', tendin' her own garden, and even takin' a turn at the plow. If it hadn't been for kind-hearted neighbors they'd 'a' never managed."

Thatcher was fighting hard in a cause in which his sympathies whole-heartedly were enlisted.

It was a part of his quiet optimism that no soil is unproductive; properly worked, it must give back some good. And even in the most sterile of natures there is always that desideratum of kindly feeling to be quickened into life by the right treatment.

A sudden impulse came to him.

"I was thinkin'," he said. "Sam bein' the only legatee, of course he got the big house along with the rest of the stuff. We'll have to drop in on him and get the key. Good thing I thought o' that, or we mightn't been able to git in the place."

He lied glibly with the knowledge that a duplicate of the same key rested snugly in his own pocket.

Crewe grunted something that might have been taken for agreement to this, and their course deflected sharply onto a narrow road that ran toward the base of the mountain.

They drew up at a neat cottage that had a close-cropped private hedge bordering the cement sidewalk.

The house was painted white and in front of it was a tiny half-moon of lawn with a segment of grass at either side, each with a flower-bed in it, very prim and neatly cut, like the cameo brooch on the spotless waist of a little old lady. In a paddock at the rear a young colt flitted his tail, kicked up his heels and stared at them in wonder.

Inside, the house repeated the thrifty orderliness that prevailed on the outside. The floor of the kitchen, at which they entered, was whitened to that degree of cleanliness that can only be obtained by the method of knees-to-the-floor and a willing supply of "elbow grease." The kettle sang on the bright stove, and the cat on the hearth dozed to its murmur.

At their entrance a young woman of about 23, who was ironing, clicked her instrument upon its holder.

Her face lighted up, and she extended a hot hand to the judge.

Her greeting was heard elsewhere, for in a brief moment a wheel-chair, propelled by its occupant, ran swiftly into the room, and there was a masculine shout of welcome.

"Howdy, judge? I am certainly right glad to see you. Sit down and take off your coat. You may as well be comfortable."

"Ellen, see if there isn't some of that hot coffee left for the judge and his friend. They must be chilled from their drive."

The coffee was taken from the back of the stove, and, though very hot and very black, Thatcher and his companion drank it willingly from capacious white cups.

This was a necessary ceremony, and nothing further could be said until it was done.

The welcome extended Crewe was polite, but not joyous.

Sam always had an instinctive dislike for the man, and just why he could not tell. As butler, valet and general factotum for his father, he knew the opportunities the man had for dishonesty, and he strongly suspected him of it.

Crewe possessed that type of face that expressed meanness of character so strongly that one could believe him guilty without the supporting basis of evidence.

"Well, have you come back here to live?" Weeks asked him, with a simulation of cheeriness. "It's a pretty good place to settle in. I don't blame you for missing

Pleasantfield. Everybody is so nice here, and the country is certainly pretty."

He exchanged a glance of sympathetic understanding with his wife.

Crewe stared uncomfortably at the floor.

"Yes," answered the judge quickly.

"Mr. Crewe has come back to stay, I guess. He is thinking of buying your father's old place up on the hill."

One of the gray eyes of the judge closed in a slow wink, which was observed only by the startled Crewe.

To the solving of complicating questions, Weeks' little boy at this moment bounded into the room, and the present topic was forgotten.

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The youngster was a chubby little fellow of some 8 or 9 years of age, with an aureole of golden curls above his sailor collar.

Observing visitors, he drew shyly into his father's embrace. The judge held open arms, and the boy, with a questioning look at his father, went over to him.

Youthful attention was then immediately absorbed in the mysterious bulbous object dangling from the judge's massive watch-chain, and in which, by putting it to the eye, could be seen the most wonderful pictures inside.

"The youngster is as purty as they make 'em," Thatcher remarked, tightening his clasp around the little form, and he patted the sunlit curls as his head bent over the boy.

The judge's huge hand, gnarled and thick of finger, had a touch like thistle-down.

Suddenly he turned to his host.

"Well, and how is the invention coming along, Sam?" he asked in fear of a reversion to the previous dangerous subject of conversation.

Weeks extended an invitation to them to go in and see his work, and they all adjourned to the next room.

And it presented all the littered disorder of combined workshop and laboratory.

Strands of electric wire and dry-cell batteries, blow-torches, gleaming implements of nickel and steel, retorts, glass jars of solutions were on benches, shelves and tables. There were row after row of bottles, some padded and all corked and labeled; fuses, test-tubes and chemists' paraphernalia, all occupying apparently irrelevant places, and seeming an endless detail of confusion.

But everything was within convenient reach of the disabled body that could not bend or stoop for itself.

It was here that Weeks spent nearly all of his time. A paralytic himself, his wish was to apply practical mercy to others suffering from the same cause. He was working on an electrical device for the quickening of atrophied or paralyzed muscles, and the machine, tested upon himself, seemed to be producing results.

His dark eyes brightened with fervor; he expounded and argued and answered endless questions which Phineas Thatcher put to him. It was interesting to note the quick play of his features as he watched, with sensitive interest, the face of his interrogator.

He had all the eager zeal of a young mother delineating the beauties of her first child and the unconscious naivete of the youthful inventor.

At an opportune pause the judge remarked that it was getting late and the road ahead of him was a long one.

Turning to go, he said:

"Let me tell you one thing, sonny: You jest keep that work up. I'm not a young man and I'm not to be able old either, and from an accumulation of experience I've discovered that the man whose intentions are good gets 'em paid back with interest some time or other."

"Your father, with his tryin' to make precious jewels out of nothin', was aimin' to increase the wealth of the world and himself—the motive was greed. He was like a horse that is tryin' to eat his way through a hull bale of hay; he jest natchally died of it. You are tryin' to decrease the sufferin' of humanity and it will mean the lightenin' of your own. So-long!"

On the road once more, Crewe shifted

his position and looked at the judge, who at that moment was gazing impassively at the horse's ears.

The ex-butler felt uncomfortable. He had the vague sense that they had reached a critical juncture and could see it in the set lines of his companion's face, but he could not exactly understand why.

It troubled him slightly, and then he dismissed the thought with an impatient shrug. There were more delightful things to think of.

"By the way, how much did the old man leave?" he asked.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Enough to give a man quite a fling," he smiled.

Thatcher gave a heavy sigh, and slumped back into the seat inertly.

"It sure is," he remarked. "What will it be—Monte Carlo or raisin' the deuce down at some o' them southern race tracks?"

"Well, I don't know. Twenty-five thousand isn't so much, after all. It won't keep a man going respectably for an awful long while, and it doesn't provide much for a bit o' high livin', either. What do you think about it?"

His face was clouded in an inward discussion of this new phase.

But the judge, with his mind hard at work upon the problem before him, did not answer.

He felt acutely the weight of a vast responsibility. With close fealty, he had always followed rigidly the obligations of his profession.

It was part of the pride of being—of the joy of working—that his duties had always been faithfully accomplished. He was too narrow-minded to appreciate the nice equivocations and deceptive practices by which the spirit of the law can be so easily falsified. Sympathy never tinged his sense of right.

And he had never felt his feelings so strongly involved. In the name of misguided justice he was to take sustenance, warmth and shelter from three of the worthiest and mold them into a gilded offering for this rake—this abortion of civilization.

He squirmed uncomfortably as he thought of the probable consequences of this legalized brutality.

Their wheels finally crunched the gravel driveway that led to their destination.

The old house, on a considerable eminence, frowned like an ancient Scottish castle upon its environs. It was large and compact, and, painted a somber smoke color, suggested the dark terrors of medievalism. Just now, in the November twilight, it looked particularly stark and gaunt, without the protecting foliage of the trees and shrubbery that surrounded it.

Crewe shivered and his face went a shade paler.

"Buy that place," he muttered. "It will be the first thing I'll sell, and this will be my last visit here, too; you can depend on that!"

He took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his lips.

"As executor of the Gideon Weeks estate, I've been tryin' to sell it myself," returned the judge. "But that ain't an easy job."

Inside the house their footfalls awakened ghostly echoes in the vast rooms and hallways. The drawn blinds made the place dark, and Thatcher detached a swinging lamp in the front hall and lighted it.

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Its pale gleams were sufficient to show the nakedness of the interior—the neutral-tinted walls and heavy chestnut paneling. It was a stanchly built dwelling, with an especial predilection for space. The stairs swept massively upward in a wide semi-circle, ceilings were high and doorways were broad.

In Pleasantfield there are a few of the bearded ones who can talk of Gideon Weeks' advent as a handsome, genial young man with a particularly vivacious and pretty girl wife.

He was a magnificent fellow, stalwart and with a figure like a modified Cyclops. The big house was to be their summer