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• Fifteen Other Big Features



# The Head of Misery

by

James Branch Cabell

Another of Those Fascinating  
Medieval Tales

Illustration by Arthur E. Becher

THEY of Poictesme narrate that in the old days Count Manuel resolved to fetch back from the grave long-dead young Niafer, because he could be content with no other woman. They tell how Count Manuel studied the histories of the presumptuous men who had attempted to perform such miracles, and learned how all these persons had sooner or later come to misery.

"Very well, then!" said Dom Manuel. And he fared alone from King Kiar's court, traveling toward the high woods of Dun Vlechlan.

When Manuel had reached the outskirts of the forest he encountered there a knight in vermilion armor, with a woman's sleeve wreathed about his helmet, and this knight demanded whence Manuel had come.

"From Kiar's court," said Manuel; "and I go to seek Kruchina, or Béda, or whatever you call Misery in these parts."

"Are you one of Kiar's friends?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, I have always been one of Kiar's enemies, and all such of his friends as I have ever encountered I have slain."

"Doubtless you have your reasons," said Manuel, and would have ridden by.

But the strange knight cried furiously, "Turn, coward, and defend yourself!"

He came upon Manuel like a whirlwind, and Manuel had no choice in the matter. So they fought, and presently Manuel brought the vermilion knight to the ground, and, dismounting, struck off his head.

Then Manuel rode on, thinking that this was a peculiarly irrational part of the forest, and wondering what might have been the vermilion blusterer's grievance against King Kiar. Count Manuel skirted the Wolf-lake, and came to a hut, painted gray, that stood clear of the ground, upon the bones of four great birds-feet. Manuel tethered his horse to a holm oak, piously crossed himself, and went into the hut. He kindled a fire, and prepared a soup; at sunset he went to the window of the hut, and cried thrice that supper was ready.

One answered him, "I am coming." And Manuel waited. There was now no sound at all in the forest: even the few birds that had been chirping of the day's adventures were hushed on a sudden, and the breeze died in the tree-tops. Inside the hut Manuel lighted his four candles: and his footsteps and the rustling of his garments as he went about the hut were noises that startled him.

Then said a thin little voice, "Manuel, open the door!"

Manuel obeyed, and found nobody anywhere in the forest twilight. The trees, he saw, were still as paintings. His horse stood tethered and quite motionless, except that it was shivering.

One spoke at his feet. "Manuel, lift me over the threshold!"

Dom Manuel, recoiling, looked downward, and in the patch of candle-light at his feet he saw a human head. He raised the head, and carried it into the hut. He noted now that the head was made of white clay,



"Is this as near as you have come to remembering me, my dearest!"  
she said, very sadly, as she looked into the still water

and deduced that Misery, whom some call Kruchina and others Béda, had come to him.

"Now, Manuel," says Misery, "do you give me my supper!"

So Manuel set the head upon the table, and put a platter of the soup before the head, and fed the soup to Misery with a gold spoon.

When the head had dined, it bade Manuel place it in the little cradle and put out the lights. Dom Manuel did not much fancy being alone in the dark with Misery, but he obeyed. He himself lay down upon the floor of the hut, and rolled up his cloak for a pillow. Presently he heard the head snoring in the cradle, and then Manuel too went to sleep and dreamed of Niafer.

In the morning, after doing the head's extraordinary bidding, Manuel went to feed his horse, and found tethered to the holm oak the steed's skeleton picked clean. He grieved at this, but considered it wiser to make no complaint. Indeed, there was nobody to complain to, for Misery, after having been again lifted over the threshold, had departed to put in a day's labor with the plague in the north.

Thereafter Manuel abode in this peculiarly irrational part of the forest, serving Misery for a month and a day. Of these services it is better not to speak. But the head was pleased by Manuel's services, because Misery loves company; and the two used to have long friendly talks together when Manuel's services and Misery's work for that day were over.

"And how came you, sir, to be thus housed in a trunkless head?" asked Manuel, one time.

"Why, when Jahveh created man on the morning of the sixth day, he set about fashioning me that afternoon from the clay which was left over. But he was interrupted by the coming of the Sabbath, for Jahveh was in those days, of course, a very orthodox Jew. So I was left incomplete, and must remain so always."

"I deduce that you, then, sir, are Heaven's last crowning work, and the final finishing touch to creation."

"So the pessimists tell me," the clay head assented, with a yawn. "Well, I have had a hard day of it, what with the pestilence in Glathion, and the wars in the Red Islands, and all those spring colds to manage, so we will talk no more philosophy."

Thus Manuel served the head of Misery, whom some call Kruchina and others Béda, for a month of days. All day the clay head would be roving about the world, carrying envious reports and devouring kingdoms and whispering malefic counsel, and bringing hurt and sorrow and despair and evil of every kind to men; and every evening, when Phobetor took over this lamentable work at sunset, the head would return contentedly to Dun Vlechlan for Manuel's services and a well-earned night's rest. Manuel wondered at first at his master's callousness, but Manuel soon comprehended that, since Misery [Continued on page 41]

## Poldekin — Continued from page 36

PODOFF — You have understood, Nikolai?

NIKOLAI — I am ready, Podoff.

SERGEANT — (returning) Nothin' there. Now, you people, we'll just look around and clear out probably. Where are you men's rooms?

POLDEKIN — On the floor below. We will have the pleasure to show you.

SERGEANT — Come on, then. The rest of you stay here.

(They all start for the hallway door except Podoff, Blanche and Maria. Podoff speaks in a low, warning voice.)

PODOFF — Nikolai!

(Nikolai swallows and gives him a look over the shoulder.)

MARIA — (catching Poldekin's sleeve) Dearest! Don't let Nikolai stand close to you.

POLDEKIN — (he smiles and points to the little flags) Among the stars, we are afraid of nothing.

(He marches to the door.)

(Maria seizes Endachieff's arm, urging him hurriedly.)

MARIA — Endachieff, keep next to Poldekin.

(Endachieff follows Poldekin; Nikolai strides after him. Poldekin turns and waves his hand cheerfully to Maria, then walks on out of sight. Blanche comes to Marie and they do not see that in the hallway Nikolai fiercely swings Endachieff back, in order to follow next to Poldekin himself.)

NIKOLAI — Got back, drunkard! (he runs off, following Poldekin.)

(The others have gone, except one policeman, his back to the door.)

BLANCHE — I guess you needn't be frightened any more.

MARIA — I am! I shall be until —

PODOFF — (solemnly) Until when, Maria?

MARIA — I don't know! Until always, perhaps! I think I shall always be frightened.

(There is a sudden hoarse outbreak of alarm, a shouting in men's voices in the hallway. Then two pistol shots. Blanche screams. Maria opens her arms as to a cross, long expected.)

The shouting continues. Nikolai tries to run in through the doorway. The policeman stops him and he is seized by Welch, who swings him into the arms of the Sergeant. The Sergeant instantly plunges off into the hallway with him.)

WELCH — That damn fool Nikolai shot him!

BLANCHE — He shot Endachieff?

ENDACHIEFF — (lurching into the doorway) No. Not me — not me.

(The shouting dies away. Poldekin appears in the doorway, Mendel and Krimoff supporting him. They bring him to the sofa.)

POLDEKIN — Maria? I don't think he has hurt me much —

(Suddenly he is very weak) Perhaps I had better lie down.

(He sinks down upon the couch. Then he speaks in a childish voice)

Maria, I have found it. (He smiles.)

Why, yes! I have found it!

(He sighs and relaxes. Welch touches Poldekin; is not sure. Endachieff with sudden dignity and gentleness comes forward.)

ENDACHIEFF — Let me. At the front I have seen so many.

(He touches Poldekin, looks at him intently) Yes. He is gone.

(Blanche picks up one of the cheap little flags, which has fallen upon the floor. She puts it in Poldekin's fingers.)

BLANCHE — I guess maybe he'd like that. (Podoff stands near-by. He seems to be laughing. The "Thinker" stares down at Poldekin and his flag.)

[The End]



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## The Head of Misery

[Continued from page 21]

was all head and no heart, it was not reasonable to expect Misery to pity the human beings whom he harassed as a matter of allotted duty.

So Manuel became more friendly with Misery, and the two talked over all Manuel's affairs; and they often talked of the two royal ladies whom Manuel had loved and loved no longer.

"For at one time," Manuel admitted, "I certainly fancied myself in love with the Princess Otrun, and at another time I was sure I was in love with Queen Freydis. And even now I like them well enough, but neither of these royal ladies could make me forget the slave-girl Niaser whom I loved in youth. Besides, the princess and the queen were horribly given to jealousy, and to squabbling with each other, and with me, too; and I could not endure this eternal bickering, which was always reminding me, by contrast, of the quiet dear ways of Niaser and of the delight I had in the ways of Niaser. So it seemed best for everyone concerned for me to run away."

"As for these proud wrangling women," the head estimated, "you are for some reasons well rid of them. Yet this Otrun has fine eyes and certain powers."

"She is a princess of the Apsaras," Manuel replied, "and therefore she had power over the butterflies and the birds and over all creatures of the air. But over her own tongue and temper the Princess Otrun has no control at all."

"Then Freydis, too, has beautiful black hair — and certain powers —"

"She is Queen of Audela, and therefore she has power over all earthen images. But Freydis's worst enemy also goes in red, and is housed by the little white teeth of Freydis."

Misery said: "You have had love from these women, you have gained power and knowledge from these women. Therefore you leave them, to run after some other woman who can give you no power and knowledge at all, but only a great deal of trouble. It is not heroic, Manuel, but it is human."

Then Manuel replied: "When I was a peasant lad, living modestly in attendance upon the miller's pigs, I loved the slave-girl Niaser. She died. I did not die, they tell me. Instead, I prospered unbelievably, so that I am to-day a nobleman, with lackeys and meadows and a castle of my own. Now royal ladies look upon me favorably, and I find them well enough except for their interminable tantrums and talkings. But the joy I took in Niaser is not to be found in any of these things."

"That too is an old human story," the head said. "Well, for a month of days you have served me faithfully, except for twice having failed to put enough venom in my soup, and for having forgotten to fetch in any ice that evening the devils were here. However, nobody is perfect, your time of service is out, and I must repay you as need is. Would you have happiness, then, and an eternal severance between you and me?"

"In all my travels I have seen but one happy person," Manuel replied. "He sat in a dry ditch, displaying vacant glittering eyes, and straws were tangled in his hair, but Tom o' Bedlam was quite happy. No, it is not happiness I desire."

The head repeated: "You have served me. What is it you demand?"

Dom Manuel said, "I demand the Niaser that was a slave girl, and is now a ghost in her pagan paradise. For I have heard that it is possible for you, Misery, to recall the dead."

Misery answered, "There is only one way to bring back the dead in flesh, and if I follow that way I shall lose my head as all the others have done."

"What is that to a lover?" says Manuel.

The head sighed, and bit at its white lips. "An oath is an oath among the Leshy. Therefore do you, who are human, now make profitable use of the knowledge and of the power you got from these women by breaking oaths! And as you have served me, so will I serve you."

Then Manuel called black eagles to him

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in the manner the Princess Orlun had taught, and sent them into all parts of the world for every sort of white earth. They obeyed the magic of the Apsaras, and brought to Dom Manuel from Britain the earth that is called leucargillon, and they brought glisomarga from Brumbelois, and eglecopala from the Gallic provinces, and white earth of every description from all parts of the world.

Thereafter Manuel made from this earth, as Queen Freydis had taught him how to do, the body of a woman. He fashioned the body peculiarly, in accordance with the old Tuya mystery, and the body was as perfect as Manuel could make it, in all ways save that it had no head.

Then Manuel sent a gold-crested wren into Valland; it entered the king's marmoreal palace, and went into the Princess Orlun's chamber, and fetched thence a handkerchief figured with yellow mulberries, and wet with the tears which Orlun had shed in her grieving for Manuel. And Dom Manuel sent a cliff-swallow, which returned to him with Queen Freydis's handkerchief; this was figured with blue fleurs-de-lys, and this also was drenched with tears.

Whereupon, all being in readiness, Misery smiled craftily, and said:

"In the time that is past I have overthrown high kings, and prophets and soverers also, in ways that ballad singers still delight to tell of. But with you, Dom Manuel, I shall deal otherwise, and I shall disconcert you by and by in a more quiet fashion. I must grapple carefully with your love for Nisfer, as with an antagonist who is not scrupulous, nor very sensible, but who is exceedingly strong. For observe: you obstinately desire this perished heathen woman, who in life, it well may be, was nothing remarkable. Therefore you have sought Misery, you have dwelt for a month of days with terror, you are planning to defy death, you are intent to rob the deep grave and to despoil paradise. Truly your love is great. I it is alone who can obtain for you this woman. And as you have served me, so must I serve you. But when you have this Nisfer I shall return to you in the appearance of a light formless cloud, and I shall rise about you, not suddenly but a little by a little. So shall you see through me the woman for love of whom your living was once made high-hearted and fearless, and for whose sake death was derided, and paradise was ransacked: and you will ask tolorfully, 'Was it for this?' You will be content, as human contentment goes, and my triumph will not be public: but none the less, I shall have overthrown my present conqueror, and I shall have brought low the love which terror and death did not fright, and which the laws of earth could not control: and I, whom some call Kruchina and others Bèda, shall be monstrously amused by this."

"That is to-morrow's affair," replied Manuel, "and my dealings are with to-day."

Then Manuel bound the clay head of Misery in the two handkerchiefs which were wet with the tears of Orlun and of Freydis. When the cock had crowed three times, Dom Manuel unbound the head, and it was only a shapeless mass of moist white clay, because of the tears of Freydis and Orlun. Manuel modeled in this clay to the best of his ability the head of Nisfer, as he remembered her when both were young and they had loved each other: and when the white head was finished he fitted it to the body which he had made from the other sorts of white earth. Thereafter Dom Manuel robed this body in brown druggot such as Nisfer had been used to wear.

Now the tale tells that when Misery was dispossessed of the earth he entered (because Misery is un-Christian) into the paradise of the pagans, where Nisfer the long-dead slave girl abode in bliss: and Misery came shortly afterward to Nisfer, and talked with her in a thin little voice. She listened willingly to this talk of Manuel and of the days that Nisfer had shared with Manuel: and she could no longer be happy in the paradise of the pagans.

Thereafter Misery went about the heathens' paradise in the appearance of a light formless cloud. And the fields of this paradise seemed less green, and the sky less radiant, and the waters of the paradisaal river, Eridanus, grew muddy. The poets became tired of hearing one another recite: the heroes lost delight in their wrestling and in their exercises with the spear. "How can anybody expect us to waste eternity with recreations which are only fitted to waste time?" they demanded.

And the lovely ladies began to find the handsome lovers with whom they wandered

hand in hand rather tedious companions.

"I love you," said the lovers.

"You have been telling me that for twelve centuries," replied the ladies, yawning, "and too much of anything is enough."

"Well," replied the lover, "I said it only out of politeness and force of habit, and I can assure you I am as tired of this lackadaisical idiosyncrasy as you are."

So everything was at sixes and sevens in this paradise: and when the mischief-maker was detected, the blessed held a meeting, and thrust Misery and Nisfer also out of the pagan paradise, because Misery clung to Nisfer in the appearance of a formless cloud, and there was no separating the two.

They turned earthward together and in a dim country on the world's rim the blended spirit of Misery and the ghost of Nisfer rose through a hole in the ground, like an imponderable vapor. They disassembled each from the other in a gray place overgrown with poplars, and Misery cried farewell to Nisfer.

"And it is heartily I thank you for your kindness now that we part, and now that, it may be, I shall not ever see you again," said Nisfer, politely.

And Misery replied:

"Take no fear for not seeing me again, now that you are once more about to become human. Certainly, Nisfer, I must leave you for a little while, but certainly I shall return. There will first be for you much kissing and soft laughter, and the quiet happy ordering of your home, and the heart-shaking wonder of the child who is neither you nor Manuel but both of you, and whose like was not ever seen before on earth: and life will burgeon with white miracles, and every blossom you will take to be eternal. Laughing, you will say of sorrow, 'What is it?' And I, whom some call Kruchina and others Bèda, shall be monstrously amused by this."

"THEN your seeing will have my help, and you will observe that Manuel is very much like other persons. He will be used to having you about, and you him, and that will be the sorry bond between you. The children that have left their flesh from your flesh ruthlessly, and have derived their living from your glad anguish, each day will be appearing a little less intimately yours until these children find their mates. Thereafter you will be a tolerated intruder into these children's daily living, and nobody anywhere will do more than condone your coming; you will weep secretly; and I, whom some call Kruchina and others Bèda, shall be monstrously amused by this."

"Then I shall certainly return to you, when your tears are dried, and when you no longer believe what young Nisfer once believed; and when, remembering young Nisfer's desires and her intentions as to the disposal of her life, you will shrug withered shoulders. For then to go on living will yet remain desirable to you, to be sure, but the dilapidations of life will no longer move you deeply. Shrugging, you will say of sorrow, 'What is it?' And then your inability to be quite miserable any more will assure you that I have returned; and I, whom some call Kruchina and others Bèda, shall be monstrously amused by this."

Said Nisfer, impatiently: "Do you intend to keep me here forever under these dark trees, with your thin talking, while Manuel stays unhappy through his want of me?"

And Misery answered nothing as he departed from Nisfer, for a season.

Now all this while, at the gray hut in Dun Viechlan, in the peculiarly irrational part of the forest, lay the earthen image of Nisfer: and Dom Manuel sat at the feet of it, and played upon a flageolet the air with which he had been used to call young Nisfer from her sweeping and cleaning. Now he was a nobleman, and she a homeless ghost, but the tune kept its power over them, none the less, for its burden was young love and the high-hearted time of youth, so that the melody which once had summoned Nisfer out of the kitchen now summoned her resistlessly from paradise.

The spirit of Nisfer entered at the mouth of the image. Instantly the head sneezed, and said, "I am unhappy." But Manuel kept on playing. The spirit descended further, bringing life to the lungs and the belly, so that the image then cried, "I am hungry." But Manuel kept on playing. So the soul was drawn further and further, until Manuel saw that the white image had taken on the colors of flesh and so knew that the entire body was informed with life.

He cast down the flageolet, and touched the breast of the image with the ancient

formal gestures of the old Tuyla mystery, and he sealed the mouth of the image with a kiss, so that the spirit of Niafer was imprisoned in the image which Manuel had made. Under his lips the lips which had been Misery's cried, "I love." And Niafer rose, a living girl just such as Manuel had remembered through long years; and with their first kiss all memories of paradise had departed from her, and she had no more intelligence than an untutored slave girl.

They made much of each other for a while. But the first thing Niafer asked for was a mirror, and Manuel had none.

"Now but certainly I must know at once how faithfully you have remembered me," says Niafer.

So they went to the Wolflake hard by the gray hut, and Niafer gazed for a minute at her reflection in the still water.

"Is this as near as you have come to remembering me, my dearest!" she said, very sadly, as she looked down at Manuel's notion of her face. For the appearance which Niafer now wore she found to be nothing like that which she remembered as having once been hers, in the old days when she had been tolerably familiar with her mistress's mirrors, and had got frequent comfort from them.

"I have forgotten not one line nor curve of your dear face," says Manuel, stoutly, "in all these years. And when my love spurred me to make your image, Niafer, my love loaned me unwonted cunning. Even by ordinary, they tell me, I have some skill at making images: and while I do not boast of that skill—not for a moment, you must understand, because the credit of any knack which may have been given me is not due to me,—I certainly think that in this instance nobody has fair reason to complain."

She looked at his face now; and she noted what the years of living in a world wherein one must live as one best can had done to the boy's face which she remembered. Count Manuel's face was of remodeled stuff: youth had not yet gone out of it, but pleasure-seeking had etched wrinkles in it, success had hardened and caution had pinched and self-complacency had kissed it. And Niafer sighed again.

"There is no cheating time nor death," said Niafer. "No matter: I love you,

Manuel, and I am content with what remains of you; and if the body you have given me is to your will it is to my will."

"My dear," said Manuel, "I think that Dun Vlechlan is unwholesome, and I am of the opinion that you and I will be more comfortable in Poietesme, where, as I must tell you, I am now a nobleman with lackeys and meadow-lands and a castle of my own."

"This is excellent hearing," said Niafer, "and I am glad that the world has had sense enough to appreciate you, Manuel, and we will have rubies in my coronet, because I always fancied them. And now do you tell me how it all happened, and what I am to be called countess of."

So with Manuel telling of his adventures, they left this peculiarly irrational part of the forest, and fared out of the high woods of Dun Vlechlan, and presently came face to face with Queen Freydis and the Princess Otrun, where these two royal ladies and their servants rode a-hunting. Otrun went magnificently this morning on a white horse, and wearing a kirtle of changeable green like the sea's green in sunlight: her golden hair was bound with a gold frontlet wherein were emeralds. Freydis, a very dark and stately lady, was in crimson embroidered with small gold stars and ink-horns: a hooded falcon sat on her gloved wrist.

Now Freydis and Otrun stared at the pallid flat-faced little peasant girl in brown druggot that was with Count Manuel. Then Otrun stared at Freydis.

"Is it for this," says Otrun, with her proud fine face all wonder, "that Dom Manuel has forsaken us? Why, the girl is out and out ugly."

"Our case is none the better for that," replied Freydis, the wise queen, who was looking not at Niafer but at Manuel.

And Manuel civilly saluted the two royal ladies, and thought they would be well enough were it not for their tantrums and their talkings. Then his gaze returned adoringly to the face he had created as he willed, and to the quiet love of his youth, and he had no occasion to be thinking of queens and princesses. Instead, he fared contentedly homeward with the one woman in the world who to his finding was desirable and lovely.



# You and yours Should brush teeth in this new way

All statements approved by high dental authorities

Millions of teeth are now cleaned in a new way. You see them everywhere — glistening teeth.

They are pretty teeth, but there's a deeper reason for them. They are safer, cleaner. The cloudy and destructive film is every day combated.

You will use this method and have your family use it when you make this ten-day test.

### To end the film

The purpose is to fight film — that viscous film you feel. It is the teeth's chief enemy.

It is that film-coat which discolors. Film is the basis of tartar. It holds food substance which ferments and forms acid. It holds the acid in contact with the teeth to cause decay.

Millions of germs breed in it. They, with tartar, are the chief cause of pyor-

rhea. Thus most tooth troubles are now traced to film.

The film is clinging. It enters crevices and stays. The ordinary tooth paste does not dissolve it, so the tooth brush leaves much of it intact.

It dims the teeth, and month after month, between dental cleanings, it may do a ceaseless damage. That is why tooth troubles come despite the daily brushing.

### What dentists urge

Dental science, after years of searching, has found a way to combat film. Authorities have amply proved it by many careful tests.

It is now embodied in a dentifrice called Pepsodent — a scientific tooth paste. And leading dentists everywhere are urging its daily use.

## Sent to anyone who asks

A 10-Day Tube of Pepsodent is sent to anyone who asks, and millions have thus proved it. Every person owes himself that test.

Pepsodent is based on pepsin, the digestant of albumin. The film is albuminous matter. The object of Pepsodent is to dissolve it, then to day by day combat it.

But pepsin must be activated, and the usual agent is an acid harmful to the

teeth. So this method long seemed barred. Now science has discovered a harmless activating method, and active pepsin can be every day applied.

Two other problems have been solved in Pepsodent. In three ways this tooth paste brings a new era in teeth cleaning.

Watch the results of a ten-day test. Read the reason for them, then judge for yourself what is best.

**Pepsodent** PAT. OFF.  
REG. U.S.  
The New-Day Dentifrice

A scientific film combatant, combined with two other newly-recognized essentials. Now advised by leading dentists everywhere and supplied by druggists in large tubes.

### Watch them whiten

Send this coupon for a 10-Day Tube. Note how clean the teeth feel after using. Mark the absence of the viscous film. See how they whiten as the film coat disappears. Cut out the coupon now.

### Ten-day tube free

THE PEPSODENT COMPANY  
Dept. 613, 1104 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.  
Mail 10-day tube of Pepsodent to

Name .....

Address .....

Only one tube to a family.

## Clippings — Continued from page 16

two ways — either floated them on a flood tide of plutocracy, or scuttled them to failure, overnight. He had served many years in the National Guard, as a cavalryman, and when war came, he had welcomed it. But soon he had been called upon to sacrifice his personal ideals in favor of national ideals; and so he had crushed down his desire for active service, and obeyed an official request from Washington to resign from the Troop, and to speed up the production of aviation engines. There had been a thousand changes in the design of the engines; some of the changes would have required a complete rebuilding of the plant, a complete scrapping of the old machinery, and an expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars for new equipment. He had done his best to compromise between engineering common sense and Government inefficiency, and as a result, he had kept pace with the rest of the program, worked himself into stagnation, and accomplished nothing. His aircraft contracts had lost an immense sum of money for him; and before he had regained his poise, labor had revolted, credit had tightened, competitors had cut across his path, and abruptly he had found himself in control of a crippled enterprise instead of a flourishing success. The worst of it was that he didn't own the business outright. He owned a fifth interest; and it was for the other stockholders that he was now chiefly oppressed. He was spending ten hours a day at the factory. Anything less would be treachery to those who held the Mead securities.

At the conclusion, she was both breathless and impatient. "What are you going to do about it, Mr. Mead?"

"There are only three things that can happen," he said slowly, "and one of 'em's improbable and another's impossible. The improbable one is credit. I need too much; I need over half a million dollars. In these days, it can't be borrowed except on terms that would ruin us by and by, instead of now. The second thing is to sell out to a

combination. That's what I'm working on now, and even if I put it over, I wouldn't quite get my stockholders out even. They'd get back about ninety per cent. of their investment. Still, it's the best solution there is in sight. The third thing is to let her slide. Naturally, I'm not going to do that. It's impossible. . . . The devil of it is that I haven't the energy I need to fight with. If I did, we might have an outside chance. We had a meeting the other day; people made statements that weren't true; and guesses that weren't accurate; and accusations that weren't fair; and after a while I simply didn't have the driving power to go on and keep the upper hand over the meeting. There were about twenty men there against me. I'd rather try to fight twenty men with my fists than to fight 'em with my brains — the odds would be better. You can knock a man down, but nobody in God's world ever convinced another man against his will. I'm not a quitter, but I can't put out more energy than I've got in me."

"What you ought to be doing," she said, "is concentrating on just that one problem, isn't it? Letting everything else go, and putting all your eggs into one basket?"

"There isn't a chance of it." This was the nearest that he ever came to an indictment of Amy. "I've got so many other obligations."

"I'm astonished at you! Obligations! Why don't you talk to Mrs. Mead, and explain things?"

"It's been my experience," he said, "that the less business a man takes home with him, the better off he is. Mrs. Mead's a wonderful woman, but she's like most women; she doesn't want to listen to a lot of statistics she doesn't understand. You're the abnormal person; she isn't. . . ."

She was as absorbed as though the matter touched upon her own future.

"But certainly you don't have to wear yourself out on all these silly dances, and things! That's just plain suicide. If you're