

From Now On

CHAPTER XXIII God's Chance

IT WAS a big house—like some vast, enormous deserted place. Furniture, when there were footsteps, and voices, when there were voices, seemed to echo with strange loneliness through the great halls, and up and down the wide staircase. And in the dawn, as the light came gray, the pieces of furniture swathed in their summer coverings swathed, had seemed like weird and ghostly specters inhabiting the place.

But he had dawn had come hours ago, Dave Henderson raised his head from his cupped hands. Was that the nurse now, or the doctor—that footstep up above? He listened a moment, and then his heart beat louder.

Black hours they had been—black hours for his soul, and hours full of the torment and agony of fear for Teresa.

From somewhere, almost coincident with their arrival at the house, a nurse had come. From some restaurant, a man had brought breakfast for the doctor, for the nurse, for Millman—and for him. He had eaten something—what, she didn't know. Then he had gone, and come again—the doctor was upstairs these now. Perhaps, when the doctor came down again, the doctor would allow him to see Teresa. Half an hour ago they had told him that she would get well.

There was a strange chaos in his mind. That agony of fear for her, that cold, seedy thing that had held a clutch upon his heart, was gone; but in its place had come another agony—an agony of yearning—and now he was afraid—it himself.

Millman had tried to make him go to bed and sleep. Sleep! He could not have slept! He could not even have remained still for five minutes at a stretch! He had been half mad with his anxiety for Teresa. He had wanted to be somewhere where his restless movements would not rouse Teresa in her room, and yet he could not bear to interrupt every sound and going of the doctor. And so for hours he had alternately crept up and down the lower hall here, and thrown himself upon this great, wide, sheet-covered divan where he sat now. And in those hours his mind, it seemed, had run the gamut of every emotion a human soul could know. It acted now physiologically. His heart throbbed and beat.



He didn't see the face any more now, because his own was buried in the counterpane.

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Millman made no answer.

"Five years," said Dave Henderson, "with a bad name—'Well, it's mine now. Those years were a hell, Millman—a hell—do you understand? But they would only be a little hell compared with the hell today if I couldn't get away with that packing now without, say, a policeman standing there in the doorway waiting for me."

"Dave," said Millman sharply, "what do you mean? What are you going to do?"

Dave Henderson laughed again quietly.

"I'm going upstairs—to see Teresa," he said.

"And then?" Millman asked.

But Dave Henderson scarcely heard him. He was already moving toward the stairs. The nurse's voice reached him.

"Just a few minutes," warned the nurse. "And she must not be ex- cited."

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"I get you, as we used to say 'out there,'" said Millman. "I get you, Dave. Thank God! It's two straight crooks— isn't it, Dave—two of us?"

Millman's face was blotted out—there was another face that Dave Henderson saw now through the open doorway, a face that was just in front of him, the room eyes upon his own. And then, with a smile, the smile came through a mist that had gathered in them. And then Millman's voice came softly.

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By FRANK L. PACKARD
AUTHOR OF "THE MIRACLE MAN"
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