

The Knight's Move

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I

Havelock the Dane settled himself back in his chair and set his feet firmly on the oaken table. Chantry let him do it, though some imperceptible inch of his body winced. For the oak of it was neither fumed nor golden; it was English to its ancient core, and the table had served in the refectory of monks before Henry VIII decided that monks shocked him. Naturally Chantry did not want his friends' boots havocking upon it. But more important than to possess the table was to possess it nonchalantly. He let the big man dig his heel in. Any man but Havelock the Dane would have known better. But Havelock did as he pleased, and you either gave him up or bore it. Chantry did not want to give him up.

Chantry was a feminist; a bit of an æsthete but canny at affairs; good-looking, and temperate, and less hipped on the matter of sex than feminist gentlemen are wont to be. That is to say, while he vaguely wanted *l'homme moyen sensuel* to mend his ways, he did not expect him to change fundamentally. He rather thought the women would manage all that when they got the vote. You see, he was not a socialist: only a feminist.

Havelock the Dane, on the other hand, was by no means a feminist, but was a socialist. What probably brought the two men together-- apart from their common likableness--was that each, in his way, refused to "go the whole hog." They sometimes threshed the thing out

together, unable to decide on a programme, but always united at last in their agreement that things were wrong. Havelock trusted Labor, and Chantry trusted Woman; the point was that neither trusted men like themselves, with a little money and an inherited code of honor. Havelock wanted his money taken away from him; Chantry desired his code to be trampled on by innumerable feminine feet. But each was rather helpless, for both expected these things to be done for them.

Except for this tie of ineffectuality, they had nothing special in common. Havelock's life had been adventurous in the good old-fashioned sense: the bars down and a deal of wandering. Chantry had sown so many crops of intellectual wild oats that even the people who came for subscriptions might be forgiven for thinking him a mental libertine, good for subscriptions and not much else. Between them, they boxed the compass about once a week. Havelock had more of what is known as "personality" than Chantry; Chantry more of what is known as "culture." They dovetailed, on the whole, not badly.

Havelock, this afternoon, was full of a story. Chantry wanted to listen, though he knew that he could have listened better if Havelock's heel had not been quite so ponderous on the sæcular oak. He took refuge in a cosmic point of view. That was the only point of view from which Havelock (it was, by the way, his physical type only that had caused him to be nicknamed the Dane: his ancestors had come over from England in great discomfort two centuries since), in his blonde hugeness, became negligible. You had to climb very high to see him small.

"You never did the man justice," Havelock was saying.

"Justice be hanged!" replied Chantry.

"Quite so: the feminist slogan."

"A socialist can't afford to throw stones."

The retorts were spoken sharply, on both sides. Then both men laughed. They had too often had it out seriously to mind; these little insults were mere convention.

"Get at your story," resumed Chantry. "I suppose there's a woman in it: a nasty cat invented by your own prejudices. There usually is."

"Never a woman at all. If there were, I shouldn't be asking for your opinion. My opinion, of course, is merely the rational one. I don't side-step the truth because a little drama gets in. I am appealing to you because you are the average man who hasn't seen the light. I honestly want to know what you think. There's a reason."

"What's the reason?"

"I'll tell you that later. Now, I'll tell you the story." Havelock screwed his tawny eyebrows together for a moment before plunging in.

"Humph!" he ejaculated at last. "Much good anybody is in a case like this--What did you say you thought of Ferguson?"

"I didn't think anything of Ferguson--except that he had a big brain for biology. He was a loss."

"No personal opinion?"

"I never like people who think so well of themselves as all that."

"No opinion about his death?"

"Accidental, as they said, I suppose."

"Oh, 'they said'! It was suicide, I tell you."

"Suicide? Really?" Chantry's brown eyes lighted for an instant. "Oh, poor chap; I'm sorry."

It did not occur to him immediately to ask how Havelock knew. He trusted a plain statement from Havelock.

"I'm not. Or--yes, I am. I hate to have a man inconsistent."

"It's inconsistent for any one to kill himself. But it's frequently done."

Havelock, hemming and hawing like this, was more nearly a bore than Chantry had ever known him.

"Not for Ferguson."

"Oh, well, never mind Ferguson," Chantry yawned. "Tell me some anecdote out of your tapestried past."

"I won't."

Havelock dug his heel in harder. Chantry all but told him to take his feet down, but stopped himself just in time.

"Well, go on, then," he said, "but it doesn't sound interesting. I hate all tales of suicide. And there isn't even a woman in it," he sighed maliciously.

"Oh, if it comes to that, there is."

"But you said--"

"Not in it exactly, unless you go in for *post hoc, propter hoc*."

"Oh, drive on." Chantry was pettish.

But at that point Havelock the Dane removed his feet from the refectory table. He will probably never know why Chantry, just then, began to be amiable.

"Excuse me, Havelock. Of course, whatever drove a man like Ferguson to suicide is interesting. And I may say he managed it awfully well. Not a hint, anywhere."

"Well, a scientist ought to get something out of it for himself. Ferguson certainly knew how. Can't you imagine him sitting up there, cocking his hair" (an odd phrase, but Chantry understood), "and deciding just how to circumvent the coroner? I can."

"Ferguson hadn't much imagination."

"A coroner doesn't take imagination. He takes a little hard, expert knowledge."

"I dare say." But Chantry's mind was wandering through other defiles. "Odd, that he should have snatched his life out of the very jaws of what-do-you-call-it, once, only to give it up at last, politely, of his own volition."

"You may well say it." Havelock spoke with more earnestness than he had done. "If you're not a socialist when I get through with you, Chantry, my boy--"

"Lord, Lord! don't tell me your beastly socialism is mixed up with it all! I never took to Ferguson, but he was no syndicalist. In life *or* in death, I'd swear to that."

"Ah, no. If he had been! But all I mean is that, in a properly regulated state, Ferguson's tragedy would not have occurred."

"So it was a tragedy?"

"He was a loss to the state, God knows."

Had they been speaking of anything less dignified than death and genius, Havelock might have sounded a little austere and silly. As it was--Chantry bit back, and swallowed, his censure.

"That's why I want to know what you think," went on Havelock, irrelevantly. "Whether your damned code of honor is worth Ferguson."

"It's not my damned code any more than yours," broke in Chantry.

"Yes, it is. Or, at least, we break it down at different points--theoretically. Actually, we walk all round it every day to be sure it's intact. Let's be honest."

"Honest as you like, if you'll only come to the point. Whew, but it's hot! Let's have a gin-fizz."

"You aren't serious."

Havelock seemed to try to lash himself into a rage. But he was so big that he could never have got all of himself into a rage at once. You felt that only part of him was angry--his toes, perhaps, or his complexion.

Chantry rang for ice and lemon, and took gin, sugar, and a siphon out of a carved cabinet.

"Go slow," he said. He himself was going very slow, with a beautiful crystal decanter which he set lovingly on the oaken table. "Go slow," he repeated, more easily, when he had set it down. "I can think just as well with a gin-fizz as without one. And I didn't know Ferguson well; and I didn't like him at all. I read his books, and I admired him. But he looked like the devil--*the* devil, you'll notice, not *a* devil. With a dash

of Charles I by Van Dyck. The one standing by a horse. As you say, he cocked his hair. It went into little horns, above each eyebrow. I'm sorry he's lost to the world, but it doesn't get me. He may have been a saint, for all I know; but there you are--I never cared particularly to know. I am serious. Only, somehow, it doesn't touch me."

And he proceeded to make use of crushed ice and lemon juice.

"Oh, blow all that," said Havelock the Dane finally, over the top of his glass. "I'm going to tell you, anyhow. Only I wish you would forget your prejudices. I want an opinion."

"Go on."

Chantry made himself comfortable.

II

"You remember the time when Ferguson didn't go down on the *Argentina*?"

"I do. Ferguson just wouldn't go down, you know. He'd turn up smiling, without even a chill, and meanwhile lots of good fellows would be at the bottom of the sea."

"Prejudice again," barked Havelock. "Yet in point of fact, it's perfectly true. And you would have preferred him to drown."

"I was very glad he was saved." Chantry said it in a stilted manner.

"Why?"

"Because his life was really important to the world."

Chantry might have been distributing tracts. His very voice sounded falsetto.

"Exactly. Well, that is what Ferguson thought."

"How do you know?"

"He told me."

"You must have known him well. Thank heaven, I never did."

Havelock flung out a huge hand. "Oh, get off that ridiculous animal you're riding, Chantry, and come to the point. You mean you don't think Ferguson should have admitted it?"

Chantry's tone changed. "Well, one doesn't."

The huge hand, clenched into a fist, came down on the table. The crystal bottle was too heavy to rock, but the glasses jingled and a spoon slid over the edge of its saucer.

"There it is--what I was looking for."

"What were you looking for?" Chantry's wonder was not feigned.

"For your hydra-headed prejudice. Makes me want to play Hercules."

"Oh, drop your metaphors, Havelock. Get into the game. What is it?"

"It's this: that you don't think--or affect not to think--that it's decent for a man to recognize his own worth."

Chantry did not retort. He dropped his chin on his chest and thought for a moment. Then he spoke, very quietly and apologetically.

"Well--I don't see you telling another man how wonderful you are. It isn't immoral, it simply isn't manners. And if Ferguson boasted to you that he was saved when so many went down, it was worse than bad manners. He ought to have been kicked for it. It's the kind of phenomenal luck that it would have been decent to regret."

Havelock set his massive lips firmly together. You could not say that he pursed that Cyclopean mouth.

"Ferguson did not boast. He merely told me. He was, I think, a modest man."

Incredulity beyond any power of laughter to express settled on Chantry's countenance. "Modest? And he *told* you?"

"The whole thing." Havelock's voice was heavy enough for tragedy. "Listen. Don't interrupt me once. Ferguson told me that, when the explosion came, he looked round--considered, for fully a minute, his duty. He never lost control of himself once, he said, and I believe him. The *Argentina* was a small boat, making a winter passage. There were very few cabin passengers. No second cabin, but plenty of steerage. She sailed, you remember, from Naples. He had been doing some work, some very important work, in the Aquarium. The only other person of consequence--I am speaking in the most literal and un-snobbish sense--in the first cabin, was Benson. No" (with a lifted hand), "*don't interrupt me*. Benson, as we all know, was an international figure. But Benson was getting old. His son could be trusted to carry on the House of Benson. In fact, every one suspected that the son had become more important than the old man. He had put through the last big loan while his father was taking a rest-cure in Italy. That is how Benson *père* happened to be on the *Argentina*. The newspapers never sufficiently accounted for that. A private deck on the *Schrecklichkeit* would have been more his size. Ferguson made it out: the old man got wild, suddenly, at the notion of their putting

anything through without him. He trusted his gouty bones to the *Argentina*."

"Sounds plausible, but--" Chantry broke in.

"If you interrupt again," said Havelock, "I'll hit you, with all the strength I've got."

Chantry grunted. You had to take Havelock the Dane as you found him.

"Ferguson saw the whole thing clear. Old Benson had just gone into the smoking-room. Ferguson was on the deck outside his own stateroom. The only person on board who could possibly be considered as important as Ferguson was Benson; and he had good reason to believe that every one would get on well enough without Benson. He had just time, then, to put on a life-preserver, melt into his stateroom, and get a little pile of notes, very important ones, and drop into a boat. No, don't interrupt. I know what you are going to say. 'Women and children.' What do you suppose a lot of Neapolitan peasants meant to Ferguson--or to you and me, either? He didn't do anything outrageous; he just dropped into a boat. As a result, we had the big book a year later. No" (again crushing down a gesture of Chantry's), "don't say anything about the instincts of a gentleman. If Ferguson hadn't been perfectly cool, his instincts would have governed him. He would have dashed about trying to save people, and then met the waves with a noble gesture. He had time to be reasonable; not instinctive. The world was the gainer, as he jolly well knew it would be--or where would have been the reasonableness? I don't believe Ferguson cared a hang about keeping his individual machine going for its own sake. But he knew he was a valuable person. His mind was a Kohinoor among minds. It stands to reason that you save the Kohinoor and let the little stones go. Well, that's not the story. Only I wanted to get that out of the way first, or the story

wouldn't have meant anything. Did you wish," he finished graciously, "to ask a question?"

Chantry made a violent gesture of denial. "Ask a question about a hog like that? God forbid!"

"Um-m-m." Havelock seemed to muse within himself. "You will admit that if a jury of impartial men of sense could have sat, just then, on that slanting deck, they would have agreed that Ferguson's life was worth more to the world than all the rest of the boiling put together?"

"Yes, but--"

"Well, there wasn't any jury. Ferguson had to be it. I am perfectly sure that if there had been a super-Ferguson on board, our Ferguson would have turned his hand to saving him first. In fact, I honestly believe he was sorry there hadn't been a super-Ferguson. For he had all the instincts of a gentleman; and it's never a pleasant job making your reason inhibit your instincts. You can't look at this thing perfectly straight, probably. But if you can't, who can? I don't happen to want an enlightened opinion; I've got one, right here at home. You don't care about the State: you want to put it into white petticoats and see it cross a muddy street."

"I don't wonder the socialists won't have anything to do with you."

"Because I'm not a feminist? I know. Just as the feminists won't have anything to do with you because you're so reactionary. We're both out of it. Fifty years ago; either of us could have been a real prophet, for the price of a hall and cleaning the rotten eggs off our clothes. Now we're too timid for any use. But this is a digression."

"Distinctly. Is there anything more about Ferguson?"

"I should say there was. About a year ago, he became engaged. She's a very nice girl, and I am sure you never heard of her. The engagement wasn't to be announced until just before the marriage, for family reasons of some sort--cockering the older generation somehow. I've forgotten; it's not important. But they would have been married by now, if Ferguson hadn't stepped out."

"You seem to have been very intimate with Ferguson."

"He talked to me once--just once. The girl was a distant connection of my own. I think that was why. Now I've got some more things to tell you. I've let you interrupt a good lot, and if you're through, I'd like to start in on the next lap. It isn't easy for me to tell this thing in bits. It's an effort."

Havelock the Dane set down his second emptied glass and drew a long breath. He proceeded, with quickened pace.

III

"He didn't see the girl very often. She lives at some little distance. He was busy,--you know how he worked,--and she was chained at home, more or less. Occasionally he slipped away for a week-end, to see her. One time--the last time, about two months ago--he managed to get in a whole week. It was as near happiness as Ferguson ever got, I imagine; for they were able to fix a date. Good heaven, how he loved that girl! Just before he went, he told me of the engagement. I barely knew her, but, as I said, she's some sort of kin. Then, after he came back, he sent for me to come and see him. I didn't like his cheek, but I went as though I had been a laboratory boy. I'm not like you. Ferguson always did get me. He wanted the greatest good of the greatest number. Nothing petty about him. He was a big man.

"I went, as I say. And Ferguson told me, the very first thing, that the engagement was off. He began by cocking his hair a good deal. But he

almost lost control of himself. He didn't cock it long: he ruffled it instead, with his hands. I thought he was in a queer state, for he seemed to want to give me, with his beautiful scientific precision--as if he'd been preparing a slide--the details of a country walk he and she had taken the day before he left. It began with grade-crossings, and I simply couldn't imagine what he was getting at. It wasn't his business to fight grade-crossings--though they might be a very pretty symbol for the kind of thing he was fighting, tooth and nail, all the time. I couldn't seem to see it, at first; but finally it came out. There was a grade-crossing, with a 'Look out for the Engine' sign, and there was a tow-headed infant in rags. They had noticed the infant before. It had bandy legs and granulated eyelids, and seemed to be dumb. It had started them off on eugenics. She was very keen on the subject; Ferguson, being a big scientist, had some reserves. It was a real argument.

"Then everything happened at once. Tow-head with the sore eyes rocked onto the track simultaneously with the whistle. They were about fifty yards off. Ferguson sprinted back down the hill, the girl screaming pointlessly meanwhile. There was just time--you'll have to take my word for this; Ferguson explained it all to me in the most meticulous detail, but I can't repeat that masterpiece of exposition--for Ferguson to decide. To decide again, you understand, precisely as he had decided on the *Argentina*. Rotten luck, wasn't it? He could just have flung tow-head out of the way by getting under the engine himself. He grabbed for tow-head, but he didn't roll onto the track. So tow-head was killed. If he had got there ten seconds earlier, he could have done the trick. He was ten seconds too late to save both Ferguson and tow-head. So--once more--he saved Ferguson. Do you get the situation?"

"I should say I did!" shouted Chantry. "Twice in a man's life--good Lord! I hope you walked out of his house at that point."

"I didn't. I was very much interested. And by the way, Chantry, if Ferguson had given his life for tow-head, you would have been the first man to write a pleasant little article for some damned highbrow review, to prove that it was utterly wrong that Ferguson should have exchanged his life for that of a little Polish defective. I can even see you talking about the greatest good of the greatest number. You would have loved the paradox of it; the mistaken martyr, self-preservation the greatest altruism, and all the rest of it. But because Ferguson did exactly what you would have said in your article that he ought to have done, you are in a state of virtuous chill."

"I should have written no such article. I don't see how you can be so flippant."

"Flippant--I? Have I the figure of a flippant man? Can't you see--honestly, now, can't you see?--that it was a hideous misfortune for that situation to come to Ferguson twice? Can't you see that it was about as hard luck as a man ever had? Look at it just once from his point of view."

"I can't," said Chantry frankly. "I can understand a man's being a coward, saving his own skin because he wants to. But to save his own skin on principle--humph! Talk of paradoxes: there's one for you. There's not a principle on earth that tells you to save your own life at some one's else expense. If he thought it was principle, he was the bigger defective of the two. Of course it would have been a pity; of course we should all have regretted it; but there's not a human being in this town, high or low, who wouldn't have applauded, with whatever regret--who wouldn't have said he did the only thing a self-respecting man could do. Of course it's a shame; but that is the only way the race has ever got on: by the strong, because they were strong, going under for the weak, because they were weak. Otherwise we'd all be living, to this day, in hell."

"I know; I know." Havelock's voice was touched with emotion. "That's the convention--invented by individualists, for individualists. All sorts of people would see it that way, still. But you've got more sense than most; and I will make you at least see the other point of view. Suppose Ferguson to have been a good Catholic--or a soldier in the ranks. If his confessor or his commanding officer had told him to save his own skin, you'd consider Ferguson justified; you might even consider the priest or the officer justified. The one thing you can't stand is the man's giving himself those orders. But let's not argue over it now--let's go back to the story. I'll make you 'get' Ferguson, anyhow--even if I can't make him 'get' you.

"Well, here comes in the girl."

"And you said there was no girl in it!"

Chantry could not resist that. He believed that Havelock's assertion had been made only because he didn't want the girl in it--resented her being there.

"There isn't, as I see it," replied Havelock the Dane quietly. "From my point of view, the story is over. Ferguson's decision: that is the whole thing--made more interesting, more valuable, because the repetition of the thing proves beyond a doubt that he acted on principle, not on impulse. If he had flung himself into the life-boat because he was a coward, he would have been ashamed of it; and whatever he might have done afterwards, he would never have done that thing again. He would have been sensitive: not saving his own life would have turned into an obsession with him. But there is left, I admit, the murder. And murders always take the public. So I'll give you the murder--though it throws no light on Ferguson, who is the only thing in the whole accursed affair that really counts."

"The murder? I don't see--unless you mean the murdering of the tow-headed child."

"I mean the murder of Ferguson by the girl he loved."

"You said 'suicide' a little while ago," panted Chantry.

"Technically, yes. She was a hundred miles away when it happened. But she did it just the same. Oh, I suppose I've got to tell you, as Ferguson told me."

"Did he tell you he was going to kill himself?" Chantry's voice was sharp.

"He did not. Ferguson wasn't a fool. But it was plain as day to me after it happened, that he had done it himself."

"How--"

"I'm telling you this, am I not? Let me tell it, then. The thing happened in no time, of course. The girl got over screaming, and ran down to the track, frightened out of her wits. The train managed to stop, about twice its own length farther down, round a bend in the track, and the conductor and brakeman came running back. The mother came out of her hovel, carrying twins. The--the--thing was on the track, across the rails. It was a beastly mess, and Ferguson got the girl away; set her down to cry in a pasture, and then went back and helped out, and gave his testimony, and left money, a lot of it, with the mother, and--all the rest. You can imagine it. No one there considered that Ferguson ought to have saved the child; no one but Ferguson dreamed that he could have. Indeed, an ordinary man, in Ferguson's place, wouldn't have supposed he could. It was only that brain, working like lightning, working as no plain man's could, that had made the calculation and *seen*. There were no preliminary seconds lost in surprise or shock, you see. Ferguson's mind hadn't been jarred from its pace for an instant. The thing had happened too quickly for any one--except Ferguson--to

understand what was going on. Therefore he ought to have laid that super-normal brain under the wheels, of course!

"Ferguson was so sane, himself, that he couldn't understand, even after he had been engaged six months, our little everyday madneses. It never occurred to him, when he got back to the girl and she began all sorts of hysterical questions, not to answer them straight. It was by way of describing the event simply, that he informed her that he would just have had time to pull the creature out, but not enough to pull himself back afterwards. Ferguson was used to calculating things in millionths of an inch; she wasn't. I dare say the single second that had given Ferguson time to turn round in his mind, she conceived of as a minute, at least. It would have taken her a week to turn round in her own mind, no doubt--a month, a year, perhaps. How do I know? But she got the essential fact: that Ferguson had made a choice. Then she rounded on him. It would have killed her to lose him, but she would rather have lost him than to see him standing before her, etc., etc. Ferguson quoted a lot of her talk straight to me, and I can remember it; but you needn't ask me to soil my mouth with it. 'And half an hour before, she had been saying with a good deal of heat that that little runt ought never to have been born, and that if we had decent laws it never would have been allowed to live.'" Ferguson said that to me, with a kind of bewilderment. You see, he had made the mistake of taking that little fool seriously. Well, he loved her. You can't go below that: that's rock-bottom. Ferguson couldn't dig any deeper down for his way out. There *was* no deeper down.

"Apparently Ferguson still thought he could argue it out with her. She so believed in eugenics, you see--a very radical, compared with Ferguson. It was she who had had no doubt about tow-head. And the love-part of it seemed to him fixed: it didn't occur to him that that was debatable. So he stuck to something that could be discussed. Then--and this was his moment of exceeding folly--he caught at the old episode of the *Argentina*. *That* had nothing to do with her present state of shock. She had seen tow-head; but she hadn't seen the sprinkled

Mediterranean. And she had accepted that. At least, she had spoken of his survival as though it had been one of the few times when God had done precisely the right thing. So he took that to explain with. The fool! The reasonable fool!

"Then--oh, then she went wild. (Yet she must have known there were a thousand chances on the *Argentina* for him to throw his life away, and precious few to save it.) She backed up against a tree and stretched her arms out like this"--Havelock made a clumsy stage-gesture of aversion from Chantry, the villain. "And for an instant he thought she was afraid of a Jersey cow that had come up to take part in the discussion. So he threw a twig at its nose."

IV

Chantry's wonder grew, swelled, and burst.

"Do you mean to say that that safety-deposit vault of a Ferguson told you all this?"

"As I am telling it to you. Only much more detail, of course--and much, much faster. It wasn't like a story at all: it was like--like a hemorrhage. I didn't interrupt him as you've been interrupting me. Well, the upshot of it was that she spurned him quite in the grand manner. She found the opposites of all the nice things she had been saying for six months, and said them. And Ferguson--your cocky Ferguson--stood and listened, until she had talked herself out, and then went away. He never saw her again; and when he sent for me, he had made up his mind that she never intended to take any of it back. So he stepped out, I tell you."

"As hard hit as that," Chantry mused.

"Just as hard hit as that. Ferguson had had no previous affairs; she was very literally the one woman; and he managed, at forty, to combine the illusions of the boy of twenty and the man of sixty."

"But if he thought he was so precious to the world, wasn't it more than ever his duty to preserve his existence? He could see other people die in his place, but he couldn't see himself bucking up against a broken heart. Isn't that what the strong man does? Lives out his life when he doesn't at all like the look of it? Say what you like, he was a coward, Havelock--at the last, anyhow."

"I won't ask for your opinion just yet, thank you. Perhaps if Ferguson had been sure he would ever do good work again, he wouldn't have taken himself off. That might have held him. He might have stuck by on the chance. But I doubt it. Don't you see? He loved the girl too much."

"Thought he couldn't live without her," snorted Chantry.

"Oh, no--not that. But if she was right, he was the meanest skunk alive. He owed the world at least two deaths, so to speak. The only approach you can make to dying twice is to die in your prime, of your own volition." Havelock spoke very slowly. "At least, that's the way I've worked it out. He didn't say so. He was careful as a cat."

"You think"--Chantry leaned forward, very eager at last--"that he decided she was right? That I'm right--that we're all of us right?"

Havelock the Dane bowed his head in his huge hands. "No. If you ask me, I think he kept his own opinion untarnished to the end. When I told him I thought he was right, he just nodded, as if one took that for granted. But it didn't matter to him. I am pretty sure that he cared only what *she* thought."

"If he didn't agree with her? And if she had treated him like a criminal? He must have despised her, in that case."

"He never said one word of her--bar quoting some of *her* words--that wasn't utterly gentle. You could see that he loved her with his whole soul. And--it's my belief--he gave her the benefit of the doubt. In killing himself, he acted on the hypothesis that she had been right. It was the one thing he could do for her."

"But if no one except you thinks it was suicide--and you can't prove it--"

"Oh, he had to take that chance--the chance of her never knowing--or else create a scandal. And that would have been very hard on her and on his family. But there were straws she could easily clutch at--as I have clutched at them. The perfect order in which everything happened to be left--even the last notes he had made. His laboratory was a scientist's paradise, they tell me. And the will, made after she threw him over, leaving everything to her. Not a letter unanswered, all little bills paid, and little debts liquidated. He came as near suggesting it as he could, in decency. But I dare say she will never guess it."

"Then what did it profit him?"

"It didn't profit him, in your sense. He took a very long chance on her guessing. That wasn't what concerned him."

"I hope she will never guess, anyhow. It would ruin her life, to no good end."

"Oh, no." Havelock was firm. "I doubt if she would take it that way. If she grasped it at all, she'd believe he thought her right. And if he thought her right, of course he wouldn't want to live, would he? She would never think he killed himself simply for love of her."

"Why not?"

"Well, she wouldn't? She wouldn't be able to conceive of Ferguson's killing himself merely for that--with *his* notions about survival."

"As he did."

"As he did--and didn't."

"Ah, she'd scarcely refine on it as you are doing, Havelock. You're amazing."

"Well, he certainly never expected her to know that he did it himself. If he had been the sort of weakling that dies because he can't have a particular woman, he'd have been also the sort of weakling that leaves a letter explaining."

"What then did he die for? You'll have to explain to me. Not because he couldn't have her; not because he felt guilty. Why, then? You haven't left him a motive."

"Oh, haven't I? The most beautiful motive in the whole world, my dear fellow. A motive that puts all your little simple motives in the shade."

"Well, what?"

"Don't you see? Why, I told you. He simply assumed, for all practical purposes, that she had been right. He gave himself the fate he knew she considered him to deserve. He preferred--loving her as he did--to do what she would have had him do. He knew she was wrong; but he knew also that she was made that way, that she would never be right. And he took her for what she was, and loved her as she was. His love--don't you see?--was too big. He couldn't revolt from her: she had the whole of him--except, perhaps, his excellent judgment. He couldn't

drag about a life which she felt that way about. He destroyed it, as he would have destroyed anything she found loathsome. He was merely justifying himself to his love. He couldn't hope she would know. Nor, I believe, could he have lied to her. That is, he couldn't have admitted in words that she was right, when he felt her so absolutely wrong; but he could make that magnificent silent act of faith."

Chantry still held out. "I don't believe he did it. I hold with the coroner."

"I don't. He came as near telling me as he could without making me an accessory before the fact. There were none of the loose ends that the most orderly man would leave if he died suddenly. Take my word for it, old man."

A long look passed between them. Each seemed to be trying to find out with his eyes something that words had not helped him to.

Finally Chantry protested once more. "But Ferguson couldn't love like that."

Havelock the Dane laid one hand on the arm of Chantry's chair and spoke sternly. "He not only could, but did. And there I am a better authority than you. Think what you please, but I will not have that fact challenged. Perhaps you could count up on your fingers the women who are loved like that; but, anyhow, she was. My second cousin once removed, damn her!" He ended with a vicious twang.

"And now"--Havelock rose--"I'd like your opinion."

"About what?"

"Well, can't you see the beautiful sanity of Ferguson?"

"No, I can't," snapped Chantry. "I think he was wrong, both in the beginning and in the end. But I will admit he was not a coward. I respect him, but I do not think, at any point, he was right--except perhaps in 'doing' the coroner."

"That settles it, then," said Havelock. And he started towards the door.

"Settles what, in heaven's name?"

"What I came to have settled. I shan't tell her. If I could have got one other decent citizen--and I confess you were my only chance--to agree with me that Ferguson was right,--right about his fellow passengers on the *Argentina*, right about tow-head on the track,--I'd have gone to her, I think. I'd rather like to ruin her life, if I could."

A great conviction approached Chantry just then. He felt the rush of it through his brain.

"No," he cried. "Ferguson loved her too much. He wouldn't like that--not as you'd put it to her."

Havelock thought a moment. "No," he said in turn; but his "no" was very humble. "He wouldn't. I shall never do it. But, my God, how I wanted to!"

"And I'll tell you another thing, too." Chantry's tone was curious. "You may agree with Ferguson all you like; you may admire him as much as you say; but you, Havelock, would never have done what he did. Not even"--he lifted a hand against interruption--"if you knew you had the brain you think Ferguson had. You'd have been at the bottom of the sea, or under the engine wheels, and you know it."

He folded his arms with a hint of truculence.

But Havelock the Dane, to Chantry's surprise, was meek. "Yes," he said, "I know it. Now let me out of here."

"Well, then,"--Chantry's voice rang out triumphant,--"what does that prove?"

"Prove?" Havelock's great fist crashed down on the table. "It proves that Ferguson's a better man than either of us. I can think straight, but he had the sand to act straight. You haven't even the sand to think straight. You and your reactionary rot! The world's moving, Chantry. Ferguson was ahead of it, beckoning. You're an ant that got caught in the machinery, I shouldn't wonder."

"Oh, stow the rhetoric! We simply don't agree. It's happened before." Chantry laughed scornfully. "I tell you I respect him; but God Almighty wouldn't make me agree with him."

"You're too mediæval by half," Havelock mused. "Now, Ferguson was a knight of the future--a knight of Humanity."

"Don't!" shouted Chantry. His nerves were beginning to feel the strain. "Leave chivalry out of it. The *Argentina* business may or may not have been wisdom, but it certainly wasn't cricket."

"No," said Havelock. "Chess, rather. The game where chance hasn't a show--the game of the intelligent future. That very irregular and disconcerting move of his.... And he got taken, you might say. She's an irresponsible beast, your queen."

"Drop it, will you!" Then Chantry pulled himself together, a little ashamed. "It's fearfully late. Better stop and dine."

"No, thanks." The big man opened the door of the room and rested a foot on the threshold. "I feel like dining with some one who appreciates Ferguson."

"I don't know where you'll find him." Chantry smiled and shook hands.

"Oh, I carry him about with me. Good-night," said Havelock the Dane.