

But some impatient clerk, who had waited over-long for change, was rapping sharply on the wire away down the aisle, and Edith started out of forgetfulness and turned back to her work.

'Oh, he will know now!' she whispered again, as her fingers flew in their accustomed duties. 'He will have to admit that he isn't infallible. It's his turn now.' And as her eyes chanced to fall again on the memorandum slip he had given her, the last spark of stirring sympathy for him was quenched.

McGowan was very quiet when he returned from Mr. Swain's private office, so quiet, indeed, that Edith was tempted to look around at him, but she resisted the impulse. To one thing she had made up her mind, and that was, that she would not volunteer or in any way suggest the possibility that she might help him to search the books for the discrepancy. It was not improbable that he might call upon her for aid, and she was half-resolved to refuse point-blank if he did.

Rather to her secret chagrin, however, the old bookkeeper made no request of her. He buried himself in his work at once, without a hint of what had passed between him and the head of the firm; and he kept close to his task all the morning. When the noon hour released Edith, and she did throw a casual glance his way, she found nothing remarkable in his appearance or attitude at his desk.

For some reason unexplained, she felt a curious inclination to reticence, however, among other employees of the store, who knew McGowan and his ways, and she told no one of the events of the morning. When she returned from lunch, and saw the old man still bent over the books, with the light of the afternoon sun showing the pallor and weariness of his face, she was not sorry for her silence.

She was not comfortable. She admitted as much to herself before the afternoon had passed. The consciousness of the silent old man working there behind her—over what she knew from experience to be nerve-racking, heart-breaking labour—began to get on her nerves. She almost resented his silence and his persistent determination not to ask for help, when help would have relieved him of so much.

As the hours crept away, and her own work tired her, the thought of the heavy weariness that must be his, weighed more upon her. Still she hardened her heart to the promptings of a generous nature, and when closing-time came, she ignored the fact that he turned on the light above his desk, and settled himself, as if to continue his labours indefinitely.

But when Edith opened the door of the little central office at the store the next morning, and saw the bent figure of McGowan still in his chair, with the light still burning above him, she stopped short in the doorway, shocked and startled.

Certainly, she had no conception of what the man's mistake meant to him or the firm, if it justified this. She had thought of the shortage as a mere error in figuring, which would require hard work to find, perhaps, but which was not of the vital import this seemed to indicate; and the magnitude of the matter suddenly made her own little anger and the reasons for it, seem trivial and paltry and childish. She could almost have cried out with sudden shame, when McGowan turned sunken, bloodshot eyes upon her, and she could see exhaustion written on the whitened skin about his mouth. She crossed straight to him, and spoke quickly, with half-frightened feeling, her readiness to help him.

But he turned from her coldly. He seemed utterly wearied, almost at the limit of his strength, indeed, but he pushed back the chair and walked away from her and out of the office, without other reply than a shake of his head.

The girl was sick with the sense of rebuff and rebuke, but she had little time to indulge the feelings. The tasks of the day began at once, and when the bookkeeper returned to his place, she did not have the courage to look at him again.

McGowan was far less quiet this morning than he had been the long day before. He was in and out of his chair, he walked the floor at times, and once he left the office and was gone for more than half an hour. Whether he had breakfasted or not, Edith could not guess, but she saw that he remained in his place at noon. And then, in the afternoon, the hours dragged again, till she was ready to drop with nervousness and apprehension. The tired man worked on. Once he dozed in his chair and nearly fell to the floor; and when she impulsively offered him her aid he almost snarled his refusal.

The girl was more alarmed than angry at last. One glance into the man's face would have shown any one that he was taxing his strength to the danger-

line, and the look in his eyes was so disheartened that it seemed altogether that of despair. Anxiety divided Edith's mind with growing shame and regret for the bitter feelings she had cherished, but she did not dare to approach him again with the proffer of her assistance.

Neither did she dare to leave the old bookkeeper alone in the office again, for another night of work. She must stay, and she must devise means to stop or to help him. An event which to her, had appeared to afford only a wholesome lesson for an overbearing, intolerant old man, was becoming something very like a tragedy to his overwrought mind. She felt now that if anything should happen—if he should break down—she herself would be responsible. The sudden realization that he was old, almost feeble, in fact, that he was probably now occupying the last position he could ever hold, and that he was fighting for it, came to her. Whether the case was as serious as he thought or not, he was in great trouble, and shame swept over her that she had let a childish anger blind her to his real distress.

Her alarm grew swiftly, as the minutes before closing-time dragged away, but before she realised it, the store had emptied itself of its busy workers, and she and he were almost alone in the big, silent place. She stood by her chair, undecided, helpless. He sat in his, wearily working away, the thin line of his lips set hard, his eyes half-covered by the heavy lids, his shoulders bowed down as if under something heavier than weariness.

Tears sprang into Edith's eyes, and with them came determination to compel the man, to stop and rest. He must have been at work nearly, if not quite thirty hours now, and it was not within belief that he could continue much longer. As if to confirm her fears, too, at this very moment the old bookkeeper stopped his work, and with a pitiful movement of pain, slowly covered his eyes with trembling hands. Then his head sank forward on his desk, and his figure seemed to wilt into limp unconsciousness.

Edith never forgot the stab of self-accusation that went through her with her wild fear. With a cry half of alarm, half of pain, she ran to him, and tried to raise his head, but as she touched him, he slipped down in his chair, and on the blinding white page of ledger she saw the dark red stain of blood.

After that things were not very clear for a time. Edith knew that Farley, the watchman in the store, attracted by her cries came rushing in, and that together they laid McGowan's light body upon the floor. Farley loosened the neck of the old man's shirt, and dashed water in his face, assuring the girl that he had only fainted, and that it was common enough for men overworked at the desk, to have a bleeding of the nose.

But to Edith, the horror of it was not relieved till she saw the old man's eye-lids flutter; and then she fell into such a passion of hysterical crying that Farley left McGowan to assist her. It was not till the watchman had worked over both for a lively five minutes, that he had them sitting up and able to listen to a sound rating, which he deemed wholesome.

Edith found herself wrapped in McGowan's old office coat, which had hung upon the chair, and inside of it she shivered and shuddered miserably. But when she realised that the old man was conscious again, and that he was looking at her across the corner of the desk, even though his eyes still seemed to have some of the dim of weakness in them, she was abashed, and bowed her head.

Deep in one of the pockets of the bookkeeper's old coat, into which she had thrust her hands, her fingers were folding and crumpling a crisp paper they had found there, and quite mechanically she drew it out and looked at it. And then she suddenly gasped and stared, and caught hold of it with both hands, and cried out aloud with astonished happiness, for the paper was a cheque—a cheque for two thousand dollars, drawn by a well-known customer of the house, and dated three days back. And in one instant it solved completely the mystery of the shortage in the cash.

Together the girl and the man examined it excitedly and traced its story. 'I suppose I entered it, and then was interrupted, so that I slipped it into the pocket instead of into the drawer,' said McGowan.

Then he paused and looked up at her, and there was a little return of hardness in his voice as he scanned her tear-stained face. 'But I suppose you're satisfied now,' he added, 'and revenge is sweet.'

Edith choked suddenly. 'Oh, no, she whispered, it isn't! And please forgive me because I did think so before.'

And then McGowan did a gracious thing. He