
FREDERICK ORIN BARTLETT
THE SEVENTH NOON

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The Seventh Noon

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CHAPTER I

The Black Dog

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"The right to die?"

Professor Barstow, with a perplexed scowl ruffling the barbette of gray hairs above his keen eyes, shook his head and turning from the young man whose long legs extended over the end of the lean sofa upon which he sprawled in one corner of the laboratory, held the test-tube, which he had been studying abstractedly, up to the light. The flickering gas was not good for delicate work, and it was only lately that Barstow, spurred on by a glimpse of the end to a long series of experiments, had attempted anything after dark. He squinted thoughtfully at the yellow fluid in the tube and then, resuming his discussion, declared emphatically,

"We have no such right, Peter! You 're wrong. I don't know where, because you put it too cleverly for me. But I know you 're dead wrong—even if your confounded old theories are right, even if your deductions are sound. You 're wrong where you bring up."

"Man dear," answered the other gently, "you are too good a scientist to reason so. That is purely feminine logic."

"I am too good a scientist to believe that anything so complex as human life was meant to be wasted in a scheme where not so much as an atom is lost. Bah, your liver is asleep! Too much work—too much work! The black dog has pounced upon your shoulders!"

"I never had an attack of the blues or anything similar in my life, Barstow," Donaldson denied quietly. "You 'll propose smelling salts next."

"Then what the devil does ail you?"

"Nothing ails me. Can't a man have a few theories without the aid of liver complaint?"

"Not that kind. They don't go with a sound constitution. When a man begins to talk of finding no use for life, he 's either a coward or sick. And—I know you 're not a coward, Peter."

The man on the couch turned uneasily.

"Nor sick either. You are as stubborn and narrow as an old woman, Barstow," he complained.

"Living is n't a matter of courage, physical or moral. It suits you—it doesn't happen to suit me, but that doesn't mean that you are well and moral while I 'm sick and a coward. My difficulty is simple—clear; I haven't the material means to get out of life what I want. I 'll admit that I might get it by working longer, but I should have to work so many years in my own way that there would n't in the end be enough of me left to enjoy the reward. Now, if I don't like that proposition, who the devil is to criticize me for not accepting it?"

"It's quitting not to stay."

"It would be if we elected to come. We don't. Moreover, my case is simplified by circumstances—no one is dependent upon me either directly or indirectly. I have no relatives—few friends. These, like you, would call me names for a minute after I 'd gone and then forget."

"You 're talking beautiful nonsense," observed Barstow.

"Schopenhauer says—"

"Damn your barbaric pessimists and all their hungry tribe!"

Donaldson smiled a trifle condescendingly.

"What's the use of talking to you when you 'll not admit a sound deduction? And yet, if I said you don't know what results when you put together two known chemicals, you 'd —"

There was a look in Barstow's face that checked Donaldson,—a look of worried recollection.

"I 'd say nothing," he asserted earnestly, "because I *don't* always know."

For a moment his fingers fluttered over the medley of bottles upon the shelves before him. They paused over a small vial containing a brilliant scarlet liquid. He picked it out and held it to the light.

"See this?" he asked.

Donaldson nodded indifferently.

"It is a case in point. Theoretically I should have here the innocuous union of three harmless chemicals; as a matter of fact I had occasion to experiment with it and learned that I had innocently produced a vicious and unheard-of poison. The stuff is of no use. It is one of those things a man occasionally stumbles upon in this work,—better forgotten. How do I account for it? I don't. Even in science there is always the unknown element which comes in and plays the devil with results."

"But according to your no-waste theory, even this discovery ought to have some use," commented Donaldson with a smile.

"Well," drawled the chemist whimsically, "perhaps it has; it makes murder very simple for the laity."

"How?"

Barstow turned back to his test-tube, relieved that the conversation had taken another turn.

"Because of the slowness with which it works. It requires seven days for the system to assimilate it and yet the stomach stubbornly retains it all this while. It is impossible to eliminate it from the body once it is swallowed. It produces no symptoms and leaves no evidence. There is no antidote. In the end it paralyzes the heart—swiftly, silently, surely."

Donaldson sat up.

"Any pain?" he inquired.

"None."

Barstow ran his finger over a calendar on the wall. Then he glanced at his watch.

"Stay a little while longer and you can see for yourself how it works. I am making a final demonstration of its properties."

Barstow stepped into the next room. He was gone five minutes and returned with a scrawny bull terrier scrambling at his heels. The little brute, overjoyed at his release, frisked across the floor, clumsily tumbling over his own feet, and sniffed as an overture of friendship at Donaldson's low shoes. Then wagging his feeble tail he lifted his head and patiently blinked moist eyes awaiting a verdict. The young man stooped and scratched behind its ears, the dog holding his head sideways and pressing against his ankles. He looked like a dog of the streets, but in his eyes there was

the dumb appreciation of human sympathy which neutralizes breeding and blood. As Barstow returned to his work, the pup followed after him in a series of awkward bounds.

"Poor little pup," murmured Donaldson, sympathetically leaning forward with his arms upon his knees. "What's his name?"

"Sandy. But he 's a lucky little pup according to you; within an hour by the clock he ought to be dead."

"Dead?"

"If my poison works. It was seven days ago to-night that I gave him a dose."

Donaldson's brows contracted. He was big-hearted. This seemed a cruel thing to do. He whistled to the pup and called him by name, "Sandy, Sandy." But the dog only wagged his tail in response and snuggled with brute confidence closer to his master. Donaldson snapped his fingers coaxingly, leaning far over towards him. Reluctantly, at a nod from Barstow, the dog crept belly to the ground across the room. Donaldson picked up the trembling terrier and settling him into his lap passed his hand thoughtfully over the warm smooth sides where he could feel the heart pounding sturdily.

From the dog, Donaldson lifted his eyes to Barstow's back. They were dark brown eyes, set deep below a square forehead. His head, too, was square and drooped a bit between loose shoulders. He smiled to himself at some passing thought and the smile cast a pleasant softness over features which at rest appeared rather angular and decidedly intense. The mouth was large and the irregular

teeth were white as a hound's. His black hair was cut short and at the temples was turning gray, although he had not yet reached thirty. It was an eager face, a strong face. It hardened to granite over life in the abstract and softened to the feminine before concrete examples of it.

"It is a bit of a paradox," he resumed, "that so harmless a creature as you, Barstow, should stumble upon so deadly an agent. What do you call it?"

"I have n't reported it yet. I don't know as I care to have my name coupled with it in these days of newspaper notoriety—even though it may be my one bid for fame."

Donaldson drew a package of Durham from his pocket and fumbled around until he found a loose paper. He deftly rolled a cigarette, his long fingers moving with the dexterity of a pianist. He smoked a moment in silence, exhaling the smoke thoughtfully with his eyes towards the ceiling. The dog, his neck outstretched on Donaldson's knee, blinked sleepily across the room at his master. The gas, blown about by drafts from the open window, threw grotesque dancing shadows upon the stained, worn boards of the floor. Finally Donaldson burst out, ever recurring to the one subject like a man anxious to defend himself,

"Barstow, I tell you that merely to cling to existence is not an act in itself either righteous or courageous. If we owe obligations to individuals we should pay them to the last cent. If we owe obligations to society, we should pay those, too,—just as we pay our poll tax. But life is a straight business proposition—pay in some form for what you get out of it. There are no individuals in my life, as I said. And what do I owe society? Society does not like what I offer—

the best of me—and will not give me what I want—the best of *it*. Very well, to the devil with society. Our mutual obligations are cancelled."

Barstow, still busy with his work, shook his head.

"You come out wrong every time," he insisted. "You don't seem to get at the opportunities there are in just living."

The young man took a long breath.

"So?" he demanded between half closed teeth. "No?" he challenged with bitter intensity. "You are wrong; I know all that it is possible for life to mean! That's the trouble. Oh, I know clear to my parched soul! I was made to live, Barstow, —made to live life to its fullest! There isn't a bit of it I don't love,—love too well to be content much longer to play the galley slave in it. To live is to be free. I love the blue sky above until I ache to madness that I cannot live under it; I love the trees and grasses, the oceans, the forests and the denizens of the forests; I love men and women; I love the press of crowds, the clamor of men; I love silks and beautiful paintings and clean white linen and flowers; I love good food, good clothes, good wine, good music, good sermons, and good books. All—all it is within me to love and to desire mightily. How I want those things—not morbidly—but because I have five good senses and God knows how many more; because I was *made* to have those things!"

"Then why don't you keep after them?" demanded Barstow coldly.

"Because the price of them is so much of my soul and body that I 'd have nothing left with which to enjoy them afterwards. You can't get those things honestly in time to enjoy them, in one generation. You can't get them at all,

unless you sell the best part of you as you did when you came to the Gordon Chemical Company. Oh Lord, Barstow, how came you to forget all the dreams we used to dream?"

Barstow turned quickly. There was the look upon his face as of a man who presses back a little. For a moment he appeared pained. But he answered steadily,

"I have other dreams now, saner dreams."

"Saner dreams? What are your saner dreams but less troublesome dreams,—lazier dreams? Dreams that fit into things as they are instead of demanding things as they should be? You sleep o' nights now; you sleep snugly, you tread safely about the cage they trapped you into."

"Then let me alone there. Don't—don't poke me up."

Donaldson snapped away his cigarette.

"No. Why should I? But I 'll have none of it. That damned Barnum, 'Society,' shall not catch me and trim my claws and file my teeth."

He laughed to himself, his lips drawn back a little, rubbing behind the pup's ears. The dog moved sleepily.

"Barstow," he continued more calmly, "this is n't a whine. I 'm not discouraged—it is n't that. I 'm not frightened, nor despondent, nor worried, understand. I know that things will come out all right by the time I 'm fifty, but I shall then be fifty. I 'd like a taste of the jungle now—a week or two of roaming free, of sprawling in the sunshine, of drinking at the living river, of rolling under the blue sky. I 'd like to slash around uncurbed outside the pale a little. I 'd like to do it while I 'm young and strong,—I 'd like to do it now."

"In brief," suggested Barstow, "you desire money."

"Enough so that I might forget there was such a thing."

"Well, you 'll have to sell something of yourself to get it."

"Just so. I won't and there you are. You see I don't fit."

Donaldson paused a moment and then went on.

"You know something of my story, you alone of all this grinding city. You saw me in college and in the law school, where on a coolie diet I did a man's work. But even you don't know how close to hard pan I was during those seven years,—down to crackers and water for weeks at a time."

"You don't mean to say you went hungry?"

"Hungry?" laughed Donaldson. "Man dear, there were days when I was starving! I 've been to classes when I was so weak I could n't push my pencil. I was hungry, and cold, and lonesome, but at that time I had my good warm, well-fed dreams, so I did n't mind so much. And always I thought it would be better next year, but it was n't. None of the things that come to some men fell to me; it continued the same old pitiless grind until I began to expect it. Then I said to myself that it would be different when I got through. But it was n't. I finished, and you are the only pleasant recollection I have of all that past. You used to let me sit by your fire and now and then you brought out cake they had sent you from home."

"Good Lord," groaned Barstow, "why did n't you let a fellow know?"

"Why should I let you know? It was my fight. But I 've watched by the hour your every move about the room, so hungry that my pulse increased or decreased as you neared or retreated from the closet where you kept that cake. I 'll admit that this condition was a good deal my fault,—I had a cursed false pride that forbade my doing for grub what

some of the fellows did. Then, too, I was an optimist; it was coming out all right in the end. But it did n't and it has n't."

Donaldson paused.

"Am I boring you, old man?"

"No! No! Go on. But if I had suspected—"

"You could not then have been the friend you were to me, —I 'd have cut you dead. And understand, I 'm not recalling this now for the purpose of exciting sympathy. I don't deserve sympathy; I went my own gait and cheerfully paid the cost, content with my dreams of the future. I would n't sell one whit of myself. I wouldn't sacrifice one extravagant belief. I would n't compromise. And I 'm glad I did n't.

"When I finished my course you lost sight of me, but it was the same old thing over again. I refused to accept a position in a law office, because I would n't be fettered. I had certain definite notions of how a law practice ought to be conducted,—of certain things a decent man ought not to do. This in turn barred me from a job offered by a street railway company and another by a promoting syndicate. I took a room and waited. It has been a long wait, Barstow, a bitter long wait. Four barren years have gone. I have been hungry again; I have gone on wearing second-hand clothes; I have slept in second-class surroundings; my life has resembled life about as much as the naked trees in the Fall resemble those in June. I have existed after a fashion and learned that if I skimp and drudge and save for twenty years I can then begin to do the things I wish to do. But not before,—not before without compromise. And I 've had enough of the will o' the wisp Future, enough of the shadowy to-morrows. I 've saved a few hundreds and had a

few hundreds left me recently by the last relative I had on earth. I 'd like to take this and squander it—live a space."

"Why don't you?"

"It's the curse of coming back, and the mere fact that your heart continues to tick forces that upon you. There is only one way—one way to dodge the mortgage I would place upon my Future by spending these savings."

"And that?"

"Not to let the heart tick on; to bar the future."

Donaldson moved a bit uneasily. As he did so the pup lost his balance and fell to the floor. The little fellow struck upon his side but instantly regained his feet, blinking sleepily at the light. Barstow took out his watch and squatting nearer him studied him with interest.

Suddenly the dog's legs crumpled beneath him. He tried to stand, to make his way to his master, but instantly toppled over on his side. Donaldson reached for him. That which he lifted was like a limp glove. He drew back from it in horror, glancing up at Barstow.

"You see," exclaimed the chemist with evident satisfaction, "almost to the hour!"

"But he isn't—"

"Dead!"

"Poor Sandy! Poor Sandy!"

Donaldson gingerly passed his fingers over the dog's hair. He was curiously unconvinced. There was no responsive lift of the head, no contented wagging of the tail, but that was the only difference. A moment ago the dog had been asleep for an hour; now he was asleep for an eternity. That was the only difference.

"Well," reflected Barstow, "Sandy had his week; beefsteak, bread and milk, all he could eat."

"Is n't that better than being still alive,—hungry in the gutters?"

"God knows," answered Barstow solemnly, as he picked up the body and carried it into the next room. "You see what is left."

As Barstow went out, Donaldson crossed to the chemist's desk. He fumbled nervously among the bottles until he found the little vial Barstow had pointed out. He had just time to thrust this into his pocket and reseat himself before Barstow returned. At the same moment there was a firm but decidedly feminine knock upon the outer door. The chemist seemed to recognize it, for instead of his usual impatient shout he went to the door and opened it. And yet, when the feeble light revealed his visitor he evinced surprise.

"What, you, Miss Arsdale?"

"What, you, Miss Arsdale?"

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"*What, you, Miss Arsdale?*"

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"Yes, Professor," she answered, slightly out of breath. "I thought that if I hurried I might possibly find you here. I am all out of my brother's medicine and I did not dare wait until to-morrow."

"I 'm glad you did n't," he responded heartily. "If you will sit down a moment I will prepare it."

Donaldson glanced up, irritated to think he had not left earlier and so escaped the inevitable introduction. He saw a young woman of perhaps twenty-two or three, and then—the young woman's eyes. They were dark, but not black, a sort of silver black like gun metal. They were, he noted instantly, apparently more mature than the rest of her features, as is sometimes true when the soul grows out of proportion to the years. Her hair was of a reddish brown; brown in the shadows, a golden red as she stood beneath the gas-jet. She was a little below medium height, rather slight, and was dressed in a dark blue pongee suit, the coat of which reached to her ankles. One might expect most anything of her, thought Donaldson, child or woman. It would no more surprise one to see her in tears over a trifle than standing firm in a crisis; bending over a wisp of embroidery, or driving a sixty horse-power automobile. Of one thing Donaldson thought he could be sure; that whatever she did she would do with all her heart.

These and many other fugitive thoughts passed through Donaldson's brain during the few minutes he was left here alone with her. What was said he could not remember a minute afterwards; something of the night, something of the brilliant reflections of the gas-light in the varicolored bottles, something of the approaching summer. Her thoughts seemed to be as far removed from this small room as were his own.

"Your patient is better?" Barstow inquired, when he returned with the package.

Her face lightened instantly.

"Yes," she answered, "much better."

"Good." He added, "I should n't think it safe for you to be out alone at night. Have n't there been a good many highway robberies recently in your neighborhood?"

"You have heard?"

"It would be difficult to listen to the newsboys and not hear that. The last one, a week ago, made the fourth, didn't it?"

"I don't know. I seldom read the papers. They are too horrible."

"I will gladly escort you if—"

"I could n't think of troubling you," she protested, starting at once for the door. "I 'm in the machine, so I 'm quite safe. Good night."

With a nod and smile to both men she went out.

Donaldson himself prepared to go at once.

"Well, old man," he apologized nervously to the chemist, "pardon me for boring you so long. It is bad taste I know for a man to air such views as mine, but it has done me good."

"Take my advice and forget them yourself. Go into the country. Loaf a little in the sunshine. Stay a week. I 'm going off for a while myself."

"You leave—"

"Within a few days, possibly. I can't tell."

"Well, s' long and a pleasant trip to you."

Donaldson gripped the older man's hand. The latter gazed at him affectionately, apprehensively.

"See here, Peter," he broke out earnestly. "There is one thing even better for you than the country, a thing that includes the sunshine and everything else worth while in life. I have hesitated about mentioning it, but this girl who

was here made me think of it again. You know I 'm not a sentimental man, Peter?"

"Unless you have changed. But your panacea?"

"Love."

"That's a generic term."

"Just plain human love, love for a woman like this one who was here. I wish you knew her. She 'd be good for you; she 'd give your present self-centred life a broader meaning."

Donaldson turned away.

"Barstow," he replied uneasily, "you 're good,—good clear through, but we move in different worlds. It is n't in me to love as you mean. I 'm too critical, which is to say too selfish."

"I think you are selfish, Peter," Barstow agreed frankly, "but I don't think it's your nature. You 've got into the Slough of Despond, and the only thing that will drag you out of that is love, love of something outside yourself. Try it."

Donaldson shook his head.

"You 're as good as gold," he declared, "but the things which content you and me are not the same. Good night."

"Good night. Be sure to drop in again when I get back."

Donaldson went out the door. He groped his way down the stairs into the street. Once he swung abruptly on his heel and stared at the pavement behind him. He thought he heard at his heels the scratching padded tread of the pup.

CHAPTER II

King of To-day

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Donaldson pressed his way along the lighted streets, clutching the vial in his pocket with the thrill of a man holding the key to fretting shackles. One week of life with the future eliminated; one week with no reckoning to be made at the end; one week with every human fetter struck off; one week in which to ignore every curbing law of futurity and abandon himself to the joy of the present! The future—even the narrow bounds of an earthly future—holds men prisoners. A few careless dogs, to be sure, live their day, blind to the years to come, but that is brute stupidity. A few brave souls swagger through their prime with some bravado, knowing the final cost, but willing to pay it by installments through the dribbling years which follow; but the usury of time makes that folly. The wise choke such gypsy impulses—admit the mortgage of the Present to the Future—and surrender the brisk liberty of youth to the limping freedom of old age. But Donaldson was too thoughtful a man to belong to either the first or second class and yet of too lusty stuff to join the third.

There were now just two doubtful points which checked him in his first impulse to swallow the deadly elixir at once, —two questions needing further thought before he would have a clear conscience about it; he must convince himself a trifle more clearly that he shifted nothing to the load of those he left behind, and he must make sure that no

element of fear entered into his act. That phrase of Barstow's, "It's quitting not to stay," smarted a bit.

In spite of these vital problems, Donaldson was keenly conscious, even with his wild freedom still nothing but a conception, of sharpened senses which responded keenly to the lights and sounds about him. This bottle which he held made him feel like some old time king's messenger who carried a warrant making him exempt from local laws. He moved among people whose perplexed thoughts wandered restlessly down the everlasting vista of the days ahead, and he alone of them all knew the secret of being untroubled beyond the week. The world had not for ten years appeared so gay to him. He felt the exhilarating sting of life as he had when it first surged in upon him at twenty. The very fact that he held even a temporary solution to his barren days was enough. In the joy of his almost august scorn of circumstance he forgot the minor difficulties which still lay before him.

He turned aside from the direct course to his room into Broadway. It was the last of May and early evening. The month revealed itself in the warm night sky and the buoyant spirits of those below its velvet richness. Spring was in the air—a stimulation as of etherialized champagne. The spirit of adventure, the spirit of renaissance, the spirit of creation was abroad once more. Not a cranny in even this sprawling section of denaturalized earth but thrilled for the time being with budding hopes, sap-swollen courage, and bright, colorful dreams. Walking beneath the spitting glare of the arc-lights, through the golden mist flooding from the store windows, Donaldson hazily saw again the careless

unburdened world of his early youth. He caught the spirit of Broadway and all Broadway means in the spring. It was a marionette world where marionettes dance their gayest. Yesterday this would have been to him nothing but a dead bioscope picture; now, though he still sat an onlooker in the pit, it was a living human drama at which he gazed.

Two dark-haired grisettes passed him, their cheeks aglow and their eyes dancing. They appeared so full of life, so very gay, that he turned to glance back at them. He found the eyes of the prettier one upon him; she had turned to look at him. It was long since even so trifling an intrigue as this had quickened his life.

As a matter of fact Donaldson always attracted more interest in feminine eyes than, in his self engrossment, he was ever aware. Even in his shiny blue serge suit, baggy at the knees and sagging at the shoulders, even in his shabby hat, he carried himself with an air. Two things about his person were always as fine and immaculate as though he were a gentleman of some fortune, his linen and his shoes. But in addition to such slight externals Donaldson, although not a large man, had good shoulders, a well-poised head, and walked with an Indian stride from the hips that made him noticeable among the flat-footed native New Yorkers. He might have been mistaken for an ambitious actor of the younger school; even for a forceful young cleric, save for the fact that he smoked his cigarette with evident satisfaction.

He followed an aimless course—but a course fairly prickling with new sensations—until he stood before one of the popular cafés, now effervescing with sprightly life. He

paused here a moment to listen to the music. A group of well-groomed men and women laughingly clambered out of a big touring car and passed in before the obsequious attendants. He watched them with some envy. Music, good food, good wines, laughter, and bright eyes—the flimsiest vanities of life to be sure—and yet there was something in his hungry heart that craved them all. Well, ten years from now perhaps,—his hand fell upon the vial. No. Not ten years from now, but to-morrow, even tomorrow, he might claim these luxuries!

He jumped on a car and in thirty minutes stood in the lean, quiet street into which for three years he had stared from his third floor room. These quarters seemed now more than ever a parody on home. This row of genteel structures which had degenerated into boarding houses for the indigent and struggling younger generation, and the wrecks of the past, embodied, in even the blank stare of their exteriors, stupid mediocrity. He fumbled nervously in his pocket for his latch-key, and opening the door climbed the three stale flights to his room. He lighted both gas-jets, but even then the gloom remained. He craved more light—the dazzling light of arc-lamps, the glare reflected from polished mirrors. Better absolute darkness than this. He turned out the gas and throwing open his window leaned far out over the sill. Then he concentrated his thoughts upon the issue confronting him.

At the end of other colorless days, when he had come back here only to be tortured by the stretch of gray road before him, he had considered as a possibility that which now was almost a reality. He had always been checked by

this desire to have first his taste of life and by the troublesome conviction that there was something unfair about seizing it in this way. Furthermore, though he could, without Barstow's discovery, have lived his week and closed it by any one of a dozen effective means, he realized that he could not trust even himself to fulfill at the end—no matter how binding the oath—so fearful a decree. A few deep draughts of joyous life might turn his head. It was as dangerous an experiment as taking the first smoke of opium, as tampering with the first injection of morphine, upon the promise of stopping there. No, before beginning he must set at work some power outside himself which should be operative even against his will; which should be as final as death itself. Until to-night this had seemed an impossibility. Now, with that chief obstruction removed, he had but to consider the ethics of the question.

In arguing with Barstow he had been sincere. He believed as he had said that a man had the right to end the contract so long as he cheated no one by so doing. All his life he had paid his way like a man, done his duty like a good citizen, given a fair return for everything he took. He did not feel himself indebted to his country, his state, his city, nor to any living man or woman. In one form and another, he had paid. Few men could claim this as sincerely as Donaldson. He had lived conscientiously, so very conscientiously in fact that it was as much rebellion against self-imposed fetters which now drove him on to an opposite extreme as any bitterness against that society which had spurned his idealism. He had refused to compromise and learned that the world uses only as martyrs those who so refuse. The limitations of his nature

were defined by the fact that he withdrew from so self sacrificing an end as that. But now if he demanded nothing more—if he was tired of this give and take—why should he not balance accounts?

Chiefly because there would still be one week to account for—that last week in which he should demand most. Like an inspiration came the solution to this, the final difficulty; economically he was wasting a life; very well, but if he could find a way of not wasting it, of giving his life to another, then he would have paid even this last bill. In the excitement of this new idea, he paced his room. If he could give his life for another! But supposing this were impossible, supposing no opportunity should offer, it would be something if he held himself open, offered himself a free instrument of Fate. He could promise—and he knew he could keep so sacred a promise as this with death approaching in so inevitable a form,—he could promise to offer himself upon the slightest pretext, recklessly and without fear, instantly and without thought, to the first chance which might come to him to give his life for another. That was the bond he would give to Fate—the same Fate which had produced him—his life for the life of another. Let society use him so if such use could be found for him. He would stand ready, would live up to the spirit and the letter of the bond unhesitatingly. For one week he would live his life in the present upon that condition—one week with the eighth day a blank, one week with the whole world his plaything.

He stared with new eyes from his window to the jumble of houses below, to the jumble of stars above. The whole

world expanded and vibrated before the intensity of his passion. He was to condense a possible thirty or forty years into seven days. To-day was the twenty-third of May. By to-morrow noon he could adjust all his affairs. With nothing to demand of them in the future it would be an easy matter to cut them off. On Friday, May twenty-fourth, then, he could begin. This would bring the end on the thirty-first.

He considered a moment; was it better to die at noon or at night? An odd thing for a man to decide, but such details as this might as well be fixed now as later. It took but a moment's deliberation; he elected to go out at high noon. There would be dark enough afterwards—possibly an eternity of dark. He would face the sun with his last gaze; he would have the mad riot of men and women at midday ringing last in his ears.

As he drew in deep breaths it was as if he inhaled the whole world. He felt as though, if he but stepped out sturdily enough, he could foot the darkness. His head was light; his brain teemed with wild fancies. Then pressing through this medley he saw for a moment the young woman who had come to Barstow's laboratory. The effect was to steady him. He remembered the sweet girlishness of her face, the freshness of it which was like the freshness of a garden in the early morning. He realized that she stood for one thing that he could never know. What was it that he saw now in those strange eyes that left him a bit wistful at thought of this? There was not a detail of her features, of her dress, of her speech, that he could not see now as vividly as though she were still standing before him. That was odd, too. He was not ordinarily so impressionable. It occurred to him that

he would not like her to know what he was about to do. Bah, he was getting maudlin!

Late as it was, he left his room and went downtown to his office. He worked here until daylight, falling asleep in his chair from four to seven. He awoke fresh, and even more eager than the night before to undertake his venture.

There remained still a few men to be seen. He transacted his business with a brilliant dispatch and swift decision that startled them. He disposed of all his office furniture, his books, destroyed all his letters, made a will leaving instructions for the disposal of his body, and concluded every other detail of his affairs before eleven o'clock. When he left his office to go back to his room, he had in his pocket every cent he possessed in the world in crisp new bank notes. It amounted to twenty-eight hundred and forty-seven dollars. Not much to scatter over a long life,—not much as capital. Invested it might yield some seventy dollars a year. But as ready cash, it really stood for a fortune. It was the annual income at four per cent on over seventy thousand dollars, the monthly income on eight hundred and forty thousand dollars, the weekly income on over three million. For seven days then he could squander the revenue of a princely estate.

As a matter of fact his position was even more remarkable; he was as wealthy—so far as his own capacity for pleasure went—as though the possessor of thirty million. This because of his limitations; he was barred from travel; barred from the purchase of future holdings; barred from everything by this time restriction save what he could absorb within seven days through his five senses. Being an