

Theodore Dreiser

The Stoic



Kharkiv
«Folio»
2025

CHAPTER 1

There were two most disturbing problems confronting Frank Cowperwood at the time of his Chicago defeat, when, so reducingly and after so long a struggle, he lost his fight for a fifty-year franchise renewal. First, there was his age. He was nearing sixty, and while seemingly as vigorous as ever, it would be no easy matter, he felt, with younger and equally resourceful financiers on the scene, to pile up the great fortune, which assuredly would have been his if his franchise had been extended.

That fortune would have been all of \$50,000,000. Secondly, and of even greater importance, in his realistic judgment, was the fact that by this time he had still not achieved social connections of any value; in other words, social prestige. Of course, his youthful incarceration in the penitentiary in Philadelphia had not helped matters, and then, too, his natural varietism, plus his unfortunate marriage to Aileen, who had been no real social help, and his own determined and almost savage individualism, had alienated many who otherwise might have been friendly to him.

For Cowperwood was not one to make friends of those less forceful, subtle, or efficient than himself. It smacked too much of meaningless self-depreciation and was, at best, in his opinion, a waste of time. On the other hand, he found, the strong and cunning or genuinely significant were not always easy to acquire as friends. Particularly here in Chicago, where he had fought so many of them for position and power,

they had chosen to combine against him; not because he represented morals or methods different from any they were willing to practice or accept in others, but rather because he, a total stranger, had ventured on financial preserves presumably their own and had risen to greater wealth and power, and in less time, than they had.

Moreover, he had attracted the wives and daughters of some of the very men who were most jealous of him financially, and so they had set out to ostracize him socially and had well-nigh succeeded in doing so. As far as sex was concerned, he had always desired individual freedom and proceeded ruthlessly to achieve it. At the same time, he had always held the thought that somewhere he might well meet a woman so superior that in spite of himself he might be held, not to absolute faithfulness—he was never willing to count upon that in regard to himself—but rather to a genuine union of understanding and affection. For eight years now, he had felt that he had really found that ideal individual in the girl, Berenice Fleming.

Obviously, she was not overawed by his personality or his fame, nor at all impressed by his usual arts. And because of that, as well as the deep aesthetic and sensual spell she cast over him, there had arisen in him a conviction that she, with her youth, beauty, mental awareness, and certainty as to her own personal value, could contrive and maintain the natural social background for his force and wealth, assuming, of course, that he were ever free to marry her. Unfortunately, for all his determination in connection with Aileen, he had not been able to divest himself of her.

For one thing, she was determined not to give him up. And to have added a contest for freedom to his difficult railway fight in Chicago would have been too much of a burden. Moreover, in Berenice's attitude, he saw no trace of the necessary acceptance. Her eyes appeared to be set toward men not only younger than himself but with

conventional social advantages, which his personal record made it impossible for him to offer her. This had given him his first real taste of romantic defeat, and he had sat alone in his rooms for hours at a time convinced that he was hopelessly beaten in his battle for greater fortune and for the love of Berenice.

And then suddenly, she had come to him and announced a most amazing and unexpected surrender, so that he experienced a sense of rejuvenation, which almost at once definitely restored his old constructive mood. At last, he felt, he had the love of a woman who could truly support him in his quest for power, fame, and prestige. On the other hand, as frank and direct as had been her explanation of why she had come—"I thought you really might need me now ... I have made up my mind"—still, there was on her part a certain hurt attitude in regard to life and society, which moved her to seek reparation in some form for the cruelties she felt had been imposed on her in her early youth.

What she was really thinking, and what Cowperwood, because of his delight at her sudden surrender did not comprehend, was: You are a social outcast, and so am I. The world has sought to frustrate you. In my own case, it has attempted to exclude me from the sphere to which, temperamentally and in every other way, I feel I belong. You are resentful, and so am I. Therefore, a partnership: one of beauty and strength and intelligence and courage on both sides, but without domination by either of us. For without fair play between us, there is no possibility of this unsanctioned union enduring. This was the essence of her motive in coming to him at this time.

And yet Cowperwood, aware as he was of her force and subtlety, was not so fully aware of her chain of thought in this direction. He would not have said, for instance, looking upon her on that wintry night of her arrival (perfect and flowery out of an icy wind), that she was as carefully and

determinedly aligned mentally. It was a little too much to expect of one so youthful, smiling, cheerful and altogether exquisite in every feminine sense. And yet she was. She stood daringly, and yet secretly somewhat nervously, before him. There was no trace of malice in regard to him; rather love, if a desire to be with him and of him for the remainder of his days on these conditions might be called love. Through him and with him she would walk to such victory as might be possible, the two of them whole-heartedly and sympathetically co-operating.

Therefore, on that first night, Cowperwood turned to her and said, "But Bevy, I'm really curious as to this sudden decision of yours. To think you should come to me now just when I have met my second really important setback." Her still blue eyes enveloped him, as might a warming cloak or a dissolving ether.

"Well, I've been thinking and reading about you for years, you know. Only last Sunday, in New York, I read two whole pages about you in the Sun. They made me understand you a little better, I think."

"The newspapers! Did they, really?"

"Yes, and no. Not what they said about you critically, but the facts, if they are facts, that they pieced together. You never cared for your first wife, did you?"

"Well, I thought I did, at first. But, of course, I was very young when I married her."

"And the present Mrs. Cowperwood?"

"Oh, Aileen, yes. I cared for her very much at one time," he confessed. "She did a great deal for me once, and I am not ungrateful, Bevy. Besides, she was very attractive, very, to me at that time. But I was still young, and not as exacting mentally as I am now. The fault is not Aileen's. It was a mistake due to inexperience."

"You make me feel better when you talk that way," she said. "You're not as ruthless as you're said to be. Just the same,

I am many years younger than Aileen, and I have the feeling that without my looks my mind might not be very important to you."

Cowperwood smiled. "Quite true. I have no excuses to offer for the way I am," he said. "Intelligently or unintelligently, I try to follow the line of self-interest, because, as I see it, there is no other guide. Maybe I am wrong, but I think most of us do that. It may be that there are other interests that come before those of the individual, but in favoring himself, he appears, as a rule, to favor others."

"I agree, somehow, with your point of view," commented Berenice.

"The one thing I am trying to make clear to you," went on Cowperwood, smiling affectionately at her, "is that I am not seeking to belittle or underestimate any hurt I may have inflicted. Pain seems to go with life and change. I just want to state my case as I see it, so that you may understand me."

"Thanks," and Berenice laughed lightly, "but you needn't feel you are on the witness stand."

"Well, almost. However, please let me explain a little about Aileen. Her nature is one of love and emotion, but her intellect is not, and never was, sufficient for my needs. I understand her thoroughly, and I am grateful for all she did for me in Philadelphia. She stood by me, to her own social detriment. Because of that, I have stood by her, even though I cannot possibly love her as I once did. She has my name, my residence. She feels she should have both." He paused, a little dubious as to what Berenice would say.

"You understand, of course?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Berenice, "of course, I understand. And, please, I do not want to disturb her in any way. I did not come to you with that in view."

"You're very generous, Bevy, but unfair to yourself," said Cowperwood. "But I want you to know how much you mean to my entire future. You may not understand, but I acknowledge

it here and now. I have not followed you for eight years for nothing. It means that I care, and care deeply."

"I know," she said, softly, not a little impressed by this declaration.

"For all of eight years," he continued, "I have had an ideal. That ideal is you." He paused, wishing to embrace her, but feeling for the moment that he should not.

Then, reaching into a waistcoat pocket, he took from it a thin gold locket, the size of a silver dollar, which he opened and handed to her. One interior face of it was lined with a photograph of Berenice as a girl of twelve, thin, delicate, supercilious, self-contained, distant, as she was to this hour. She looked at it and recognized it as a photograph that had been taken when she and her mother were still in Louisville, her mother a woman of social position and means. How different the situation now, and how much she had suffered because of that change! She gazed at it, recalling pleasant memories.

"Where did you get this?" she asked at last.

"I took it from your mother's bureau in Louisville, the first time I saw it. It was not in this case, though; I have added that." He closed it affectionately and returned it to his pocket. "It has been close to me ever since," he said. Berenice smiled.

"I hope, unseen. But I am such a child there."

"Just the same, an ideal to me. And more so now than ever. I have known many women, of course. I have dealt with them according to my light and urge at the time. But apart from all that, I have always had a certain conception of what I really desired. I have always dreamed of a strong, sensitive, poetic girl like yourself. Think what you will about me, but judge me now by what I do, not by what I say. You said you came because you thought I needed you. I do." She laid her hand on his arm.

"I have decided," she said, calmly. "The best I can do with my life is to help you. But we ... I ... neither of us can do just as we please. You know that."

“Perfectly. I want you to be happy with me, and I want to be happy with you. And, of course, I can’t be if you are going to worry over anything. Here in Chicago, particularly at this time, I have to be most careful, and so do you. And that’s why you’re going back to your hotel very shortly. But tomorrow is another day, and at about eleven, I hope you will telephone me. Then perhaps we can talk this over. But wait a moment.” He took her arm and directed her into his bedroom.

Closing the door, he walked briskly to a handsome wrought-iron chest of considerable size, which stood in a corner of the room. Unlocking it, he lifted from it three trays containing a collection of ancient Greek and Phoenician rings.

After setting them in order before her, he said, “With which of these would you like me to pledge you?” Indulgently, and a little indifferently, as was her way—always the one to be pleaded with, not the one to plead—Berenice studied and toyed with the rings, occasionally exclaiming over one that interested her.

At last, she said, “Circe might have chosen this twisted silver snake. And Helen, this green bronze circlet of flowers, perhaps. I think Aphrodite might have liked this curled arm and hand encircling the stone. But I will not choose for beauty alone. For myself, I will take this tarnished silver band. It has strength as well as beauty.”

“Always the unexpected, the original!” exclaimed Cowperwood. “Bevy, you are incomparable!” He kissed her tenderly as he placed the ring on her finger.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	3
CHAPTER 2	10
CHAPTER 3	14
CHAPTER 4	18
CHAPTER 5	22
CHAPTER 6	28
CHAPTER 7	34
CHAPTER 8	39
CHAPTER 9	45
CHAPTER 10	47
CHAPTER 11	50
CHAPTER 12	55
CHAPTER 13	63
CHAPTER 14	71
CHAPTER 15	78
CHAPTER 16	82
CHAPTER 17	86
CHAPTER 18	90
CHAPTER 19	96
CHAPTER 20	102
CHAPTER 21	109
CHAPTER 22	115
CHAPTER 23	118
CHAPTER 24	124
CHAPTER 25	133

CHAPTER 26	139
CHAPTER 27	143
CHAPTER 28	147
CHAPTER 29	154
CHAPTER 30	161
CHAPTER 31	167
CHAPTER 32	173
CHAPTER 33	178
CHAPTER 34	185
CHAPTER 35	191
CHAPTER 36	197
CHAPTER 37	205
CHAPTER 38	210
CHAPTER 39	215
CHAPTER 40	219
CHAPTER 41	224
CHAPTER 42	229
CHAPTER 43	235
CHAPTER 44	240
CHAPTER 45	243
CHAPTER 46	246
CHAPTER 47	249
CHAPTER 48	252
CHAPTER 49	260
CHAPTER 50	264
CHAPTER 51	269
CHAPTER 52	274
CHAPTER 53	277
CHAPTER 54	281
CHAPTER 55	286
CHAPTER 56	288
CHAPTER 57	292
CHAPTER 58	298
CHAPTER 59	301

CHAPTER 60	305
CHAPTER 61	310
CHAPTER 62	314
CHAPTER 63	318
CHAPTER 64	322
CHAPTER 65	325
CHAPTER 66	328
CHAPTER 67	334
CHAPTER 68	342
CHAPTER 69	348
CHAPTER 70	353
CHAPTER 71	357
CHAPTER 72	360
CHAPTER 73	365
CHAPTER 74	369
CHAPTER 75	376
CHAPTER 76	380
CHAPTER 77	383
CHAPTER 78	390
CHAPTER 79	399
APPENDIX	408