

Modern Chronicle, a — Volume 03 eBook

Modern Chronicle, a — Volume 03 by Winston Churchill

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Contents

Modern Chronicle, a — Volume 03 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	7
Page 3.....	9
Page 4.....	11
Page 5.....	13
Page 6.....	15
Page 7.....	17
Page 8.....	19
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	23
Page 11.....	24
Page 12.....	25
Page 13.....	27
Page 14.....	28
Page 15.....	29
Page 16.....	31
Page 17.....	33
Page 18.....	35
Page 19.....	37
Page 20.....	39
Page 21.....	41
Page 22.....	43



Page 23..... 45
Page 24..... 47
Page 25..... 48
Page 26..... 50
Page 27..... 52
Page 28..... 53
Page 29..... 54
Page 30..... 56
Page 31..... 58
Page 32..... 60
Page 33..... 62
Page 34..... 64
Page 35..... 66
Page 36..... 68
Page 37..... 70
Page 38..... 72
Page 39..... 74
Page 40..... 76
Page 41..... 78

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
CHAPTER I		1
CHAPTER II		7
CHAPTER III		12
CHAPTER IV		20
CHAPTER V		26
CHAPTER VI		34



Page 1

CHAPTER I

So long as ye both shall live!

It was late November. And as Honora sat at the window of the drawing-room of the sleeping car, life seemed as fantastic and unreal as the moss-hung Southern forest into which she stared. She was happy, as a child is happy who is taken on an excursion into the unknown. The monotony of existence was at last broken, and riven the circumscribing walls. Limitless possibilities lay ahead.

The emancipation had not been without its pangs of sorrow, and there were moments of retrospection—as now. She saw herself on Uncle Tom's arm, walking up the aisle of the old church. How many Sundays of her life had she sat watching a shaft of sunlight strike across the stone pillars of its gothic arches! She saw, in the chancel, tall and grave and pale, Peter Erwin standing beside the man with the flushed face who was to be her husband. She heard again the familiar voice of Dr. Ewing reciting the words of that wonderful introduction. At other weddings she had been moved. Why was her own so unrealizable?

“Honora, wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy state of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?”

She had promised. And they were walking out of the church, facing the great rose window with its blended colours, and the vaults above were ringing now with the volume of an immortal march.

After that an illogical series of events and pictures passed before her. She was in a corner of the carriage, her veil raised, gazing at her husband, who had kissed her passionately. He was there beside her, looking extremely well in his top hat and frock-coat, with a white flower in his buttonhole. He was the representative of the future she had deliberately chosen. And yet, by virtue of the strange ceremony through which they had passed, he seemed to have changed. In her attempt to seize upon a reality she looked out of the window. They were just passing the Hanbury mansion in Wayland Square, and her eyes fell upon the playroom windows under the wide cornice; and she wondered whether the doll's house were still in its place, its mute inhabitants waiting to be called by the names she had given them, and quickened into life once more.

Next she recalled the arrival at the little house that had been her home, summer and winter, for so many years of her life. A red and white awning, stretching up the length of the walk which once had run beside the tall pear trees, gave it an unrecognizable, gala air. Long had it stood there, patient, unpretentious, content that the great things should



pass it by! And now, modest still, it had been singled out from amongst its neighbours and honoured. Was it honoured? It seemed to Honora, so fanciful this day, that its unwonted air of festival was unnatural. Why should the hour of departure from such a harbour of peace be celebrated?



Page 2

She was standing beside her husband in the little parlour, while carriage doors slammed in the dusk outside; while one by one—a pageant of the past which she was leaving forever the friends of her childhood came and went. Laughter and tears and kisses! And then, in no time at all, she found herself changing for the journey in the “little house under the hill.” There, locked up in the little desk Cousin Eleanor had given her long ago, was the unfinished manuscript of that novel written at fever heat during those summer days in which she had sought to escape from a humdrum existence. And now—she had escaped. Aunt Mary, helpful under the most trying circumstances, was putting her articles in a bag, the initials on which she did not recognize—H. L. S.—Honora Leffingwell Spence; while old Catherine, tearful and inefficient, knelt before her, fumbling at her shoes. Honora, bending over, took the face of the faithful old servant and kissed it.

“Don’t feel badly, Catherine,” she said; “I’ll be coming back often to see you, and you will be coming to see me.”

“Will ye, darlint? The blessing of God be on you for those words—and you to be such a fine lady! It always was a fine lady ye were, with such a family and such a bringin’ up. And now ye’ve married a rich man, as is right and proper. If it’s rich as Croesus he was, he’d be none too good for you.”

“Catherine,” said Aunt Mary, reprovngly, “what ideas you put into the child’s head!”

“Sure, Miss Mary,” cried Catherine, “it’s always the great lady she was, and she a wee bit of a thing. And wasn’t it yerself, Miss Mary, that dressed her like a princess?”

Then came the good-bys—the real ones. Uncle Tom, always the friend of young people, was surrounded by a group of bridesmaids in the hall. She clung to him. And Peter, who had the carriage ready. What would her wedding have been without Peter? As they drove towards the station, his was the image that remained persistently in her mind, bareheaded on the sidewalk in the light of the carriage lamps. The image of struggle.

She had married Prosperity. A whimsical question, that shocked her, irresistibly presented itself: was it not Prosperity that she had promised to love, honour, and obey?

It must not be thought that Honora was by any means discontented with her Prosperity. He was new—that was all. Howard looked new. But she remembered that he had always looked new; such was one of his greatest charms. In the long summer days since she had bade him good-by on her way through New York from Silverdale, Honora had constructed him: he was perpetual yet sophisticated Youth; he was Finance and Fashion; he was Power in correctly cut clothes. And when he had arrived in St. Louis to play his part in the wedding festivities, she had found her swan a swan indeed—he was all that she had dreamed of him. And she had tingled with pride as she introduced him

to her friends, or gazed at him across the flower-laden table as he sat beside Edith Hanbury at the bridesmaids' dinner in Wayland Square.



Page 3

The wedding ceremony had somehow upset her opinion of him, but Honora regarded this change as temporary. Julius Caesar or George Washington himself must have been somewhat ridiculous as bridegrooms: and she had the sense to perceive that her own agitations as a bride were partly responsible. No matter how much a young girl may have trifled with that electric force in the male sex known as the grand passion, she shrinks from surrendering herself to its dominion. Honora shrank. He made love to her on the way to the station, and she was terrified. He actually forgot to smoke cigarettes. What he said was to the effect that he possessed at last the most wonderful and beautiful woman in the world, and she resented the implication of possession.

Nevertheless, in the glaring lights of the station, her courage and her pride in him revived, and he became again a normal and a marked man. Although the sex may resent it, few women are really indifferent to clothes, and Howard's well-fitting check suit had the magic touch of the metropolis. His manner matched his garments. Obsequious porters grasped his pig-skin bag, and seized Honora's; the man at the gate inclined his head as he examined their tickets, and the Pullman conductor himself showed them their stateroom, and plainly regarded them as important people far from home. Howard had the cosmopolitan air. He gave the man a dollar, and remarked that the New Orleans train was not exactly the Chicago and New York Limited.

"Not by a long shot," agreed the conductor, as he went out, softly closing the door behind him.

Whereupon the cosmopolitan air dropped from Mr. Howard Spence, not gracefully, and he became once more that superfluous and awkward and utterly banal individual, the husband.

"Let's go out and walk on the platform until the train starts," suggested Honora, desperately. "Oh, Howard, the shades are up! I'm sure I saw some one looking in!"

He laughed. But there was a light in his eyes that frightened her, and she deemed his laughter out of place. Was he, after all, an utterly different man than what she had thought him? Still laughing, he held to her wrist with one hand, and with the other pulled down the shades.

"This is good enough for me," he said. "At last—at last," he whispered, "all the red tape is over, and I've got you to myself! Do you love me just a little, Honora?"

"Of course I do," she faltered, still struggling, her face burning as from a fire.

"Then what's the matter?" he demanded.

"I don't know—I want air. Howard, please let me go. It's-it's so hot in here. You must let me go."



Her release, she felt afterwards, was due less to a physical than a mental effort. She seemed suddenly to have cowed him, and his resistance became enfeebled. She broke from him, and opened the door, and reached the cement platform and the cold air. When he joined her, there was something jokingly apologetic about his manner, and he was smoking a cigarette; and she could not help thinking that she would have respected him more if he had held her.

Page 4

“Women beat me,” he said. “They’re the most erratic stock in the market.”

It is worthy of remark how soon the human, and especially the feminine brain adjusts itself to new conditions. In a day or two life became real again, or rather romantic.

For the American husband in his proper place is an auxiliary who makes all things possible. His ability to “get things done,” before it ceases to be a novelty, is a quality to be admired. Honora admired. An intimacy—if the word be not too strong—sprang up between them. They wandered through the quaint streets of New Orleans, that most foreign of American cities, searching out the tumbledown French houses; and Honora was never tired of imagining the romances and tragedies which must have taken place in them. The new scenes excited her,—the quaint cafes with their delicious, peppery Creole cooking,—and she would sit talking for a quarter of an hour at a time with Alphonse, who outdid himself to please the palate of a lady with such allure. He called her “Madame”; but well he knew, this student of human kind, that the title had not been of long duration.

Madame came from New York, without doubt? such was one of his questions, as he stood before them in answer to Howard’s summons, rubbing his hands. And Honora, with a little thrill, acknowledged the accuracy of his guess. There was no dish of Alphonse’s they did not taste. And Howard smilingly paid the bills. He was ecstatically proud of his wife, and although he did justice to the cooking, he cared but little for the mysterious courtyards, the Spanish buildings, and the novels of Mr. George W. Cable, which Honora devoured when she was too tired to walk about. He followed her obediently to the battle field of New Orleans, and admired as obediently the sunset, when the sky was all silver-green through the magnolias, and the spreading live oaks hung with Spanish moss, and a silver bar lay upon the Father of Waters. Honora, with beating heart and flushed cheeks, felt these things: Howard felt them through her and watched—not the sunset—but the flame it lighted in her eyes.

He left her but twice a day, and then only for brief periods. He even felt a joy when she ventured to complain.

“I believe you care more for those horrid stocks than for me,” she said. “I—I am just a novelty.”

His answer, since they were alone in their sitting-room, was obvious.

“Howard,” she cried, “how mean of you! Now I’ll have to do my hair all over again. I’ve got such a lot of it—you’ve no idea how difficult it is.”

“You bet I have!” he declared meaningly, and Honora blushed.



His pleasure of possession was increased when people turned to look at her on the street or in the dining room—to think that this remarkable creature was in reality his wife! Nor did the feeling grow less intense with time, being quite the same when they arrived at a fashionable resort in the Virginia mountains, on their way to New York. For such were the exactions of his calling that he could spare but two weeks for his honeymoon.

Page 5

Honora's interest in her new surroundings was as great, and the sight of those towering ridges against the soft blue of the autumn skies inspired her. It was Indian summer here, the tang of wood smoke was in the air; in the valleys—as they drove—the haze was shot with the dust of gold, and through the gaps they looked across vast, unexplored valleys to other distant, blue-stained ridges that rose between them and the sunset. Honora took an infinite delight in the ramshackle cabins beside the red-clay roads, in the historic atmosphere of the ancient houses and porticoes of the Warm Springs, where the fathers of the Republic had come to take the waters. And one day, when a north wind had scattered the smoke and swept the sky, Howard followed her up the paths to the ridge's crest, where she stood like a Victory, her garments blowing, gazing off over the mighty billows to the westward. Howard had never seen a Victory, but his vision of domesticity was untroubled.

Although it was late in the season, the old-fashioned, rambling hotel was well filled, and people interested Honora as well as scenery—a proof of her human qualities. She chided Howard because he, too, was not more socially inclined.

“How can you expect me to be—now?” he demanded.

She told him he was a goose, although secretly admitting the justice of his defence. He knew four or five men in the hotel, with whom he talked stocks while waiting for Honora to complete her toilets; and he gathered from two of these, who were married, that patience was a necessary qualification in a husband. One evening they introduced their wives. Later, Howard revealed their identity—or rather that of the husbands.

“Bowker is one of the big men in the Faith Insurance Company, and Tyler is president of the Gotham Trust.” He paused to light a cigarette, and smiled at her significantly. “If you can dolly the ladies along once in a while, Honora, it won't do any harm,” he added. “You have a way with you, you know,—when you want to.”

Honora grew scarlet.

“Howard!” she exclaimed.

He looked somewhat shamefaced.

“Well,” he said, “I was only joking. Don't take it seriously. But it doesn't do any harm to be polite.”

“I am always polite,” she answered a little coldly.

Honeymoons, after all, are matters of conjecture, and what proportion of them contain disenchantments will never be known. Honora lay awake for a long time that night, and the poignant and ever recurring remembrance of her husband's remark sent the blood



to her face like a flame. Would Peter, or George Hanbury, or any of the intimate friends of her childhood have said such a thing?

Page 6

A new and wistful feeling of loneliness was upon her. For some days, with a certain sense of isolation and a tinge of envy which she would not acknowledge, she had been watching a group of well-dressed, clean-looking people galloping off on horseback or filling the six-seated buckboards. They were from New York—that she had discovered; and they did not mix with the others in the hotel. She had thought it strange that Howard did not know them, but for a reason which she did not analyze she hesitated to ask him who they were. They had rather a rude manner of staring—especially the men—and the air of deriving infinite amusement from that which went on about them. One of them, a young man with a lisp who was addressed by the singular name of “Toots,” she had overheard demanding as she passed: who the deuce was the tall girl with the dark hair and the colour? Wherever she went, she was aware of them. It was foolish, she knew, but their presence seemed—in the magnitude which trifles are wont to assume in the night-watches—of late to have poisoned her pleasure.

Enlightenment as to the identity of these disturbing persons came, the next day, from an unexpected source. Indeed, from Mrs. Tyler. She loved brides, she said, and Honora seemed to her such a sweet bride. It was Mrs. Tyler’s ambition to become thin (which was hitching her wagon to a star with a vengeance), and she invited our heroine to share her constitutional on the porch. Honora found the proceeding in the nature of an ordeal, for Mrs. Tyler’s legs were short, her frizzled hair very blond, and the fact that it was natural made it seem, somehow, all the more damning.

They had scarcely begun to walk before Honora, with a sense of dismay of which she was ashamed, beheld some of the people who had occupied her thoughts come out of the door and form a laughing group at the end of the porch. She could not rid herself of the feeling that they were laughing at her. She tried in vain to drive them from her mind, to listen to Mrs. Tyler’s account of how she, too, came as a bride to New York from some place with a classical name, and to the advice that accompanied the narration. The most conspicuous young woman in the group, in riding clothes, was seated on the railing, with the toe of one boot on the ground. Her profile was clear-cut and her chestnut hair tightly knotted behind under her hat. Every time they turned, this young woman stared at Honora amusedly.

“Nasty thing!” exclaimed Mrs. Tyler, suddenly and unexpectedly in the midst of a description of the delights of life in the metropolis.

“Who?” asked Honora.

“That young Mrs. Freddy Maitland, sitting on the rail. She’s the rudest woman in New York.”

A perversity of spirit which she could not control prompted Honora to reply:

“Why, I think she is so good-looking, Mrs. Tyler. And she seems to have so much individuality and independence.”



Page 7

“There!” cried Mrs. Tyler, triumphantly. “Once—not so very long ago—I was just as inexperienced as you, my dear. She belongs to that horribly fast set with which no self-respecting woman would be seen. It’s an outrage that they should come to a hotel like this and act as though it belonged to them. She knows me quite as well as I know her, but when I am face to face she acts as though I was air.”

Honora could not help thinking that this, at least, required some imagination on Mrs. Maitland’s part. Mrs. Tyler had stopped for breath.

“I have been introduced to her twice,” she continued, “but of course I wouldn’t speak to her. The little man with the lisp, next to her, who is always acting in that silly way, they call Toots Cuthbert. He gets his name in the newspapers by leading cotillions in New York and Newport. And the tall, slim, blond one, with the green hat and the feather in it, is Jimmy Wing. He’s the son of James Wing, the financier.”

“I went to school at Sutcliffe with his sister,” said Honora.

It seemed to Honora that Mrs. Tyler’s manner underwent a change.

“My dear,” she exclaimed, “did you go to Sutcliffe? What a wonderful school it is! I fully intend to send my daughter Louise there.”

An almost irresistible desire came over Honora to run away. She excused herself instead, and hurried back towards her room. On the way she met Howard in the corridor, and he held a telegram in his hand.

“I’ve got some bad news, Honora,” he said. “That is, bad from the point of view of our honeymoon. Sid Dallam is swamped with business, and wants me in New York. I’m afraid we’ve got to cut it short.”

To his astonishment she smiled.

“Oh, I’m so glad, Howard,” she cried. “I—I don’t like this place nearly so well as New Orleans. There are—so many people here.”

He looked relieved, and patted her on the arm.

“We’ll go to-night, old girl,” he said.

CHAPTER II

“Stafford park”



There is a terrifying aspect of all great cities. Rome, with its leviathan aqueducts, its seething tenements clinging to the hills, its cruel, shining Palatine, must have overborne the provincial traveller coming up from Ostia. And Honora, as she stood on the deck of the ferry-boat, approaching New York for the second time in her life, could not overcome a sense of oppression. It was on a sharp December morning, and the steam of the hurrying craft was dazzling white in the early sun. Above and beyond the city rose, overpowering, a very different city, somehow, than that her imagination had first drawn. Each of that multitude of vast towers seemed a fortress now, manned by Celt and Hun and, Israelite and Saxon, captained by Titans. And the strife between them was on a scale never known in the world before, a strife with modern arms and modern methods and modern brains, in which there was no mercy.

Page 8

Hidden somewhere amidst those bristling miles of masonry to the northward of the towers was her future home. Her mind dwelt upon it now, for the first time, and tried to construct it. Once she had spoken to Howard of it, but he had smiled and avoided discussion. What would it be like to have a house of one's own in New York? A house on Fifth Avenue, as her girl friends had said when they laughingly congratulated her and begged her to remember that they came occasionally to New York. Those of us who, like Honora, believe in Providence, do not trouble ourselves with mere matters of dollars and cents. This morning, however, the huge material towers which she gazed upon seemed stronger than Providence, and she thought of her husband. Was his fibre sufficiently tough to become eventually the captain of one of those fortresses, to compete with the Maitlands and the Wings, and others she knew by name, calmly and efficiently intrenched there?

The boat was approaching the slip, and he came out to her from the cabin, where he had been industriously reading the stock reports, his newspapers thrust into his overcoat pocket.

"There's no place like New York, after all," he declared, and added, "when the market's up. We'll go to a hotel for breakfast."

For some reason she found it difficult to ask the question on her lips.

"I suppose," she said hesitatingly, "I suppose we couldn't go—home, Howard. You—you have never told me where we are to live."

As before, the reference to their home seemed to cause him amusement. He became very mysterious.

"Couldn't you pass away a few hours shopping this morning, my dear?"

"Oh, yes," replied Honora.

"While I gather in a few dollars," he continued. "I'll meet you at lunch, and then we'll go home."

As the sun mounted higher, her spirits rose with it. New York, or that strip of it which is known to the more fortunate of human beings, is a place to raise one's spirits on a sparkling day in early winter. And Honora, as she drove in a hansom from shop to shop, felt a new sense of elation and independence. She was at one, now, with the prosperity that surrounded her: her purse no longer limited, her whims existing only to be gratified. Her reflections on this recently attained state alternated with alluring conjectures on the place of abode of which Howard had made such a mystery. Where was it? And why had he insisted, before showing it to her, upon waiting until afternoon?



Newly arrayed in the most becoming of grey furs, she met him at that hitherto fabled restaurant which in future days—she reflected—was to become so familiar—Delmonico's. Howard was awaiting her in the vestibule; and it was not without a little quiver of timidity and excitement and a consequent rise of colour that she followed the waiter to a table by the window. She felt as though the assembled fashionable world was staring at her, but presently gathered courage enough to gaze at the costumes of the women and the faces of the men. Howard, with a sang froid of which she felt a little proud, ordered a meal for which he eventually paid a fraction over eight dollars. What would Aunt Mary have said to such extravagance? He produced a large bunch of violets.

Page 9

“With Sid Dallam’s love,” he said, as she pinned them on her gown. “I tried to get Lily—Mrs. Sid—for lunch, but you never can put your finger on her. She’ll amuse you, Honora.”

“Oh, Howard, it’s so much pleasanter lunching alone to-day. I’m glad you didn’t. And then afterwards—?”

He refused, however, to be drawn. When they emerged she did not hear the directions he gave the cabman, and it was not until they turned into a narrow side street, which became dingier and dingier as they bumped their way eastward, that she experienced a sudden sinking sensation.

“Howard!” she cried. “Where are you going? You must tell me.”

“One of the prettiest suburbs in New Jersey—Rivington,” he said. “Wait till you see the house.”

“Suburbs! Rivington! New Jersey!” The words swam before Honora’s eyes, like the great signs she had seen printed in black letters on the tall buildings from the ferry that morning. She had a sickening sensation, and the odour of his cigarette in the cab became unbearable. By an ironic trick of her memory, she recalled that she had told the clerks in the shops where she had made her purchases that she would send them her address later. How different that address from what she had imagined it!

“It’s in the country!” she exclaimed.

To lunch at Delmonico’s for eight dollars and live in Rivington

Howard appeared disturbed. More than that, he appeared astonished, solicitous.

“Why, what’s the matter, Honora?” he asked. “I thought you’d like it. It’s a brand new house, and I got Lily Dallam to furnish it. She’s a wonder on that sort of thing, and I told her to go ahead—within reason. I talked it over with your aunt and uncle, and they agreed with me you’d much rather live out there for a few years than in a flat.”

“In a flat!” repeated Honora, with a shudder.

“Certainly,” he said, flicking his ashes out of the window. “Who do you think I am, at my age? Frederick T. Maitland, or the owner of the Brougham Building?”

“But—Howard,” she protested, “why didn’t you talk it over with me?”

“Because I wanted to surprise you,” he replied. “I spent a month and a half looking for that house. And you never seemed to care. It didn’t occur to me that you would care—for the first few years,” he added, and there was in his voice a note of reproach that did



not escape her. “You never seemed inclined to discuss business with me, Honora. I didn’t think you were interested. Dallam and I are making money. We expect some day to be on Easy Street—so to speak—or Fifth Avenue. Some day, I hope, you can show some of these people the road. But just now what capital we have has to go into the business.”

Strangely enough, in spite of the intensity of her disappointment, she felt nearer to her husband in that instant than at any time since their marriage. Honora, who could not bear to hurt any one’s feelings, seized his hand repentantly. Tears started in her eyes.



Page 10

“Oh, Howard, I must seem to you very ungrateful,” she cried. “It was such a—such a surprise. I have never lived in the country, and I’m sure it will be delightful—and much more healthful than the city. Won’t you forgive me?”

If he had known as much about the fluctuations of the feminine temperament as of those of stocks, the ease with which Honora executed this complete change of front might have disturbed him. Howard, as will be seen, possessed that quality which is loosely called good nature. In marriage, he had been told (and was ready to believe), the wind blew where it listed; and he was a wise husband who did not spend his time in inquiry as to its sources. He kissed her before he helped her out of the carriage. Again they crossed the North River, and he led her through the wooden ferry house on the New Jersey side to where the Rivington train was standing beside a platform shed.

There was no parlour car. Men and women—mostly women—with bundles were already appropriating the seats and racks, and Honora found herself wondering how many of these individuals were her future neighbours. That there might have been an hysterical element in the lively anticipation she exhibited during the journey did not occur to Howard Spence.

After many stops,—in forty-two minutes, to be exact, the brakeman shouted out the name of the place which was to be her home, and of which she had been ignorant that morning. They alighted at an old red railroad station, were seized upon by a hackman in a coonskin coat, and thrust into a carriage that threatened to fall to pieces on the frozen macadam road. They passed through a village in which Honora had a glimpse of the drug store and grocery and the Grand Army Hall; then came detached houses of all ages in one and two-acre plots some above the road, for the country was rolling; a very attractive church of cream-coloured stone, and finally the carriage turned sharply to the left under an archway on which were the words “Stafford Park,” and stopped at a very new curbstone in a very new gutter on the right.

“Here we are!” cried Howard, as he fished in his trousers pockets for money to pay the hackman.

Honora looked around her. Stafford Park consisted of a wide centre-way of red gravel, not yet packed, with an island in its middle planted with shrubbery and young trees, the bare branches of which formed a black tracery against the orange-red of the western sky. On both sides of this centre-way were concrete walks, with cross-walks from the curbs to the houses. There were six of these—three on each side—standing on a raised terrace and about two hundred feet apart. Beyond them, to the northward, Stafford Park was still a wilderness of second-growth hardwood, interspersed with a few cedars.



Page 11

Honora's house, the first on the right, was exactly like the other five. If we look at it through her eyes, we shall find this similarity its main drawback. If we are a little older, however, and more sophisticated, we shall suspect the owner of Stafford Park and his architect of a design to make it appear imposing. It was (indefinite and much-abused term) Colonial; painted white; and double, with dormer windows of diagonal wood-surrounded panes in the roof. There was a large pillared porch on its least private side—namely, the front. A white-capped maid stood in the open doorway and smiled at Honora as she entered.

Honora walked through the rooms. There was nothing intricate about the house; it was as simple as two times four, and really too large for her and Howard. Her presents were installed, the pictures and photograph frames and chairs, even Mr. Isham's dining-room table and Cousin Eleanor's piano. The sight of these, and of the engraving which Aunt Mary had sent on, and which all her childhood had hung over her bed in the little room at home, brought the tears once more to her eyes. But she forced them back bravely.

These reflections were interrupted by the appearance of the little maid announcing that tea was ready, and bringing her two letters. One was from Susan Holt, and the other, written in a large, slanting, and angular handwriting, was signed Lily Dallam. It was dated from New York.

"My dear Honora," it ran, "I feel that I must call you so, for Sid and Howard, in addition to being partners, are such friends. I hesitated so long about furnishing your house, my dear, but Howard insisted, and said he wished to surprise you. I am sending you this line to welcome you, and to tell you that I have arranged with the furniture people to take any or all things back that you do not like, and exchange them. After all, they will be out of date in a few years, and Howard and Sid will have made so much money by that time, I hope, that I shall be able to leave my apartment, which is dear, and you will be coming to town."

Honora laid down the sheet, and began to tidy her hair before the glass of the highly polished bureau in her room. A line in Susan's letter occurred to her: "Mother hopes to see you soon. She asked me to tell you to buy good things which will last you all your life, and says that it pays."

The tea-table was steaming in the parlour in front of the wood fire in the blue tiled fireplace. The oak floor reflected its gleam, and that of the electric lights; the shades were drawn; a slight odour of steam heat pervaded the place. Howard, smoking a cigarette, was reclining on a sofa that evidently was not made for such a purpose, reading the evening newspapers.

"Well, Honora," he said, as she took her seat behind the tea-table, "you haven't told me how you like it. Pretty cosy, eh? And enough spare room to have people out over Sundays."



Page 12

“Oh, Howard, I do like it,” she cried, in a desperate attempt—which momentarily came near succeeding to convince herself that she could have desired nothing more. “It’s so sweet and clean and new—and all our own.”

She succeeded, at any rate, in convincing Howard. In certain matters, he was easily convinced.

“I thought you’d be pleased when you saw it, my dear,” he said.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT UNATTACHED

It was the poet Cowper who sang of domestic happiness as the only bliss that has survived the Fall. One of the burning and unsolved questions of to-day is,—will it survive the twentieth century? Will it survive rapid transit and bridge and Woman’s Rights, the modern novel and modern drama, automobiles, flying machines, and intelligence offices; hotel, apartment, and suburban life, or four homes, or none at all? Is it a weed that will grow anywhere, in a crevice between two stones in the city? Or is it a plant that requires tender care and the water of self-sacrifice? Above all, is it desirable?

Our heroine, as may have been suspected, has an adaptable temperament. Her natural position is upright, but like the reed, she can bend gracefully, and yields only to spring back again blithely. Since this chronicle regards her, we must try to look at existence through her eyes, and those of some of her generation and her sex: we must give the four years of her life in Rivington the approximate value which she herself would have put upon it—which is a chapter. We must regard Rivington as a kind of purgatory, not solely a place of departed spirits, but of those which have not yet arrived; as one of the many temporary abodes of the Great Unattached.

No philosophical writer has as yet made the attempt to define the change—as profound as that of the tadpole to the frog—between the lover and the husband. An author of ideals would not dare to proclaim that this change is inevitable: some husbands—and some wives are fortunate enough to escape it, but it is not unlikely to happen in our modern civilization. Just when it occurred in Howard Spence it is difficult to say, but we have got to consider him henceforth as a husband; one who regards his home as a shipyard rather than the sanctuary of a goddess; as a launching place, the ways of which are carefully greased, that he may slide off to business every morning with as little friction as possible, and return at night to rest undisturbed in a comfortable berth, to ponder over the combat of the morrow.



It would be inspiring to summon the vision of Honora, in rustling garments, poised as the figurehead of this craft, beckoning him on to battle and victory. Alas! the launching happened at that grimmest and most unromantic of hours—ten minutes of eight in the morning. There was a period, indeterminate, when she poured out his coffee with wifely zeal; a second period when she appeared at the foot of the stairs to kiss him as he was going out of the door; a third when, clad in an attractive dressing-gown, she waved him good-by from the window; and lastly, a fourth, which was only marked by an occasional protest on his part, when the coffee was weak.



Page 13

"I'd gladly come down, Howard, if it seemed to make the least difference to you," said Honora. "But all you do is to sit with your newspaper propped up and read the stock reports, and growl when I ask you a polite question. You've no idea how long it makes the days out here, to get up early."

"It seems to me you put in a good many days in town," he retorted.

"Surely you don't expect me to spend all my time in Rivington!" she cried reproachfully; "I'd die. And then I am always having to get new cooks for you, because they can't make Hollandaise sauce like hotel chefs. Men have no idea how hard it is to keep house in the country,—I just wish you had to go to those horrid intelligence offices. You wouldn't stay in Rivington ten days. And all the good cooks drink."

Howard, indeed, with the aid of the village policeman, had had to expel from his kitchen one imperious female who swore like a dock hand, and who wounded Honora to the quick by remarking, as she departed in durance, that she had always lived with ladies and gentlemen and people who were somebody. The incident had tended further to detract from the romance of the country.

It is a mistake to suppose that the honeymoon disappears below the horizon with the rapidity of a tropical sun. And there is generally an afterglow. In spite of cooks and other minor clouds, in spite of visions of metropolitan triumphs (not shattered, but put away in camphor), life was touched with a certain novelty. There was a new runabout and a horse which Honora could drive herself, and she went to the station to meet her husband. On mild Saturday and Sunday afternoons they made long excursions, into the country—until the golf season began, when the lessons begun at Silverdale were renewed. But after a while certain male competitors appeared, and the lessons were discontinued. Sunday, after his pile of newspapers had religiously been disposed of, became a field day. Indeed, it is impossible, without a twinge of pity, to behold Howard taking root in Rivington, for we know that sooner or later he will be dug up and transplanted. The soil was congenial. He played poker on the train with the Rivington husbands, and otherwise got along with them famously. And it was to him an enigma—when occasionally he allowed his thoughts to dwell upon such trivial matters—why Honora was not equally congenial with the wives.

There were, no doubt, interesting people in Rivington about whom many stories could be written: people with loves and fears and anxieties and joys, with illnesses and recoveries, with babies, but few grandchildren. There were weddings at the little church, and burials; there were dances at the golf club; there were Christmas trees, where most of the presents—like Honora's—came from afar, from family centres formed in a social period gone by; there were promotions for the heads of families, and consequent rejoicings over increases of income; there were movings; there were—inevitable in the ever grinding action of that remorseless law, the survival of the fittest—commercial calamities, and the heartrending search for new employment.

Page 14

Rivington called upon Honora in vehicles of all descriptions, in proportion to the improvidence or prosperity of the owners. And Honora returned the calls, and joined the Sewing Circle, and the Woman's Luncheon Club, which met for the purpose of literary discussion. In the evenings there were little dinners of six or eight, where the men talked business and the women house rent and groceries and gossip and the cheapest places in New York City to buy articles of the latest fashion. Some of them had actually built or were building houses that cost as much as thirty thousand dollars, with the inexplicable intention of remaining in Rivington the rest of their lives!

Honora was kind to these ladies. As we know, she was kind to everybody. She almost allowed two or three of them to hope that they might become her intimates, and made excursions to New York with them, and lunched in fashionable restaurants. Their range of discussion included babies and Robert Browning, the modern novel and the best matinee. It would be interesting to know why she treated them, on the whole, like travellers met by chance in a railroad station, from whom she was presently forever to depart. The time and manner of this departure were matters to be determined in the future.

It would be interesting to know, likewise, just at what period the intention of moving away from Rivington became fixed in Honora's mind. Honora circumscribed, Honora limited, Honora admitting defeat, and this chronicle would be finished. The gods exist somewhere, though many incarnations may, be necessary to achieve their companionship. And no prison walls loom so high as to appall our heroine's soul. To exchange one prison for another is in itself something of a feat, and an argument that the thing may be done again. Neither do the wise ones beat themselves uselessly against brick or stone. Howard—poor man!—is fatuous enough to regard a great problem as being settled once and for all by a marriage certificate and a benediction; and labours under the delusion that henceforth he may come and go as he pleases, eat his breakfast in silence, sleep after dinner, and spend his Sundays at the Rivington Golf Club. It is as well to leave him, at present, in blissful ignorance of his future.

Our sympathies, however, must be with Honora, who has paid the price for heaven, and who discovers that by marriage she has merely joined the ranks of the Great Unattached. Hitherto it had been inconceivable to her that any one sufficiently prosperous could live in a city, or near it and dependent on it, without being socially a part of it. Most momentous of disillusion! With the exception of the Sidney Dallams and one or two young brokers who occasionally came out over Sunday, her husband had no friends in New York. Rivington and the Holt family (incongruous mixture) formed the sum total of her acquaintance.



Page 15

On Monday mornings in particular, if perchance she went to town, the huge signs which she read across the swamps, of breakfast foods and other necessities, seemed, for some reason, best to express her isolation. Well-dressed, laughing people descended from omnibuses at the prettier stations, people who seemed all-sufficient to themselves; people she was sure she should like if only she knew them. Once the sight of her school friend, Ethel Wing, chatting with a tall young man, brought up a flood of recollections; again, in a millinery establishment, she came face to face with the attractive Mrs. Maitland whom she had seen at Hot Springs. Sometimes she would walk on Fifth Avenue, watching, with mingled sensations, the procession there. The colour, the movement, the sensation of living in a world where every one was fabulously wealthy, was at once a stimulation and a despair. Brougham after brougham passed, victoria after victoria, in which beautifully gowned women chatted gayly or sat back, impassive, amidst the cushions. Some of them, indeed, looked bored, but this did not mar the general effect of pleasure and prosperity. Even the people—well-dressed, too—in the hansom cabs were usually animated and smiling. On the sidewalk athletic, clear-skinned girls passed her, sometimes with a man, sometimes in groups of two and three, going in and out of the expensive-looking shops with the large, plate-glass windows.

All of these women, apparently, had something definite to do, somewhere to go, some one to meet the very next, minute. They protested to milliners and dressmakers if they were kept waiting, and even seemed impatient of time lost if one by chance bumped into them. But Honora had no imperative appointments. Lily Dallam was almost sure to be out, or going out immediately, and seemed to have more engagements than any one in New York.

“I’m so sorry, my dear,” she would say, and add reproachfully: “why didn’t you telephone me you were coming? If you had only let me know we might have lunched together or gone to the matinee. Now I have promised Clara Trowbridge to go to a lunch party at her house.”

Mrs. Dallam had a most convincing way of saying such things, and in spite of one’s self put one in the wrong for not having telephoned. But if indeed Honora telephoned—as she did once or twice in her innocence—Lily was quite as distressed.

“My dear, why didn’t you let me know last night? Trixy Brent has given Lula Chandos his box at the Horse Show, and Lula would never, never forgive me if I backed out.”

Although she lived in an apartment—in a most attractive one, to be sure—there could be no doubt about it that Lily Dallam was fashionable. She had a way with her, and her costumes were marvellous. She could have made her fortune either as a dressmaker or a house decorator, and she bought everything from “little” men and women whom she discovered herself. It was a curious fact that all of these small tradespeople eventually became fashionable, too. Lily was kind to Honora, and gave her their

addresses before they grew to be great and insolent and careless whether one patronized them or not.

Page 16

While we are confessing the trials and weaknesses of our heroine, we shall have to admit that she read, occasionally, the society columns of the newspapers. And in this manner she grew to have a certain familiarity with the doings of those favourites of fortune who had more delightful engagements than hours in which to fulfil them. So intimate was Lily Dallam with many of these Olympians that she spoke of them by their first names, or generally by their nicknames. Some two years after Honora's marriage the Dallams had taken a house in that much discussed colony of Quicksands, where sport and pleasure reigned supreme: and more than once the gown which Mrs. Sidney Dallam had worn to a polo match had been faithfully described in the public prints, or the dinners which she had given at the Quicksands Club. One of these dinners, Honora learned, had been given in honour of Mr. Trixton Brent.

"You ought to know Trixy, Honora," Mrs. Dallam declared; "he'd be crazy about you."

Time passed, however, and Mrs. Dallam made no attempt to bring about this most desirable meeting. When Honora and Howard went to town to dine with the Dallams, it was always at a restaurant, a 'partie carree'. Lily Dallam thought it dull to dine at home, and they went to the theatre afterwards—invariably a musical comedy. Although Honora did not care particularly for musical comedies, she always experienced a certain feverish stimulation which kept her wide awake on the midnight train to Rivington. Howard had a most exasperating habit of dozing in the corner of the seat.

"You are always sleepy when I have anything interesting to talk to you about," said Honora, "or reading stock reports. I scarcely see anything at all of you."

Howard roused himself.

"Where are we now?" he asked.

"Oh," cried Honora, "we haven't passed Hydeville. Howard, who is Trixton Brent?"

"What about him?" demanded her husband.

"Nothing—except that he is one of Lily's friends, and she said she knew—I should like him. I wish you would be more interested in people. Who is he?"

"One of the best-known operators in the market," Howard answered, and his air implied that a lack of knowledge of Mr. Brent was ignorance indeed; "a daring gambler. He cornered cotton once, and raked in over a million. He's a sport, too."

"How old is he?"

"About forty-three."

"Is he married?" inquired Honora.



“He’s divorced,” said Howard. And she had to be content with so much of the gentleman’s biography, for her husband relapsed into somnolence again. A few days later she saw a picture of Mr. Brent, in polo costume, in one of the magazines. She thought him good-looking, and wondered what kind of a wife he had had.



Page 17

Honora, when she went to town for the day, generally could be sure of finding some one, at least, of the Holt family at home at luncheon time. They lived still in the same house on Madison Avenue to which Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom had been invited to breakfast on the day of Honora's arrival in her own country. It had a wide, brownstone front, with a basement, and a high flight of steps leading up to the door. Within, solemnity reigned, and this effect was largely produced by the prodigiously high ceilings and the black walnut doors and woodwork. On the second floor, the library where the family assembled was more cheerful. The books themselves, although in black-walnut cases, and the sun pouring in, assisted in making this effect.

Here, indeed, were stability and peace. Here Honora remade the acquaintance of the young settlement worker, and of the missionary, now on the Presbyterian Board of Missions. Here she charmed other friends and allies of the Holt family; and once met, somewhat to her surprise, two young married women who differed radically from the other guests of the house. Honora admired their gowns if not their manners; for they ignored her, and talked to Mrs. Holt about plans for raising money for the Working Girl's Relief Society.

"You should join us, my dear," said Mrs. Holt; "I am sure you would be interested in our work."

"I'd be so glad to, Mrs. Holt," replied Honora, "if only I didn't live in the country."

She came away as usual, feeling of having run into a cul de sac. Mrs. Holt's house was a refuge, not an outlet; and thither Honora directed her steps when a distaste for lunching alone or with some of her Rivington friends in the hateful, selfish gayety of a fashionable restaurant overcame her; or when her moods had run through a cycle, and an atmosphere of religion and domesticity became congenial.

"Howard," she asked unexpectedly one evening, as he sat smoking beside the blue tiled mantel, "have you got on your winter flannels?"

"I'll bet a hundred dollars to ten cents," he cried, "that you've been lunching with Mrs. Holt."

"I think you're horrid," said Honora.

Something must be said for her. Domestic virtue, in the face of such mocking heresy, is exceptionally difficult of attainment.

Mrs. Holt had not been satisfied with Honora's and Susan's accounts of the house in Stafford Park. She felt called upon to inspect it. And for this purpose, in the spring following Honora's marriage, she made a pilgrimage to Rivington and spent the day. Honora met her at the station, and the drive homeward was occupied in answering

innumerable questions on the characters, conditions, and modes of life of Honora's neighbours.



Page 18

“Now, my dear,” said Mrs. Holt, when they were seated before the fire after lunch, “I want you to feel that you can come to me for everything. I must congratulate you and Howard on being sensible enough to start your married life simply, in the country. I shall never forget the little house in which Mr. Holt and I began, and how blissfully happy I was.” The good lady reached out and took Honora’s hand in her own. “Not that your deep feeling for your husband will ever change. But men are more difficult to manage as they grow older, my dear, and the best of them require a little managing for their own good. And increased establishments bring added cares and responsibilities. Now that I am here, I have formed a very fair notion of what it ought to cost you to live in such a place. And I shall be glad to go over your housekeeping books with you, and tell you if you are being cheated as I dare say you are.”

“Oh, Mrs. Holt,” Honora faltered, “I—I haven’t kept any books. Howard just pays the bills.”

“You mean to say he hasn’t given you any allowance!” cried Mrs. Holt, aghast. “You don’t know what it costs to run this house?”

“No,” said Honora, humbly. “I never thought of it. I have no idea what Howard’s income may be.”

“I’ll write to Howard myself—to-night,” declared Mrs. Holt.

“Please don’t, Mrs. Holt. I’ll—I’ll speak to him,” said Honora.

“Very well, then,” the good lady agreed, “and I will send you one of my own books, with my own system, as soon as I get home. It is not your fault, my dear, it is Howard’s. It is little short of criminal of him. I suppose this is one of the pernicious results of being on the Stock Exchange. New York is nothing like what it was when I was a girl—the extravagance by everybody is actually appalling. The whole city is bent upon lavishness and pleasure. And I am afraid it is very often the wives, Honora, who take the lead in prodigality. It all tends, my dear, to loosen the marriage tie—especially this frightful habit of dining in hotels and restaurants.”

Before she left Mrs. Holt insisted on going over the house from top to bottom, from laundry to linen closet. Suffice it to say that the inspection was not without a certain criticism, which must be passed over.

“It is a little large, just for you and Howard, my dear,” was her final comment. “But you are wise in providing for the future.”

“For the future?” Honora repeated.

Mrs. Holt playfully pinched her cheek.



“When the children arrive, my dear, as I hope they will—soon,” she said, smiling at Honora’s colour. “Sometimes it all comes back to me—my own joy when Joshua was a baby. I was very foolish about him, no doubt. Annie and Gwendolen tell me so. I wouldn’t even let the nurse sit up with him when he was getting his teeth. Mercy!” she exclaimed, glancing at the enamelled watch on her gown,—for long practice had enabled her to tell the time upside down,—“we’ll be late for the train, my dear.”

Page 19

After returning from the station, Honora sat for a long time at her window, looking out on the park. The afternoon sunlight had the silvery tinge that comes to it in March; the red gravel of the centre driveway was very wet, and the grass of the lawns of the houses opposite already a vivid green; in the back-yards the white clothes snapped from the lines; and a group of children, followed by nurses with perambulators, tripped along the strip of sidewalk.

Why could not she feel the joys and desires of which Mrs. Holt had spoken? It never had occurred to her until to-day that they were lacking in her. Children! A home! Why was it that she did not want children? Why should such a natural longing be absent in her? Her mind went back to the days of her childhood dolls, and she smiled to think of their large families. She had always associated marriage with children—until she got married. And now she remembered that her childhood ideals of the matrimonial state had been very much, like Mrs. Holt's own experience of it: Why then had that ideal gradually faded until, when marriage came to her, it was faint and shadowy indeed? Why were not her spirit and her hopes enclosed by the walls in which she sat?

The housekeeping book came from Mrs. Holt the next morning, but Honora did not mention it to her husband. Circumstances were her excuse: he had had a hard day on the Exchange, and at such times he showed a marked disinclination for the discussion of household matters. It was not until the autumn, in fact, that the subject of finance was mentioned between them, and after a period during which Howard had been unusually uncommunicative and morose. Just as electrical disturbances are said to be in some way connected with sun spots, so Honora learned that a certain glumness and tendency to discuss expenses on the part of her husband were synchronous with a depression in the market.

"I wish you'd learn to go a little slow, Honora," he said one evening. "The bills are pretty stiff this month. You don't seem to have any idea of the value of money."

"Oh, Howard," she exclaimed, after a moment's pause for breath, "how can you say such a thing, when I save you so much?"

"Save me so much!" he echoed.

"Yes. If I had gone to Ridley for this suit, he would have charged me two hundred dollars. I took such pains—all on your account—to find a little man Lily Dallam told me about, who actually made it for one hundred and twenty-five."

It was typical of the unreason of his sex that he failed to be impressed by this argument.

"If you go on saving that way," said he, "we'll be in the hands of a receiver by Christmas. I can't see any difference between buying one suit from Ridley—whoever



he may be—and three from Lily Dallam's 'little man,' except that you spend more than three times as much money.”

“Oh, I didn't get three!—I never thought you could be so unjust, Howard. Surely you don't want me to dress like these Rivington women, do you?”



Page 20

“I can’t see anything wrong with their clothes,” he maintained.

“And to think that I was doing it all to please you!” she cried reproachfully.

“To please me!”

“Who else? We-we don’t know anybody in New York. And I wanted you to be proud of me. I’ve tried so hard and—and sometimes you don’t even look at my gowns, and say whether you like them and they are all for you.”

This argument, at least, did not fail of results, combined as it was with a hint of tears in Honora’s voice. Its effect upon Howard was peculiar—he was at once irritated, disarmed, and softened. He put down his cigarette—and Honora was on his knee! He could not deny her attractions.

“How could you be so cruel, Howard?” she asked.

“You know you wouldn’t like me to be a slattern. It was my own idea to save money—I had a long talk about economy one day with Mrs. Holt. And you act as though you had such a lot of it when we’re in town for dinner with these Rivington people. You always have champagne. If—if you’re poor, you ought to have told me so, and I shouldn’t have ordered another dinner gown.”

“You’ve ordered another dinner gown!”

“Only a little one,” said Honora, “the simplest kind. But if you’re poor—”

She had made a discovery—to reflect upon his business success was to touch a sensitive nerve.

“I’m not poor,” he declared. “But the bottom’s dropped out of the market, and even old Wing is economizing. We’ll have to put on the brakes for awhile, Honora.”

It was shortly after this that Honora departed on the first of her three visits to St. Louis.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW DOCTRINE

This history concerns a free and untrammelled—and, let us add, feminine—spirit. No lady is in the least interesting if restricted and contented with her restrictions,—a fact which the ladies of our nation are fast finding out. What would become of the Goddess of Liberty? And let us mark well, while we are making these observations, that Liberty is a goddess, not a god, although it has taken us in America over a century to realize a



significance in the choice of her sex. And—another discovery!—she is not a haus frau. She is never domiciled, never fettered. Even the French, clever as they are, have not conceived her: equality and fraternity are neither kith nor kin of hers, and she laughs at them as myths—for she is a laughing lady. She alone of the three is real, and she alone is worshipped for attributes which she does not possess. She is a coquette, and she is never satisfied. If she were, she would not be Liberty: if she were, she would not be worshipped of men, but despised. If they understood her, they would not care for her. And finally, she comes not to bring peace, but a sword.

At quarter to seven one blustery evening of the April following their fourth anniversary Honora returned from New York to find her husband seated under the tall lamp in the room he somewhat facetiously called his “den,” scanning the financial page of his newspaper. He was in his dressing gown, his slippered feet extended towards the hearth, smoking a cigarette. And on the stand beside him was a cocktail glass—empty.



Page 21

“Howard,” she cried, brushing his ashes from the table, “how can you be so untidy when you are so good-looking dressed up? I really believe you’re getting fat. And there,” she added, critically touching a place on the top of his head, “is a bald spot!”

“Anything else?” he murmured, with his eyes still on the sheet.

“Lots,” answered Honora, pulling down the newspaper from before his face. “For one thing, I’m not going to allow you to be a bear any more. I don’t mean a Stock Exchange bear, but a domestic bear—which is much worse. You’ve got to notice me once in a while. If you don’t, I’ll get another husband. That’s what women do in these days, you know, when the one they have doesn’t take the trouble to make himself sufficiently agreeable. I’m sure I could get another one quite easily,” she declared.

He looked up at her as she stood facing him in the lamplight before the fire, and was forced to admit to himself that the boast was not wholly idle. A smile was on her lips, her eyes gleamed with health; her furs —of silver fox—were thrown back, the crimson roses pinned on her mauve afternoon gown matched the glow in her cheeks, while her hair mingled with the dusky shadows. Howard Spence experienced one of those startling, illuminating moments which come on occasions to the busy and self-absorbed husbands of his nation. Psychologists have a name for such a phenomenon. Ten minutes before, so far as his thoughts were concerned, she had not existed, and suddenly she had become a possession which he had not, in truth, sufficiently prized. Absurd though it was, the possibility which she had suggested aroused in him a slight uneasiness.

“You are a deuced good-looking woman, I’ll say that for you, Honora,” he admitted.

“Thanks,” she answered, mockingly, and put her hands behind her back. “If I had only known you were going to settle down in Rivington and get fat and bald and wear dressing gowns and be a bear, I never should have married you—never, never, never! Oh, how young and simple and foolish I was! And the magnificent way you talked about New York, and intimated that you were going to conquer the world. I believed you. Wasn’t I a little idiot not—to know that you’d make for a place like this and dig a hole and stay in it, and let the world go hang?”

He laughed, though it was a poor attempt. And she read in his eyes, which had not left her face, that he was more or less disturbed.

“I treat you pretty well, don’t I, Honora?” he asked. There was an amorous, apologetic note in his voice that amused her, and reminded her of the honeymoon. “I give you all the money you want or rather—you take it,—and I don’t kick up a row, except when the market goes to pieces—”



“When you act as though we’d have to live in Harlem—which couldn’t be much worse,” she interrupted. “And you stay in town all day and have no end of fun making money, —for you like to make money, and expect me to amuse myself the best part of my life with a lot of women who don’t know enough to keep thin.”



Page 22

He laughed again, but still uneasily. Honora was still smiling.

“What’s got into you?” he demanded. “I know you don’t like Rivington, but you never broke loose this way before.”

“If you stay here,” said Honora, with a new firmness, “it will be alone. I can’t see what you want with a wife, anyway. I’ve been thinking you over lately. I don’t do anything for you, except to keep getting you cooks—and anybody could do that. You don’t seem to need me in any possible way. All I do is to loiter around the house and read and play the piano, or go to New York and buy clothes for nobody to look at except strangers in restaurants. I’m worth more than that. I think I’ll get married again.”

“Great Lord, what are you talking about?” he exclaimed when he got his breath.

“I think I’ll take a man next time,” she continued calmly, “who has something to him, some ambition. The kind of man I thought I was getting when I took you only I shouldn’t be fooled again. Women remarry a good deal in these days, and I’m beginning to see the reason why. And the women who have done it appear to be perfectly happy—much happier than they were at first. I saw one of them at Lily Dallam’s this afternoon. She was radiant. I can’t see any particular reason why a woman should be tied all her life to her husband’s apron strings—or whatever he wears—and waste the talents she has. It’s wicked, when she might be the making of some man who is worth something, and who lives somewhere.”

Her husband got up.

“Jehosaphat!” he cried, “I never heard such talk in my life.”

The idea that her love for him might have ebbed a little, or that she would for a moment consider leaving him, he rejected as preposterous, of course: the reputation which the majority of her sex had made throughout the ages for constancy to the marriage tie was not to be so lightly dissipated. Nevertheless, there was in her words a new undertone of determination he had never before heard—or, at least, noticed.

There was one argument, or panacea, which had generally worked like a charm, although some time had elapsed since last he had resorted to it. He tried to seize and kiss her, but she eluded him. At last he caught her, out of breath, in the corner of the room.

“Howard—you’ll knock over the lamp—you’ll ruin my gown—and then you’ll have to buy me another. I *did* mean it,” she insisted, holding back her head; “you’ll have to choose between Rivington and me. It’s—it’s an ultimatum. There were at least three awfully attractive men at Lily Dallam’s tea—I won’t tell you who they were—who would be glad to marry me in a minute.”



He drew her down on the arm of his chair.

“Now that Lily has a house in town,” he said weakly, “I suppose you think you’ve got to have one.”



Page 23

“Oh, Howard, it is such a dear house. I had no idea that so much could be done with so narrow a front. It’s all French, with mirrors and big white panels and satin chairs and sofas, and a carved gilt piano that she got for nothing from a dealer she knows; and church candlesticks. The mirrors give it the effect of being larger than it really is. I’ve only two criticisms to make: it’s too far from Fifth Avenue, and one can scarcely turn around in it without knocking something down—a photograph frame or a flower vase or one of her spindle-legged chairs. It was only a hideous, old-fashioned stone front when she bought it. I suppose nobody but Reggie Farwell could have made anything out of it.”

“Who’s Reggie Farwell?” inquired her husband.

“Howard, do you really mean to say you’ve never heard of Reggie Farwell? Lily was so lucky to get him—she says he wouldn’t have done the house if he hadn’t been such a friend of hers. And he was coming to the tea this afternoon—only something happened at the last minute, and he couldn’t. She was so disappointed. He built the Maitlands’ house, and did over the Cecil Graingers’. And he’s going to do our house—some day.”

“Why not right away?” asked Howard.

“Because I’ve made up my mind to be very, very reasonable,” she replied. “We’re going to Quicksands for a while, first.”

“To Quicksands!” he repeated. But in spite of himself he experienced a feeling of relief that she had not demanded a town mansion on the spot.

Honora sprang to her feet.

“Get up, Howard,” she cried, “remember that we’re going out for dinner—and you’ll never be ready.”

“Hold on,” he protested, “I don’t know about this Quicksands proposition. Let’s talk it over a little more—”

“We’ll talk it over another time,” she replied. “But—remember my ultimatum. And I am only taking you there for your own good.”

“For my own good!”

“Yes. To get you out of a rut. To keep you from becoming commonplace and obscure and—and everything you promised not to be when you married me,” she retorted from the doorway, her eyes still alight with that disturbing and tantalizing fire. “It is my last desperate effort as a wife to save you from baldness, obesity, and nonentity.” Wherewith she disappeared into her room and closed the door.



We read of earthquakes in the tropics and at the ends of the earth with commiseration, it is true, yet with the fond belief that the ground on which we have built is so firm that our own 'lares' and 'penates' are in no danger of being shaken down. And in the same spirit we learn of other people's domestic cataclysms. Howard Spence had had only a slight shock, but it frightened him and destroyed his sense of immunity. And during the week that followed he lacked the moral courage either to discuss the subject of Quicksands thoroughly or to let it alone: to put down his foot like a Turk or accede like a Crichton.

Page 24

Either course might have saved him. One trouble with the unfortunate man was that he realized but dimly the gravity of the crisis. He had laboured under the delusion that matrimonial conditions were still what they had been in the Eighteenth Century—although it is doubtful whether he had ever thought of that century. Characteristically, he considered the troublesome affair chiefly from its business side. His ambition, if we may use so large a word for the sentiment that had filled his breast, had been coincident with his prenuptial passion for Honora. And she had contrived, after four years, in some mysterious way to stir up that ambition once more; to make him uncomfortable; to compel him to ask himself whether he were not sliding downhill; to wonder whether living at Quicksands might not bring him in touch with important interests which had as yet eluded him. And, above all,—if the idea be put a little more crudely and definitely than it occurred in his thoughts, he awoke to the realization that his wife was an asset he had hitherto utterly neglected. Inconceivable though it were (a middle-of-the-night reflection), if he insisted on trying to keep such a woman bottled up in Rivington she might some day pack up and leave him. One never could tell what a woman would do in these days. *Les sacrees femmes*.

We are indebted to Honora for this view of her husband's mental processes. She watched them, as it were, through a glass in the side of his head, and incidentally derived infinite amusement therefrom. With instinctive wisdom she refrained from tinkering.

An invitation to dine with the Dallams', in their own house, arrived a day or two after the tea which Honora had attended there. Although Lily had always been cordial, Honora thought this note couched in terms of unusual warmth. She was implored to come early, because Lily had so much to talk to her about which couldn't be written on account of a splitting headache. In moderate obedience to this summons Honora arrived, on the evening in question, before the ornamental ironwork of Mrs. Dallam's front door at a few minutes after seven o'clock. Honora paused in the spring twilight to contemplate the house, which stood out incongruously from its sombre, brownstone brothers and sisters with noisy basement kitchens. The Third Avenue Elevated, "so handy for Sid," roared across the gap scarcely a block away; and just as the door was opened the tightest of little blue broughams, pulled by a huge chestnut horse and driven by the tiniest of grooms in top boots, drew up at the curb. And out of it burst a resplendent lady—Mrs. Dallam.

"Oh, it's you, Honora," she cried. "Am I late? I'm so sorry. But I just couldn't help it. It's all Clara Trowbridge's fault. She insisted on my staying to meet that Renee Labride who dances so divinely in Lady Emmeline. She's sweet. I've seen her eight times." Here she took Honora's arm, and faced her towards the street. "What do you think of my turnout? Isn't he a darling?"



Page 25

"Is he—full grown?" asked Honora.

Lilly Dallam burst out laughing.

"Bless you, I don't mean Patrick,—although I had a terrible time finding him. I mean the horse. Trixy Brent gave him to me before he went abroad."

"Gave him to you!" Honora exclaimed.

"Oh, he's always doing kind things like that, and he hadn't any use for him. My dear, I hope you don't think for an instant Trixy's in love with me! He's crazy about Lula Chandos. I tried so hard to get her to come to dinner to-night, and the Trowbridges' and the Barclays'. You've no idea how difficult it is in New York to get any one under two weeks. And so we've got just ourselves."

Honora was on the point of declaring, politely, that she was very glad, when Lily Dallam asked her how she liked the brougham.

"It's the image of Mrs. Cecil Grainger's, my dear, and I got it for a song. As long as Trixy gave me the horse, I told Sid the least he could do was to give me the brougham and the harness. Is Master Sid asleep?" she inquired of the maid who had been patiently waiting at the door. "I meant to have got home in time to kiss him."

She led Honora up the narrow but thickly carpeted stairs to a miniature boudoir, where Madame Adelaide, in a gilt rococo frame, looked superciliously down from the walls.

"Why haven't you been in to see me since my tea, Honora? You were such a success, and after you left they were all crazy to know something about you, and why they hadn't heard of you. My dear, how much did little Harris charge you for that dress? If I had your face and neck and figure I'd die before I'd live in Rivington. You're positively wasted, Honora. And if you stay there, no one will look at you, though you were as beautiful as Mrs. Langtry."

"You're rather good-looking yourself, Lily," said Honora.

"I'm ten years older than you, my dear, and I have to be so careful. Sid says I'm killing myself, but I've found a little massage woman who is wonderful. How do you like this dress?"

"All your things are exquisite."

"Do you think so?" cried Mrs. Dallam, delightedly.

Honora, indeed, had not perjured herself. Only the hypercritical, when Mrs. Dallam was dressed, had the impression of a performed miracle. She was the most finished of



finished products. Her complexion was high and (be it added) natural, her hair wonderfully 'onduled', and she had withal the sweetest and kindest of smiles and the most engaging laughter in the world. It was impossible not to love her.

"Howard," she cried, when a little later they were seated at the table, "how mean of you to have kept Honora in a dead and alive place like Rivington all these years! I think she's an angel to have stood it. Men are beyond me. Do you know what an attractive wife you've got? I've just been telling her that there wasn't a woman at my tea who compared with her, and the men were crazy about her."



Page 26

"That's the reason I live down there," proclaimed Howard, as he finished his first glass of champagne.

"Honora," demanded Mrs. Dallam, ignoring his bravado, "why don't you take a house at Quicksands? You'd love it, and you'd look simply divine in a bathing suit. Why don't you come down?"

"Ask Howard," replied Honora, demurely.

"Well, Lily, I'll own up I have been considering it a little," that gentleman admitted with gravity. "But I haven't decided anything. There are certain drawbacks—"

"Drawbacks!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallam. "Drawbacks at Quicksands! I'd like to know what they are. Don't be silly, Howard. You get more for your money there than any place I know." Suddenly the light of an inspiration came into her eyes, and she turned to her husband. "Sid, the Alfred Fern house is for rent, isn't it?"

"I think it must be, Lily," replied Mr. Dallam.

"Sometimes I believe I'm losing my mind," declared Mrs. Dallam. "What an imbecile I was not to think of it! It's a dear, Honora, not five minutes from the Club, with the sweetest furniture, and they just finished it last fall. It would be positively wicked not to take it, Howard. They couldn't have failed more opportunely. I'm sorry for Alfred, but I always thought Louise Fern a little snob. Sid, you must see Alfred down town the first thing in the morning and ask him what's the least he'll rent it for. Tell him I wish to know."

"But—my dear Lily—began Mr. Dallam apologetically.

"There!" complained his wife, "you're always raising objections to my most charming and sensible plans. You act as though you wanted Honora and Howard to stay in Rivington."

"My dear Lily!" he protested again. And words failing him, he sought by a gesture to disclaim such a sinister motive for inaction.

"What harm can it do?" she asked plaintively. "Howard doesn't have to rent the house, although it would be a sin if he didn't. Find out the rent in the morning, Sid, and we'll all four go down on Sunday and look at it, and lunch at the Quicksands Club. I'm sure I can get out of my engagement at Laura Dean's—this is so important. What do you say, Honora?"

"I think it would be delightful," said Honora.



CHAPTER V

QUICKSANDS

To convey any adequate idea of the community familiarly known as Quicksands a cinematograph were necessary. With a pen we can only approximate the appearance of the shifting grains at any one time. Some households there were, indeed, which maintained a precarious though seemingly miraculous footing on the surface, or near it, going under for mere brief periods, only to rise again and flaunt men-servants in the face of Providence.



Page 27

There were real tragedies, too, although a casual visitor would never have guessed it. For tragedies sink, and that is the end of them. The cinematograph, to be sure, would reveal one from time to time, coming like a shadow across an endless feast, and gone again in a flash. Such was what might appropriately be called the episode of the Alfred Ferns. After three years of married life they had come, they had rented; the market had gone up, they had bought and built—upon the sands. The ancient farmhouse which had stood on the site had been torn down as unsuited to a higher civilization, although the great elms which had sheltered it had been left standing, in grave contrast to the twisted cedars and stunted oaks so much in evidence round about.

The Ferns—or rather little Mrs. Fern—had had taste, and the new house reflected it. As an indication of the quality of imagination possessed by the owners, the place was called “The Brackens.” There was a long porch on the side of the ocean, but a view of the water was shut off from it by a hedge which, during the successive ownerships of the adjoining property, had attained a height of twelve feet. There was a little toy greenhouse connecting with the porch (an “economy” indulged in when the market had begun to go the wrong way for Mr. Fern). Exile, although unpleasant, was sometimes found necessary at Quicksands, and even effective.

Above all things, however, if one is describing Quicksands, one must not be depressing. That is the unforgiveable sin there. Hence we must touch upon these tragedies lightly.

If, after walking through the entrance in the hedge that separated the Brackens from the main road, you turned to the left and followed a driveway newly laid out between young poplars, you came to a mass of cedars. Behind these was hidden the stable. There were four stalls, all replete with brass trimmings, and a box, and the carriage-house was made large enough for the break which Mr. Fern had been getting ready to buy when he had been forced, so unexpectedly, to change his mind.

If the world had been searched, perhaps, no greater contrast to Rivington could have been found than this delightful colony of quicksands, full of life and motion and colour, where everybody was beautifully dressed and enjoying themselves. For a whole week after her instalment Honora was in a continual state of excitement and anticipation, and the sound of wheels and voices on the highroad beyond the hedge sent her peeping to her curtains a dozen times a day. The waking hours, instead of burdens, were so many fleeting joys. In the morning she awoke to breathe a new, perplexing, and delicious perfume—the salt sea breeze stirring her curtains: later, she was on the gay, yellow-ochre beach with Lily Dallam, making new acquaintances; and presently stepping, with a quiver of fear akin to delight, into the restless, limitless blue water that stretched southward under

Page 28

a milky haze: luncheon somewhere, more new acquaintances, and then, perhaps, in Lily's light wood victoria to meet the train of trains. For at half-past five the little station, forlorn all day long in the midst of the twisted cedars that grew out of the heated sand, assumed an air of gayety and animation. Vehicles of all sorts drew up in the open space before it, wagonettes, phaetons, victorias, high wheeled hackney carts, and low Hempstead carts: women in white summer gowns and veils compared notes, or shouted invitations to dinner from carriage to carriage. The engine rolled in with a great cloud of dust, the horses danced, the husbands and the overnight guests, grimy and brandishing evening newspapers, poured out of the special car where they had sat in arm-chairs and talked stocks all the way from Long Island City. Some were driven home, it is true; some to the beach, and others to the Quicksands Club, where they continued their discussions over whiskey-and-sodas until it was time to have a cocktail and dress for dinner.

Then came the memorable evening when Lily Dallam gave a dinner in honour of Honora, her real introduction to Quicksands. It was characteristic of Lily that her touch made the desert bloom. Three years before Quicksands had gasped to hear that the Sidney Dallams had bought the Faraday house —or rather what remained of it.

"We got it for nothing," Lily explained triumphantly on the occasion of Honora's first admiring view. "Nobody would look at it, my dear."

It must have been this first price, undoubtedly, that appealed to Sidney Dallam, model for all husbands: to Sidney, who had had as much of an idea of buying in Quicksands as of acquiring a Scotch shooting box. The "Faraday place" had belonged to the middle ages, as time is reckoned in Quicksands, and had lain deserted for years, chiefly on account of its lugubrious and funereal aspect. It was on a corner. Two "for rent" signs had fallen successively from the overgrown hedge: some fifty feet back from the road, hidden by undergrowth and in the tenebrous shades of huge larches and cedars, stood a hideous, two-storied house with a mansard roof, once painted dark red.

The magical transformation of all this into a sunny, smiling, white villa with red-striped awnings and well-kept lawns and just enough shade had done no little towards giving to Lily Dallam that ascendancy which she had acquired with such startling rapidity in the community. When Honora and Howard drove up to the door in the deepening twilight, every window was a yellow, blazing square, and above the sound of voices rose a waltz from "Lady Emmeline" played with vigour on the piano. Lily Dallam greeted Honora in the little room which (for some unexplained reason) was known as the library, pressed into service at dinner parties as the ladies' dressing room.

"My dear, how sweet you look in that coral! I've been so lucky to-night," she added in Honora's ear; "I've actually got Trixy Brent for you."

Page 29

Our heroine was conscious of a pleasurable palpitation as she walked with her hostess across the little entry to the door of the drawing-room, where her eyes encountered an inviting and vivacious scene. Some ten or a dozen guests, laughing and talking gayly, filled the spaces between the furniture; an upright piano was embedded in a corner, and the lady who had just executed the waltz had swung around on the stool, and was smiling up at a man who stood beside her with his hand in his pocket. She was a decided brunette, neither tall nor short, with a suggestion of plumpness.

“That’s Lula Chandos,” explained Lily Dallam in her usual staccato, following Honora’s gaze, “at the piano, in ashes of roses. She’s stopped mourning for her husband. Trixy told her to-night she’d discarded the sackcloth and kept the ashes. He’s awfully clever. I don’t wonder that she’s crazy about him, do you? He’s standing beside her.”

Honora took a good look at the famous Trixy, who resembled a certain type of military Englishman. He had close-cropped hair and a close-cropped mustache; and his grey eyes, as they rested amusedly on Mrs. Chandos, seemed to have in them the light of mockery.

“Trixy!” cried his hostess, threading her way with considerable skill across the room and dragging Honora after her, “Trixy, I want to introduce you to Mrs. Spence. Now aren’t you glad you came!”

It was partly, no doubt, by such informal introductions that Lily Dallam had made her reputation as the mistress of a house where one and all had such a good time. Honora, of course, blushed to her temples, and everybody laughed—even Mrs. Chandos.

“Glad,” said Mr. Brent, with his eyes on Honora, “does not quite express it. You usually have a supply of superlatives, Lily, which you might have drawn on.”

“Isn’t he irrepressible?” demanded Lily Dallam, delightedly, “he’s always teasing.”

It was running through Honora’s mind, while Lily Dallam’s characteristic introductions of the other guests were in progress, that “irrepressible” was an inaccurate word to apply to Mr. Brent’s manner. Honora could not define his attitude, but she vaguely resented it. All of Lily’s guests had the air of being at home, and at that moment a young gentleman named Charley Goodwin, who was six feet tall and weighed two hundred pounds, was loudly demanding cocktails. They were presently brought by a rather harassed-looking man-servant.

“I can’t get over how well you look in that gown, Lula,” declared Mrs. Dallam, as they went out to dinner. “Trixy, what does she remind you of?”

“Cleopatra,” cried Warry Trowbridge, with an attempt to be gallant.



“Eternal vigilance,” said Mr. Brent, and they sat down amidst the laughter, Lily Dallam declaring that he was horrid, and Mrs. Chandos giving him a look of tender reproach. But he turned abruptly to Honora, who was on his other side.

“Where did you drop down from, Mrs. Spence?” he inquired.



Page 30

“Why do you take it for granted that I have dropped?” she asked sweetly.

He looked at her queerly for a moment, and then burst out laughing.

“Because you are sitting next to Lucifer,” he said. “It’s kind of me to warn you, isn’t it?”

“It wasn’t necessary,” replied Honora. “And besides, as a dinner companion, I imagine Lucifer couldn’t be improved on.”

He laughed again.

“As a dinner companion!” he repeated. “So you would limit Lucifer to dinners? That’s rather a severe punishment, since we’re neighbours.”

“How delightful to have Lucifer as one’s neighbour,” said Honora, avoiding his eyes. “Of course I’ve been brought up to believe that he was always next door, so to speak, but I’ve never—had any proof of it until now.”

“Proof!” echoed Mr. Brent. “Has my reputation gone before me?”

“I smell the brimstone,” said Honora.

He derived, apparently, infinite amusement from this remark likewise.

“If I had known I was to have the honour of sitting here, I should have used another perfume,” he replied. “I have several.”

It was Honora’s turn to laugh.

“They are probably for—commercial transactions, not for ladies,” she retorted. “We are notoriously fond of brimstone, if it is not too strong. A suspicion of it.”

Her colour was high, and she was surprised at her own vivacity. It seemed strange that she should be holding her own in this manner with the renowned Trixton Brent. No wonder, after four years of Rivington, that she tingled with an unwonted excitement.

At this point Mr. Brent’s eye fell upon Howard, who was explaining something to Mrs. Trowbridge at the far end of the table.

“What’s your husband like?” he demanded abruptly.

Honora was a little taken aback, but recovered sufficiently to retort: “You’d hardly expect me to give you an unprejudiced judgment.”

“That’s true,” he agreed significantly.



“He’s everything,” added Honora, “that is to be expected in a husband.”

“Which isn’t much, in these days,” declared Mr. Brent.

“On the contrary,” said Honora.

“What I should like to know is why you came to Quicksands,” said Mr. Brent.

“For a little excitement,” she replied. “So far, I have not been disappointed. But why do you ask that question?” she demanded, with a slight uneasiness. “Why did you come here?”

“Oh,” he said, “you must remember that I’m—Lucifer, a citizen of the world, at home anywhere, a sort of ‘freebooter. I’m not here all the time—but that’s no reflection on Quicksands. May I make a bet with you, Mrs. Spence?”

“What about?”

“That you won’t stay in Quicksands more than six months,” he answered.

“Why do you say that?” she asked curiously.

He shook his head.

“My experience with your sex,” he declared enigmatically, “has not been a slight one.”



Page 31

“Trixy!” interrupted Mrs. Chandos at this juncture, from his other side, “Warry Trowbridge won’t tell me whether to sell my Consolidated Potteries stock.”

“Because he doesn’t know,” said Mr. Brent, laconically, and readdressed himself to Honora, who had, however, caught a glimpse of Mrs. Chandos’ face.

“Don’t you think it’s time for you to talk to Mrs. Chandos?” she asked.

“What for?”

“Well, for one reason, it is customary, out of consideration for the hostess, to assist in turning the table.”

“Lily doesn’t care,” he said.

“How about Mrs. Chandos? I have an idea that she does care.”

He made a gesture of indifference.

“And how about me?” Honora continued. “Perhaps—I’d like to talk to Mr. Dallam.”

“Have you ever tried it?” he demanded.

Over her shoulder she flashed back at him a glance which he did not return. She had never, to tell the truth, given her husband’s partner much consideration. He had existed in her mind solely as an obliging shopkeeper with whom Lily had unlimited credit, and who handed her over the counter such things as she desired. And to-night, in contrast to Trixton Brent, Sidney Dallam suggested the counter more than ever before. He was about five and forty, small, neatly made, with little hands and feet; fast growing bald, and what hair remained to him was a jet black. His suavity of manner and anxious desire to give one just the topic that pleased had always irritated Honora.

Good shopkeepers are not supposed to have any tastes, predilections, or desires of their own, and it was therefore with no little surprise that, after many haphazard attempts, Honora discovered Mr. Dallam to be possessed by one all-absorbing weakness. She had fallen in love, she remarked, with little Sid on the beach, and Sidney Dallam suddenly became transfigured. Was she fond of children? Honora coloured a little, and said “yes.” He confided to her, with an astonishing degree of feeling, that it had been the regret of his life he had not had more children. Nobody, he implied, who came to his house had ever exhibited the proper interest in Sid.

“Sometimes,” he said, leaning towards her confidentially, “I slip upstairs for a little peep at him after dinner.”



“Oh,” cried Honora, “if you’re going to-night mayn’t I go with you? I’d love to see him in bed.”

“Of course I’ll take you,” said Sidney Dallam, and he looked at her so gratefully that she coloured again.

“Honora,” said Lily Dallam, when the women were back in the drawing-room, “what did you do to Sid? You had him beaming—and he hates dinner parties.”

“We were talking about children,” replied Honora, innocently.

“Children!”

“Yes,” said Honora, “and your husband has promised to take me up to the nursery.”

“And did you talk to Trixy about children, too?” cried Lily, laughing, with a mischievous glance at Mrs. Chandos.

Page 32

"Is he interested in them?" asked Honora.

"You dear!" cried Lily, "you'll be the death of me. Lula, Honora wants to know whether Trixy is interested in children."

Mrs. Chandos, in the act of lighting a cigarette, smiled sweetly.

"Apparently he is," she said.

"It's time he were, if he's ever going to be," said Honora, just as sweetly.

Everybody laughed but Mrs. Chandos, who began to betray an intense interest in some old lace in the corner of the room.

"I bought it for nothing, my dear," said Mrs. Dallam, but she pinched Honora's arm delightedly. "How wicked of you!" she whispered, "but it serves her right."

In the midst of the discussion of clothes and house rents and other people's possessions, interspersed with anecdotes of a kind that was new to Honora, Sidney Dallam appeared at the door and beckoned to her.

"How silly of you, Sid!" exclaimed his wife; "of course she doesn't want to go."

"Indeed I do," protested Honora, rising with alacrity and following her host up the stairs. At the end of a hallway a nurse, who had been reading beside a lamp, got up smilingly and led the way on tiptoe into the nursery, turning on a shaded electric light. Honora bent over the crib. The child lay, as children will, with his little yellow head resting on his arm. But in a moment, as she stood gazing at him, he turned and opened his eyes and smiled at her, and she stooped and kissed him.

"Where's Daddy?" he demanded.

"We've waked him!" said Honora, remorsefully.

"Daddy," said the child, "tell me a story."

The nurse looked at Dallam reproachfully, as her duty demanded, and yet she smiled. The noise of laughter reached them from below.

"I didn't have any to-night," the child pleaded.

"I got home late," Dallam explained to Honora, and, looking at the nurse, pleaded in his turn; "just one."

"Just a tiny one," said the child.



"It's against all rules, Mr. Dallam," said the nurse, "but—he's been very lonesome today."

Dallam sat down on one side of him, Honora on the other.

"Will you go to sleep right away if I do, Sid?" he asked.

The child shut his eyes very tight.

"Like that," he promised.

It was not the Sidney Dallam of the counting-room who told that story, and Honora listened with strange sensations which she did not attempt to define.

"I used to be fond of that one when I was a youngster," he explained apologetically to her as they went out, and little Sid had settled himself obediently on the pillow once more. "It was when I dreamed," he added, "of less prosaic occupations than the stock market."

Sidney Dallam had dreamed!

Although Lily Dallam had declared that to leave her house before midnight was to insult her, it was half-past eleven when Honora and her husband reached home. He halted smilingly in her doorway as she took off her wrap and laid it over a chair.



Page 33

“Well, Honora,” he asked, “how do you like—the whirl of fashion?”

She turned to him with one of those rapid and bewildering movements that sometimes characterized her, and put her arms on his shoulders.

“What a dear old stay-at-home you were, Howard,” she said. “I wonder what would have happened to you if I hadn’t rescued you in the nick of time! Own up that you like—a little variety in life.”

Being a man, he qualified his approval.

“I didn’t have a bad time,” he admitted. “I had a talk with Brent after dinner, and I think I’ve got him interested in a little scheme. It’s a strange thing that Sid Dallam was never able to do any business with him. If I can put this through, coming to Quicksands will have been worth while.” He paused a moment, and added: “Brent seems to have taken quite a shine to you, Honora.”

She dropped her arms, and going over to her dressing table, unclasped a pin on the front of her gown.

“I imagine,” she answered, in an indifferent tone, “that he acts so with every new woman he meets.”

Howard remained for a while in the doorway, seemingly about to speak. Then he turned on his heel, and she heard him go into his own room.

Far into the night she lay awake, the various incidents of the evening, like magic lantern views, thrown with bewildering rapidity on the screen of her mind. At last she was launched into life, and the days of her isolation gone by forever. She was in the centre of things. And yet—well, nothing could be perfect. Perhaps she demanded too much. Once or twice, in the intimate and somewhat uproarious badinage that had been tossed back and forth in the drawing-room after dinner, her delicacy had been offended: an air of revelry had prevailed, enhanced by the arrival of whiskey-and-soda on a tray. And at the time she had been caught up by an excitement in the grip of which she still found herself. She had been aware, as she tried to talk to Warren Trowbridge, of Trixton Brent’s glance, and of a certain hostility from Mrs. Chandos that caused her now to grow warm with a kind of shame when she thought of it. But she could not deny that this man had for her a fascination. There was in him an insolent sense of power, of scarcely veiled contempt for the company in which he found himself. And she asked herself, in this mood of introspection, whether a little of his contempt for Lily Dallam’s guests had not been communicated from him to her.

When she had risen to leave, he had followed her into the entry. She recalled him vividly as he had stood before her then, a cigar in one hand and a lighted match in the



other, his eyes fixed upon her with a singularly disquieting look that was tinged, however, with amusement. "I'm coming to see you," he announced.

"Do be careful," she had cried, "you'll burn yourself!"

"That," he answered, tossing away the match, "is to be expected."



Page 34

She laughed nervously.

“Good night,” he added, “and remember my bet.”

What could he have meant when he had declared that she would not remain in Quicksands?

CHAPTER VI

GAD AND MENI

There was an orthodox place of worship at Quicksands, a temple not merely opened up for an hour or so on Sunday mornings to be shut tight during the remainder of the week although it was thronged with devotees on the Sabbath. This temple, of course, was the Quicksands Club. Howard Spence was quite orthodox; and, like some of our Puritan forefathers, did not even come home to the midday meal on the first day of the week. But a certain instinct of protest and of nonconformity which may have been remarked in our heroine sent her to St. Andrews-by-the-Sea—by no means so well attended as the house of Gad and Meni. She walked home in a pleasantly contemplative state of mind through a field of daisies, and had just arrived at the hedge in front of the Brackens when the sound of hoofs behind her caused her to turn. Mr. Trixton Brent, very firmly astride of a restive, flea-bitten polo pony, surveyed her amusedly.

“Where have you been?” said he.

“To church,” replied Honora, demurely.

“Such virtue is unheard of in Quicksands.”

“It isn’t virtue,” said Honora.

“I had my doubts about that, too,” he declared.

“What is it, then?” she asked laughingly, wondering why he had such a faculty of stirring her excitement and interest.

“Dissatisfaction,” was his prompt reply.

“I don’t see why you say that,” she protested.

“I’m prepared to make my wager definite,” said he. “The odds are a thoroughbred horse against a personally knitted worsted waistcoat that you won’t stay in Quicksands six months.”



“I wish you wouldn’t talk nonsense,” said Honora, “and besides, I can’t knit.”

There was a short silence during which he didn’t relax his disconcerting stare.

“Won’t you come in?” she asked. “I’m sorry Howard isn’t home.”

“I’m not,” he said promptly. “Can’t you come over to my box for lunch? I’ve asked Lula Chandos and Warry Trowbridge.”

It was not without appropriateness that Trixton Brent called his house the “Box.” It was square, with no pretensions to architecture whatever, with a porch running all the way around it. And it was literally filled with the relics of the man’s physical prowess cups for games of all descriptions, heads and skins from the Bitter Roots to Bengal, and masks and brushes from England. To Honora there was an irresistible and mysterious fascination in all these trophies, each suggesting a finished—and some perhaps a cruel—performance of the man himself. The cups were polished until they beat back the light like mirrors, and the glossy bear and tiger skins gave no hint of dying agonies.



Page 35

Mr. Brent's method with women, Honora observed, more resembled the noble sport of Isaac Walton than that of Nimrod, but she could not deny that this element of cruelty was one of his fascinations. It was very evident to a feminine observer, for instance, that Mrs. Chandos was engaged in a breathless and altogether desperate struggle with the slow but inevitable and appalling Nemesis of a body and character that would not harmonize. If her figure grew stout, what was to become of her charm as an 'enfant gate'? Her host not only perceived, but apparently derived great enjoyment out of the drama of this contest. From self-indulgence to self-denial—even though inspired by terror—is a far cry. And Trixton Brent had evidently prepared his menu with a satanic purpose.

"What! No entree, Lula? I had that sauce especially for you."

"Oh, Trixy, did you really? How sweet of you!" And her liquid eyes regarded, with an almost equal affection, first the master and then the dish. "I'll take a little," she said weakly; "it's so bad for my gout."

"What," asked Trixton Brent, flashing an amused glance at Honora, "are the symptoms of gout, Lula? I hear a great deal about that trouble these days, but it seems to affect every one differently."

Mrs. Chandos grew very red, but Warry Trowbridge saved her.

"It's a swelling," he said innocently.

Brent threw back his head and laughed.

"You haven't got it anyway, Warry," he cried.

Mr. Trowbridge, who resembled a lean and greying Irish terrier, maintained that he had.

"It's a pity you don't ride, Lula. I understand that that's one of the best preventives—for gout. I bought a horse last week that would just suit you—an ideal woman's horse. He's taken a couple of blue ribbons this summer."

"I hope you will show him to us, Mr. Brent," exclaimed Honora, in a spirit of kindness.

"Do you ride?" he demanded.

"I'm devoted to it," she declared.

It was true. For many weeks that spring, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings, she had gone up from Rivington to Harvey's Riding Academy, near Central Park. Thus she had acquired the elements of the equestrian art, and incidentally aroused the enthusiasm of a riding-master.



After Mrs. Chandos had smoked three of the cigarettes which her host specially imported from Egypt, she declared, with no superabundance of enthusiasm, that she was ready to go and see what Trixy had in the “stables.” In spite of that lady’s somewhat obvious impatience, Honora insisted upon admiring everything from the monogram of coloured sands so deftly woven on the white in the coach house, to the hunters and polo ponies in their rows of boxes. At last Vercingetorix, the latest acquisition of which Brent had spoken, was uncovered and trotted around the ring.

“I’m sorry, Trixy, but I’ve really got to leave,” said Mrs. Chandos. “And I’m in such a predicament! I promised Fanny Darlington I’d go over there, and it’s eight miles, and both my horses are lame.”



Page 36

Brent turned to his coachman.

“Put a pair in the victoria right away and drive Mrs. Chandos to Mrs. Darlington’s,” he said.

She looked at him, and her lip quivered.

“You always were the soul of generosity, Trixy, but why the victoria?”

“My dear Lula,” he replied, “if there’s any other carriage you prefer—?”

Honora did not hear the answer, which at any rate was scarcely audible. She moved away, and her eyes continued to follow Vercingetorix as he trotted about the tan-bark after a groom. And presently she was aware that Trixton Brent was standing beside her.

“What do you think of him?” he asked.

“He’s adorable,” declared Honora. “Would you like to try him?”

“Oh—might I? Sometime?”

“Why not to-day—now?” he said. “I’ll send him over to your house and have your saddle put on him.”

Before Honora could protest Mrs. Chandos came forward.

“It’s awfully sweet of you, Trixy, to offer to send me to Fanny’s, but Warry says he will drive me over. Good-by, my dear,” she added, holding out her hand to Honora.

“I hope you enjoy your ride.”

Mr. Trowbridge’s phaeton was brought up, Brent helped Mrs. Chandos in, and stood for a moment gazing after her. Amusement was still in his eyes as he turned to Honora.

“Poor Lula!” he said. “Most women could have done it better than that —couldn’t they?”

“I think you were horrid to her,” exclaimed Honora, indignantly. “It wouldn’t have hurt you to drive her to Mrs. Darlington’s.”

It did not occur to her that her rebuke implied a familiarity at which they had swiftly but imperceptibly arrived.

“Oh, yes, it would hurt me,” said he. “I’d rather spend a day in jail than drive with Lula in that frame of mind. Tender reproaches, and all that sort of thing, you know although I can’t believe you ever indulge in them. Don’t,” he added.



In spite of the fact that she was up in arms for her sex, Honora smiled.

“Do you know,” she said slowly, “I’m beginning to think you are a brute.”

“That’s encouraging,” he replied.

“And fickle.”

“Still more encouraging. Most men are fickle. We’re predatory animals.”

“It’s just as well that I am warned,” said Honora. She raised her parasol and picked up her skirts and shot him a look. Although he did not resemble in feature the great if unscrupulous Emperor of the French, he reminded her now of a picture she had once seen of Napoleon and a lady; the lady obviously in a little flutter under the Emperor’s scrutiny. The picture had suggested a probable future for the lady.

“How long will it take you to dress?” he asked.

“To dress for what?”

“To ride with me.”

“I’m not going to ride with you,” she said, and experienced a tingle of satisfaction from his surprise.



Page 37

“Why not?” he demanded.

“In the first place, because I don’t want to; and in the second, because I’m expecting Lily Dallam.”

“Lily never keeps an engagement,” he said.

“That’s no reason why I shouldn’t,” Honora answered.

“I’m beginning to think you’re deuced clever,” said he.

“How unfortunate for me!” she exclaimed.

He laughed, although it was plain that he was obviously put out. Honora was still smiling.

“Deuced clever,” he repeated.

“An experienced moth,” suggested Honora; “perhaps one that has been singed a little, once or twice. Good-by—I’ve enjoyed myself immensely.”

She glanced back at him as she walked down the path to the roadway. He was still standing where she had left him, his feet slightly apart, his hands in the pockets of his riding breeches, looking after her.

Her announcement of an engagement with Mrs. Dallam had been, to put it politely, fiction. She spent the rest of the afternoon writing letters home, pausing at periods to look out of the window. Occasionally it appeared that her reflections were amusing. At seven o’clock Howard arrived, flushed and tired after his day of rest.

“By the way, Honora, I saw Trixy Brent at the Club, and he said you wouldn’t go riding with him.”

“Do you call him Trixy to his face?” she asked.

“What? No—but everyone calls him Trixy. What’s the matter with you?”

“Nothing,” she replied. “Only—the habit every one has in Quicksands of speaking of people they don’t know well by their nicknames seems rather bad taste.”

“I thought you liked Quicksands,” he retorted. “You weren’t happy until you got down here.”

“It’s infinitely better than Rivington,” she said.



"I suppose," he remarked, with a little irritation unusual in him, "that you'll be wanting to go to Newport next."

"Perhaps," said Honora, and resumed her letter. He fidgeted about the room for a while, ordered a cocktail, and lighted a cigarette.

"Look here," he began presently, "I wish you'd be decent to Brent. He's a pretty good fellow, and he's in with James Wing and that crowd of big financiers, and he seems to have taken a shine to me probably because he's heard of that copper deal I put through this spring."

Honora thrust back her writing pad, turned in her chair, and faced him.

"How 'decent' do you wish me to be?" she inquired.

"How decent?" he repeated.

"Yes."

He regarded her uneasily, took the cocktail which the maid offered him, drank it, and laid down the glass.

He had had before, in the presence of his wife, this vague feeling of having passed boundaries invisible to him. In her eyes was a curious smile that lacked mirth, in her voice a dispassionate note that added to his bewilderment.

"What do you mean, Honora?"



Page 38

"I know it's too much to expect of a man to be as solicitous about his wife as he is about his business," she replied. "Otherwise he would hesitate before he threw her into the arms of Mr. Trixton Brent. I warn you that he is very attractive to women."

"Hang it," said Howard, "I can't see what you're driving at. I'm not throwing you into his arms. I'm merely asking you to be friendly with him. It means a good deal to me—to both of us. And besides, you can take care of yourself. You're not the sort of woman to play the fool."

"One never can tell," said Honora, "what may happen. Suppose I fell in love with him?"

"Don't talk nonsense," he said.

"I'm not so sure," she answered, meditatively, "that it is nonsense. It would be quite easy to fall in love with him. Easier than you imagine. curiously. Would you care?" she added.

"Care!" he cried; "of course I'd care. What kind of rot are you talking?"

"Why would you care?"

"Why? What a darned idiotic question—"

"It's not really so idiotic as you think it is," she said. "Suppose I allowed Mr. Brent to make love to me, as he's very willing to do, would you be sufficiently interested to compete?"

"To what?"

"To compete."

"But—but we're married."

She laid her hand upon her knee and glanced down at it.

"It never occurred to me until lately," she said, "how absurd is the belief men still hold in these days that a wedding-ring absolves them forever from any effort on their part to retain their wives' affections. They regard the ring very much as a ball and chain, or a hobble to prevent the women from running away, that they may catch them whenever they may desire—which isn't often. Am I not right?"

He snapped his cigarette case.

"Darn it, Honora, you're getting too deep for me!" he exclaimed. "You never liked those, Browning women down at Rivington, but if this isn't Browning I'm hanged if I know what



it is. An attack of nerves, perhaps. They tell me that women go all to pieces nowadays over nothing at all.”

“That’s just it,” she agreed, “nothing at all!”

“I thought as much,” he replied, eager to seize this opportunity of ending a conversation that had neither head nor tail, and yet was marvellously uncomfortable. “There! be a good girl, and forget it.”

He stooped down suddenly to her face to kiss her, but she turned her face in time to receive the caress on the cheek.

“The panacea!” she said.

He laughed a little, boyishly, as he stood looking down at her.

“Sometimes I can’t make you out,” he said. “You’ve changed a good deal since I married you.”

She was silent. But the thought occurred to her that a complete absorption in commercialism was not developing.

“If you can manage it, Honora,” he added with an attempt at lightness, “I wish you’d have a little dinner soon, and ask Brent. Will you?”

Page 39

“Nothing,” she replied, “would give me greater pleasure.”

He patted her on the shoulder and left the room whistling. But she sat where she was until the maid came in to pull the curtains and turn on the lights, reminding her that guests were expected.

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Although the circle of Mr. Brent’s friends could not be said to include any university or college presidents, it was, however, both catholic and wide. He was hail fellow, indeed, with jockeys and financiers, great ladies and municipal statesmen of good Irish stock. He was a lion who roamed at large over a great variety of hunting grounds, some of which it would be snobbish to mention; for many reasons he preferred Quicksands: a man-eater, a woman-eater, and extraordinarily popular, nevertheless. Many ladies, so it was reported, had tried to tame him: some of them he had cheerfully gobbled up, and others after the briefest of inspections, disdainfully thrust aside with his paw.

This instinct for lion taming, which the most spirited of women possess, is, by the way, almost inexplicable to the great majority of the male sex. Honora had it, as must have been guessed. But however our faith in her may be justified by the ridiculous ease of her previous conquests, we cannot regard without trepidation her entrance into the arena with this particular and widely renowned king of beasts. Innocence pitted against sophistry and wile and might.

Two of the preliminary contests we have already witnessed. Others, more or less similar, followed during a period of two months or more. Nothing inducing the excessive wagging of tongues,—Honora saw to that, although Mrs. Chandos kindly took the trouble to warn our heroine,—a scene for which there is unfortunately no space in this chronicle; an entirely amicable, almost honeyed scene, in Honora’s boudoir. Nor can a complete picture of life at Quicksands be undertaken. Multiply Mrs. Dallam’s dinner-party by one hundred, Howard Silence’s Sundays at the Club by twenty, and one has a very fair idea of it. It was not precisely intellectual. “Happy,” says Montesquieu, “the people whose annals are blank in history’s book.” Let us leave it at that.

Late one afternoon in August Honora was riding homeward along the ocean road. The fragrant marshes that bordered it were a vivid green under the slanting rays of the sun, and she was gazing across them at the breakers crashing on the beach beyond. Trixton Brent was beside her.

“I wish you wouldn’t stare at me so,” she said, turning to him suddenly; “it is embarrassing.”



“How did you know I was looking at you?” he asked.

“I felt it.”

He drew his horse a little nearer.

“Sometimes you’re positively uncanny,” she added.

He laughed.

“I rather like that castles-in-Spain expression you wore,” he declared.

“Castles in Spain?”

“Or in some other place where the real estate is more valuable. Certainly not in Quicksands.”



Page 40

“You are uncanny,” proclaimed Honora, with conviction.

“I told you you wouldn’t like Quicksands,” said he.

“I’ve never said I didn’t like it,” she replied. “I can’t see why you assume that I don’t.”

“You’re ambitious,” he said. “Not that I think it a fault, when it’s more or less warranted. You’re thrown away here, and you know it.”

She made him a bow from the saddle.

“I have not been without a reward, at least,” she answered, and looked at him.

“I have,” said he.

Honora smiled.

“I’m going to be your good angel, and help you get out of it,” he continued.

“Get out of what?”

“Quicksands.”

“Do you think I’m in danger of sinking?” she asked. “And is it impossible for me to get out alone, if I wished to?”

“It will be easier with my help,” he answered. “You’re clever enough to realize that—Honora.”

She was silent awhile.

“You say the most extraordinary things,” she remarked presently. “Sometimes I think they are almost—”

“Indelicate,” he supplied.

She coloured.

“Yes, indelicate.”

“You can’t forgive me for sweeping away your rose-coloured cloud of romance,” he declared, laughing. “There are spades in the pack, however much you may wish to ignore ’em. You know very well you don’t like these Quicksands people. They grate on your finer sensibilities, and all that sort of thing. Come, now, isn’t it so?”

She coloured again, and put her horse to the trot.



“Onwards and upwards,” he cried. “Veni, vidi, vici, ascendi.”

“It seems to me,” she laughed, “that so much education is thrown away on the stock market.”

“Whether you will be any happier higher up,” he went on, “God knows. Sometimes I think you ought to go back to the Arcadia you came from. Did you pick out Spence for an embryo lord of high finance?”

“My excuse is,” replied Honora, “that I was very young, and I hadn’t met you.”

Whether the lion has judged our heroine with astuteness, or done her a little less than justice, must be left to the reader. Apparently he is accepting her gentle lashings with a meek enjoyment. He assisted her to alight at her own door, sent the horses home, and offered to come in and give her a lesson in a delightful game that was to do its share in the disintegration of the old and tiresome order of things—bridge. The lion, it will be seen, was self-sacrificing even to the extent of double dummy. He had picked up the game with characteristic aptitude abroad —Quicksands had yet to learn it.

Howard Spence entered in the midst of the lesson.

“Hello, Brent,” said he, genially, “you may be interested to know I got that little matter through without a hitch to-day.”

“I continue to marvel at you,” said the lion, and made it no trumps.

Since this is a veracious history, and since we have wandered so far from home and amidst such strange, if brilliant scenes, it must be confessed that Honora, three days earlier, had entered a certain shop in New York and inquired for a book on bridge. Yes, said the clerk, he had such a treatise, it had arrived from England a week before. She kept it looked up in her drawer, and studied it in the mornings with a pack of cards before her.

Page 41

Given the proper amount of spur, anything in reason can be mastered.