

Modern Chronicle, a — Volume 04 eBook

Modern Chronicle, a — Volume 04 by Winston Churchill

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OF CERTAIN DELICATE MATTERS

In the religious cult of Gad and Meni, practised with such enthusiasm at Quicksands, the Saints' days were polo days, and the chief of all festivals the occasion of the match with the Banbury Hunt Club —Quicksands's greatest rival. Rival for more reasons than one, reasons too delicate to tell. Long, long ago there appeared in Punch a cartoon of Lord Beaconsfield executing that most difficult of performances, an egg dance. We shall be fortunate indeed if we get to the end of this chapter without breaking an egg!

Our pen fails us in a description of that festival of festivals, the Banbury one, which took place early in September. We should have to go back to Babylon and the days of King Nebuchadnezzar. (Who turns out to have been only a regent, by the way, and his name is now said to be spelled rezzar). How give an idea of the libations poured out to Gad and the shekels laid aside for Meni in the Quicksands Temple?

Honora privately thought that building ugly, and it reminded her of a collection of huge yellow fungi sprawling over the ground. A few of the inevitable tortured cedars were around it. Between two of the larger buildings was wedged a room dedicated to the worship of Bacchus, to-day like a narrow river-gorge at flood time jammed with tree-trunks—some of them, let us say, water-logged—and all grinding together with an intolerable noise like a battle. If you happened to be passing the windows, certain more or less intelligible sounds might separate themselves from the bedlam.

"Four to five on Quicksands!"

"That stock isn't worth a d—n!"

"She's gone to South Dakota."

Honora, however, is an heretic, as we know. Without going definitely into her reasons, these festivals had gradually become distasteful to her. Perhaps it would be fairer to look at them through the eyes of Lily Dallam, who was in her element on such days, and regarded them as the most innocent and enjoyable of occasions, and perhaps they were.

The view from the veranda, at least, appealed to our heroine's artistic sense. The marshes in the middle distance, the shimmering sea beyond, and the polo field laid down like a vast green carpet in the foreground; while the players, in white breeches and bright shirts, on the agile little horses that darted hither and thither across the turf lent an added touch of colour and movement to the scene. Amongst them, Trixton Brent most frequently caught the eye and held it. Once Honora perceived him flying the length of the field, madly pursued, his mallet poised lightly, his shirt bulging in the wind, his close-cropped head bereft of a cap, regardless of the havoc and confusion behind him. He played, indeed, with the cocksureness and individuality one might have

expected; and Honora, forgetting at moments the disturbing elements by which she was surrounded, followed him with fascination. Occasionally his name rippled from one end of the crowded veranda to the other, and she experienced a curious and uncomfortable sensation when she heard it in the mouths of these strangers.

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From time to time she found herself watching them furtively, comparing them unconsciously with her Quicksands friends. Some of them she had remarked before, at contests of a minor importance, and they seemed to her to possess a certain distinction that was indefinable. They had come to-day from many mysterious (and therefore delightful) places which Honora knew only by name, and some had driven the twenty-five odd miles from the bunting community of Banbury in coaches and even those new and marvellous importations—French automobiles. When the game had ended, and Lily Dallam was cajoling the club steward to set her tea-table at once, a group of these visitors halted on the lawn, talking and laughing gayly. Two of the younger men Honora recognized with a start, but for a moment she could not place them—until suddenly she remembered that she had seen them on her wedding trip at Hot Springs. The one who lisped was Mr. Cuthbert, familiarly known as “Toots”: the other, taller and slimmer and paler, was Jimmy Wing. A third, the regularity of whose features made one wonder at the perfection which nature could attain when she chose, who had a certain Gallic appearance (and who, if the truth be told, might have reminded an impartial eye of a slightly animated wax clothing model), turned, stared, hesitated, and bowed to Lily Dallam.

“That’s Reggie Farwel, who did my house in town,” she whispered to Honora. “He’s never been near me since it was finished. He’s utterly ruined.”

Honora was silent. She tried not to look at the group, in which there were two women of very attractive appearance, and another man.

“Those people are so superior,” Mrs. Dallam continued.

“I’m not surprised at Elsie Shorter. Ever since she married Jerry she’s stuck to the Graingers closer than a sister. That’s Cecil Grainger, my dear, the man who looks as though he were going to fall asleep any moment. But to think of Abby Kame acting that way! Isn’t it ridiculous, Clara?” she cried, appealing to Mrs. Trowbridge. “They say that Cecil Grainger never leaves her side. I knew her when she first married John Kame, the dearest, simplest man that ever was. He was twenty years older than Abby, and made his money in leather. She took the first steamer after his funeral and an apartment in a Roman palace for the winter. As soon as she decently could she made for England. The English will put up with anybody who has a few million dollars, and I don’t deny that Abby’s good-looking, and clever in her way. But it’s absurd for her to come over here and act as though we didn’t exist. She needn’t be afraid that I’ll speak to her. They say she became intimate with Bessie Grainger through charities. One of your friend Mrs. Holt’s charities, by the way, Honora. Where are you going?”

For Honora had risen.

“I think I’ll go home, Lily,” she said; “I’m rather tired.”

“Home!” exclaimed Mrs. Dallam. “What can you be thinking of, my dear? Nobody ever goes home after the Banbury match. The fun has just begun, and we’re all to stay here for dinner and dance afterwards. And Trixy Brent promised me faithfully he’d’ come here for tea, as soon as he dressed.”

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"I really can't stay, Lily. I—I don't feel up to it," said Honora, desperately.

"And you can't know how I counted on you! You look perfectly fresh, my dear."

Honora felt an overwhelming desire to hide herself, to be alone. In spite of the cries of protest that followed her and drew—she thought—an unnecessary and disagreeable attention to her departure, she threaded her way among groups of people who stared after her. Her colour was high, her heart beating painfully; a vague sense of rebellion and shame within her for which she did not try to account. Rather than run the gantlet of the crowded veranda she stepped out on the lawn, and there encountered Trixton Brent. He had, in an incredibly brief time, changed from his polo clothes to flannels and a straw hat. He looked at her and whistled, and barred her passage.

"Hello!" he cried. "Hoity-toity! Where are we going in such a hurry?"

"Home," answered Honora, a little breathlessly, and added for his deception, "the game's over, isn't it? I'm glad you won."

Mr. Brent, however, continued to gaze at her penetratingly, and she avoided his eyes.

"But why are you rushing off like a flushed partridge?—no reference to your complexion. Has there been a row?"

"Oh, no—I was just—tired. Please let me go."

"Being your good angel—or physician, as you choose—I have a prescription for that kind of weariness," he said smilingly. "I—anticipated such an attack. That's why I got into my clothes in such record time."

"I don't know what you mean," faltered Honora. "You are always imagining all sorts of things about me that aren't true."

"As a matter of fact," said Brent, "I have promised faithfully to do a favor for certain friends of mine who have been clamouring to be presented to you."

"I can't—to-day—Mr. Brent," she cried. "I really don't feel like-meeting people. I told Lily Dallam I was going home."

The group, however, which had been the object of that lady's remarks was already moving towards them—with the exception of Mrs. Shorter and Mr. Farwell, who had left it. They greeted Mr. Brent with great cordiality.

"Mrs. Kame," he said, "let me introduce Mrs. Spence. And Mrs. Spence, Mr. Grainger, Mr. Wing, and Mr. Cuthbert. Mrs. Spence was just going home."

“Home!” echoed Mrs. Kame, “I thought Quicksands people never went home after a victory.”

“I’ve scarcely been here long enough,” replied Honora, “to have acquired all of the Quicksands habits.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Kame, and looked at Honora again. “Wasn’t that Mrs. Dallam you were with? I used to know her, years ago, but she doesn’t speak to me any more.”

“Perhaps she thinks you’ve forgotten her,” said Honora.

“It would be impossible to forget Mrs. Dallam,” declared Mrs. Kame.

“So I should have thought,” said Honora.

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Trixtan Brent laughed, and Mrs. Kame, too, after a moment's hesitation. She laid her hand familiarly on Mr. Brent's arm.

"I haven't seen you all summer, Trixy," she said. "I hear you've been here at Quicksands, stewing in that little packing-case of yours. Aren't you coming into our steeplechase at Banbury.

"I believe you went to school with my sister," said young Mr. Wing.

"Oh, yes," answered Honora, somewhat surprised. "I caught a glimpse of her once, in New York. I hope you will remember me to her."

"And I've seen you before," proclaimed Mr. Cuthbert, "but I can't for the life of me think where."

Honora did not enlighten him.

"I shan't forget, at any rate, Mrs. Spence," said Cecil Grainger, who had not taken his eyes from her, except to blink.

Mrs. Kame saved her the embarrassment of replying.

"Can't we go somewhere and play bridge," Trixy demanded.

"I'd be delighted to offer you the hospitality of my packing-case, as you call it," said Brent, "but the dining-room ceiling fell down Wednesday, and I'm having the others bolstered up as a mere matter of precaution."

"I suppose we couldn't get a fourth, anyway. Neither Jimmy nor Toots plays. It's so stupid of them not to learn."

"Mrs. Spence might, help us out," suggested Brent.

"Do you play?" exclaimed Mrs. Kame, in a voice of mixed incredulity and hope.

"Play!" cried Mr. Brent, "she can teach Jerry Shorter or the Duchess of Taunton."

"The Duchess cheats," announced Cecil Grainger. "I caught her at it at Cannes—"

"Indeed, I don't play very well," Honora interrupted him, "and besides—"

"Suppose we go over to Mrs. Spence's house," Trixtan Brent suggested. "I'm sure she'd like to have us wouldn't you, Mrs. Spence?"

"What a brilliant idea, Trixy!" exclaimed Mrs. Kame.

"I should be delighted," said Honora, somewhat weakly. An impulse made her glance toward the veranda, and for a fraction of a second she caught the eye of Lily Dallam, who turned again to Mrs. Chandos.

"I say," said Mr. Cuthbert, "I don't play—but I hope I may come along."

"And me too," chimed in Mr. Wing.

Honora, not free from a certain uneasiness of conscience, led the way to the Brackens, flanked by Mr. Grainger and Mr. Cuthbert. Her frame of mind was not an ideal one for a hostess; she was put out with Trixton Brent, and she could not help wondering whether these people would have made themselves so free with another house. When tea was over, however, and the bridge had begun, her spirits rose; or rather, a new and strange excitement took possession of her that was not wholly due to the novel and revolutionary experience of playing, for money—and winning. Her star being in the ascendant, as we may perceive. She had drawn Mrs. Kame for a partner, and the satisfaction and graciousness of that lady visibly grew as the score mounted: even the skill of Trixton Brent could not triumph over the hands which the two ladies held.

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In the intervals the talk wandered into regions unfamiliar to Honora, and she had a sense that her own horizon was being enlarged. A new vista, at least, had been cut: possibilities became probabilities. Even when Mrs. Kame chose to ridicule Quicksands Honora was silent, so keenly did she feel the justice of her guest's remarks; and the implication was that Honora did not belong there. When train time arrived and they were about to climb into Trixton Brent's omnibus—for which he had obligingly telephoned—Mrs. Kame took Honora's band in both her own. Some good thing, after all, could come out of this community—such was the triumphant discovery the lady's manner implied.

"My dear, don't you ever come to Banbury?" she asked. I'd be so glad to see you. I must get Trixy to drive you over some day for lunch. We've had such a good time, and Cecil didn't fall asleep once. Quite a record. You saved our lives, really."

"Are you going to be in town this winter?" Mr. Grainger inquired.

"I,—I suppose so—replied Honora, for the moment taken aback, although I haven't decided just where."

"I shall look forward to seeing you," he said.

This hope was expressed even more fervently by Mr. Cuthbert and Mr. Wing, and the whole party waved her a cordial good-by as the carriage turned the circle. Trixton Brent, with his hands in his pockets, stood facing her under the electric light on the porch.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," repeated Honora.

"Nice people," said Mr. Brent.

Honora bridled.

"You invited them here," she said. "I must say I think it, was rather —presumptuous. And you've got me into no end of trouble with Lily Dallam."

He laughed as he held open the screen door for her.

"I wonder whether a good angel was ever so abused," he said.

"A good angel," she repeated, smiling at him in spite of herself.

“Or knight-errant,” he continued, “whichever you choose. You want to get out of Quicksands—I’m trying to make it easy for you. Before you leave you have to arrange some place to go. Before we are off with the old we’d better be on with the new.”

“Oh, please don’t say such things,” she cried, “they’re so—so sordid.” She looked searchingly into his face. “Do I really seem to you like that?”

Her lip was quivering, and she was still under the influence of the excitement which the visit of these people had brought about.

“No,” said Brent—coming very close to her, “no, you don’t. That’s the extraordinary part of it. The trouble with you, Honora, is that you want something badly very badly—and you haven’t yet found out what it is.

“And you won’t find out,” he added, “until you have tried everything. Therefore am I a good Samaritan, or something like it.”

She looked at him with startled eyes, breathing deeply.

“I wonder if that is so!” she said, in a low voice.

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"Not until you have had and broken every toy in the shop," he declared. "Out of the mouths of men of the world occasionally issues wisdom. I'm going to help you get the toys. Don't you think I'm kind?"

"And isn't this philanthropic mood a little new to you?" she asked.

"I thought I had exhausted all novelties," he answered. "Perhaps that's the reason why I enjoy it."

She turned and walked slowly into the drawing-room, halted, and stood staring at the heap of gold and yellow bills that Mr. Grainger had deposited in front of the place where she had sat. Her sensation was akin to sickness. She reached out with a kind of shuddering fascination and touched the gold.

"I think," she said, speaking rather to herself than to Brent, "I'll give it to charity."

"If it is possible to combine a meritorious act with good policy, I should suggest giving it to Mrs. Grainger for the relief of oppressed working girls," he said.

Honora started.

"I wonder why Howard doesn't come she exclaimed, looking at the clock.

"Probably because he is holding nothing but full hands and flushes," hazarded Mr. Brent. "Might I propose myself for dinner?"

"When so many people are clamouring for you?" she asked.

"Even so," he said.

"I think I'll telephone to the Club," said Honora, and left the room.

It was some time before her husband responded to the call; and then he explained that if Honora didn't object, he was going to a man's dinner in a private room. The statement was not unusual.

"But, Howard," she said, "I—I wanted you particularly to-night."

"I thought you were going to dine with Lily Dallam. She told me you were. Are you alone?"

"Mr. Brent is here. He brought over some Banbury people to play bridge. They've gone."

"Oh, Brent will amuse you," he replied. "I didn't know you were going to be home, and I've promised these men. I'll come back early."

She hung up the receiver thoughtfully, paused a moment, and went back to the drawing-room. Brent looked up.

"Well," he said, "was I right?"

"You seem always to be right," Honora, sighed.

After dinner they sat in the screened part of the porch which Mrs. Fern had arranged very cleverly as an outside room. Brent had put a rug over Honora's knees, for the ocean breath that stirred the leaves was cold. Across the darkness fragments of dance music drifted fitfully from the Club, and died away; and at intervals, when the embers of his cigar flared up, she caught sight of her companion's face.

She found him difficult to understand. There are certain rules of thumb in every art, no doubt,—even in that most perilous one of lion-taming. But here was a baffling, individual lion. She liked him best, she told herself, when he purred platonically, but she could by no means be sure that his subjection was complete. Sometimes he had scratched her in his play. And however natural it is to desire a lion for one's friend, to be eaten is both uncomfortable and inglorious.

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"That's, a remarkable husband of yours," he said at length.

"I shouldn't have said that you were a particularly good judge of husbands," she retorted, after a moment of surprise.

He acknowledged with a laugh the justice of this observation.

"I stand corrected. He is by no means a remarkable husband. Permit me to say he is a remarkable man."

"What makes you think so?" asked Honora, considerably disturbed.

"Because he induced you to marry him, for one thing," said Brent. "Of course he got you before you knew what you were worth, but we must give him credit for discovery and foresight."

"Perhaps," Honora could not resist replying, "perhaps he didn't know what he was getting."

"That's probably true," Brent assented, "or he'd be sitting here now, where I am, instead of playing poker. Although there is something in matrimony that takes the bloom off the peach."

"I think that's a horrid, cynical remark," said Honora.

"Well," he said, "we speak according to our experiences—that is, if we're not inclined to be hypocritical. Most women are."

Honora was silent. He had thrown away his cigar, and she could no longer see his face. She wondered whither he was leading.

"How would you like to see your husband president of a trust company?" he said suddenly.

"Howard—president of a trust company!" she exclaimed.

"Why not?" he demanded. And added enigmatically, "Smaller men have been."

"I wish you wouldn't joke about Howard," she said.

"How does the idea strike you?" he persisted. "Ambition satisfied —temporarily; Quicksands a mile-stone on a back road; another toy to break; husband a big man in the community, so far as the eye can see; visiting list on Fifth Avenue, and all that sort of thing."

"I once told you you could be brutal," she said.

"You haven't told me what you thought of the idea."

"I wish you'd be sensible once in a while," she exclaimed.

"Howard Spence, President of the Orange Trust Company!" he recited. "I suppose no man is a hero to his wife. Does it sound so incredible?"

It did. But Honora did not say so.

"What have I to do with it?" she asked, in pardonable doubt as to his seriousness.

"Everything," answered Brent. "Women of your type usually have. They make and mar without rhyme or reason—set business by the ears, alter the gold reserve, disturb the balance of trade, and nobody ever suspects it. Old James Wing and I have got a trust company organized, and the building up, and the man Wing wanted for president backed out."

Honora sat up.

"Why—why did he 'back out'?" she demanded.

"He preferred to stay where he was, I suppose," replied Brent, in another tone. "The point is that the place is empty. I'll give it to *you*."

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“To me?”

“Certainly,” said Brent, “I don’t pretend to care anything about your husband. He’ll do as well as the next man. His duties are pretty well —defined.”

Again she was silent. But after a moment dropped back in her chair and laughed uneasily.

“You’re preposterous,” she said; “I can’t think why I let you talk to me in this way.”

CHAPTER VIII

OF MENTAL PROCESSES—FEMININE AND INSOLUBLE

Honora may be pardoned for finally ascribing to Mr. Brent’s somewhat sardonic sense of humour his remarks concerning her husband’s elevation to a conspicuous position in the world of finance. Taken in any other sense than a joke, they were both insulting and degrading, and made her face burn when she thought of them. After he had gone—or rather after she had dismissed him—she took a book upstairs to wait for Howard, but she could not read. At times she wished she had rebuked Trixton Brent more forcibly, although he was not an easy person to rebuke; and again she reflected that, had she taken the matter too seriously, she would have laid herself open to his ridicule. The lion was often unwittingly rough, and perhaps that was part of his fascination.

If Howard had come home before midnight it is possible that she might have tried to sound him as to his relations with Trixton Brent. That gentleman, she remembered, had the reputation of being a peculiarly hardheaded business man, and it was of course absurd that he should offer her husband a position merely to please her. And her imagination failed her when she tried to think of Howard as the president of a trust company. She was unable to picture him in a great executive office:

This tram of thought led her to the unaccustomed task of analyzing his character. For the first time since her marriage comparisons crept into her mind, and she awoke to the fact that he was not a masterful man—even among men. For all his self-confidence—self-assurance, perhaps, would be the better word—he was in reality a follower, not a leader; a gleaner. He did not lack ideas. She tried to arrest the process in her brain when she got as far as asking herself whether it might not be that he lacked ideals. Since in business matters he never had taken her into his confidence, and since she would not at any rate have understood such things, she had no proof of such a failing. But one or two vague remarks of Trixton Brent’s which she recalled, and Howard’s own request that she should be friendly with Brent, reenforced her instinct on this point.

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When she heard her husband's footstep on the porch, she put out her light, but still lay thinking in the darkness. Her revelations had arrived at the uncomfortable stage where they began to frighten her, and with an effort she forced herself to turn to the other side of the account. The hour was conducive to exaggerations. Perfection in husbands was evidently a state not to be considered by any woman in her right senses. He was more or less amenable, and he was prosperous, although definite news of that prosperity never came from him—Quicksands always knew of it first. An instance of this second-hand acquisition of knowledge occurred the very next morning, when Lily Dallam, with much dignity, walked into Honora's little sitting-room. There was no apparent reason why dignity should not have been becoming to Lily Dallam, for she was by no means an unimpressive-looking woman; but the assumption by her of that quality always made her a little tragic or (if one chanced to be in the humour—Honora was not) a little ridiculous.

"I suppose I have no pride," she said, as she halted within a few feet of the doorway.

"Why, Lily!" exclaimed Honora, pushing back the chair from her desk, and rising.

But Mrs. Dallam did not move.

"I suppose I have no pride," she repeated in a dead voice, "but I just couldn't help coming over and giving you a chance."

"Giving me a chance?" said Honora.

"To explain—after the way you treated me at the polo game. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I shouldn't have believed it. I don't think I should have trusted my own eyes," Mrs. Dallam went so far as to affirm, "if Lula Chandos and Clara Trowbridge and others hadn't been there and seen it too; I shouldn't have believed it."

Honora was finding penitence a little difficult. But her heart was kind.

"Do sit down, Lily," she begged. "If I've offended you in any way, I'm exceedingly sorry—I am, really. You ought to know me well enough to understand that I wouldn't do anything to hurt your feelings."

"And when I counted on you so, for my tea and dinner at the club!" continued Mrs. Dallam. "There were other women dying to come. And you said you had a headache, and were tired."

"I was," began Honora, fruitlessly.

"And you were so popular in Quicksands—everybody was crazy about you. You were so sweet and so unspoiled. I might have known that it couldn't last. And now, because Abby Kame and Cecil Grainger and—"

“Lily, please don’t say such things!” Honora implored, revolted.

“Of course you won’t be satisfied now with anything less than Banbury or Newport. But you can’t say I didn’t warn you, Honora, that they are a horrid, selfish, fast lot,” Lily Dallam declared, and brushed her eyes with her handkerchief. “I did love you.”

“If you’ll only be reasonable a moment, Lily,—” said Honora.

“Reasonable! I saw you with my own eyes. Five minutes after you left me they all started for your house, and Lula Chandos said it was the quickest cure of a headache she had ever seen.”

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"Lily," Honora began again, with exemplary patience, when people invite themselves to one's house, it's a little difficult to refuse them hospitality, isn't it?"

"Invite themselves?"

"Yes," replied Honora. "If I weren't—fond of you, too, I shouldn't make this explanation. I was tired. I never felt less like entertaining strangers. They wanted to play bridge, there wasn't a quiet spot in the Club where they could go. They knew I was on my way home, and they suggested my house. That is how it happened."

Mrs. Dallam was silent a moment.

"May I have one of Howard's cigarettes?" she asked, and added, after this modest wish had been supplied, that's just like them. They're willing to make use of anybody."

"I meant," said Honora, "to have gone to your house this morning and to have explained how it happened."

Another brief silence, broken by Lily Dallam.

"Did you notice the skirt of that suit Abby Kame had on?", she asked. "I'm sure she paid a fabulous price for it in Paris, and it's exactly like one I ordered on Tuesday."

The details of the rest of this conversation may be omitted. That Honora was forgiven, and Mrs. Dallam's spirits restored may be inferred from her final remark.

"My dear, what do you think of Sid and Howard making twenty thousand dollars apiece in Sassafra Copper? Isn't it too lovely! I'm having a little architect make me plans for a conservatory. You know I've always been dying for one—I don't see how I've lived all these years without it."

Honora, after her friend had gone, sat down in one of the wicker chairs on the porch. She had a very vague idea as to how much twenty thousand dollars was, but she reflected that while they had lived in Rivington Howard must have made many similar sums, of which she was unaware. Gradually she began to realize, however, that her resentment of the lack of confidence of her husband was by no means the only cause of the feeling that took possession of and overwhelmed her. Something like it she had experienced before: to-day her thoughts seemed to run through her in pulsations, like waves of heat, and she wondered that she could have controlled herself while listening to Lily Dallam.

Mrs. Dallam's reproaches presented themselves to Honora in new aspects. She began to feel now, with an intensity that frightened her, distaste and rebellion. It was intolerable that she should be called to account for the people she chose to have in her house, that any sort of pressure should be brought to bear on her to confine her friends



to Quicksands. Treason, heresy, disloyalty to the cult of that community—in reality these, and not a breach of engagement, were the things of which she had been accused. She saw now. She would not be tied to Quicksands—she would not, she would not, she would not! She owed it no allegiance. Her very soul rebelled at the thought, and cried out that she was made for something better, something higher than the life she had been leading. She would permit no one forcibly to restrict her horizon.

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Just where and how this higher and better life was to be found Honora did not know; but the belief of her childhood—that it existed somewhere—was still intact. Her powers of analysis, we see, are only just budding, and she did not and could not define the ideal existence which she so unflaggingly sought. Of two of its attributes only she was sure—that it was to be free from restraint and from odious comparisons. Honora's development, it may be remarked, proceeds by the action of irritants, and of late her protest against Quicksands and what it represented had driven her to other books besides the treatise on bridge. The library she had collected at Rivington she had brought with her, and was adding to it from time to time. Its volumes are neither sufficiently extensive or profound to enumerate.

Those who are more or less skilled in psychology may attempt to establish a sequence between the events and reflections just related and the fact that, one morning a fortnight later, Honora found herself driving northward on Fifth Avenue in a hansom cab. She was in a pleasurable state of adventurous excitement, comparable to that Columbus must have felt when the shores of the Old World had disappeared below the horizon. During the fortnight we have skipped Honora had been to town several times, and had driven and walked through certain streets: inspiration, courage, and decision had all arrived at once this morning, when at the ferry she had given the cabman this particular address on Fifth Avenue.

The cab, with the jerking and thumping peculiar to hansoms, made a circle and drew up at the curb. But even then a moment of irresolution intervened, and she sat staring through the little side window at the sign, T. Gerald Shorter, Real Estate, in neat gold letters over the basement floor of the building.

"Here y'are, Miss," said the cabman through the hole in the roof.

Honora descended, and was almost at the flight of steps leading down to the office door when a familiar figure appeared coming out of it. It was that of Mr. Toots Cuthbert, arrayed in a faultless morning suit, his tie delicately suggestive of falling leaves; and there dangled over his arm the slenderest of walking sticks.

"Mrs. Spence!" he lisped, with every appearance of joy.

"Mr. Cuthbert!" she cried.

"Going in to see Jerry?" he inquired after he had put on his hat, nodding up at the sign.

"I—that is, yes, I had thought of it," she answered.

"Town house?" said Mr. Cuthbert, with a knowing smile.

"I did have an idea of looking at houses," she confessed, somewhat taken aback.

"I'm your man," announced Mr. Cuthbert.

"You!" exclaimed Honora, with an air of considering the lilies of the field. But he did not seem to take offence.

"That's my business," he proclaimed,— "when in town. Jerry gives me a commission. Come in and see him, while I get a list and some keys. By the way, you wouldn't object to telling him you were a friend of mine, would you?"

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"Not at all," said Honora, laughing.

Mr. Shorter was a jovial gentleman in loose-fitting clothes, and he was exceedingly glad to meet Mr. Cuthbert's friend.

"What kind of a house do you want, Mrs. Spence?" he asked. "Cuthbert tells me this morning that the Whitworth house has come into the market. You couldn't have a better location than that, on the Avenue between the Cathedral and the Park."

"Oh," said Honora with a gasp, "that's much too expensive, I'm sure. And there are only two of us." She hesitated, a little alarmed at the rapidity with which affairs were proceeding, and added: "I ought to tell you that I've not really decided to take a house. I wished to—to see what there was to be had, and then I should have to consult my husband."

She gazed very seriously into Mr. Shorter's brown eyes, which became very wide and serious, too. But all the time it seemed to her that other parts of him were laughing.

"Husbands," he declared, "are kill-joys. What have they got to do with a house—except to sleep in it? Now I haven't the pleasure of knowing you as well as I hope to one of these days, Mrs. Spence—"

"Oh, I say!" interrupted Mr. Cuthbert.

"But I venture to predict, on a slight acquaintance," continued Mr. Shorter, undisturbed, "that you will pick out the house you want, and that your husband will move into it."

Honora could not help laughing. And Mr. Shorter leaned back in his revolving chair and laughed, too, in so alarming a manner as to lead her to fear he would fall over backwards. But Mr. Cuthbert, who did not appear to perceive the humour in this conversation, extracted some keys and several pasteboard slips from a rack in the corner. Suddenly Mr. Shorter jerked himself upright again, and became very solemn.

"Where's my hat?" he demanded.

"What do you want with your hat?" Mr. Cuthbert inquired.

"Why, I'm going with you, of course," Mr. Shorter replied. "I've decided to take a personal interest in this matter. You may regard my presence, Cuthbert, as justified by an artistic passion for my profession. I should never forgive myself if Mrs. Spence didn't get just the right house."

"Oh," said Mr. Cuthbert, "I'll manage that all right. I thought you were going to see the representative of a syndicate at eleven."

Mr. Shorter, with a sigh, acknowledged this necessity, and escorted Honora gallantly through the office and across the sidewalk to the waiting hansom. Cuthbert got in beside her.

“Jerry’s a joker,” he observed as they drove off, “you mustn’t mind him.”

“I think he’s delightful,” said Honora.

“One wouldn’t believe that a man of his size and appearance could be so fond of women,” said Mr. Cuthbert. “He’s the greatest old lady-killer that ever breathed. For two cents he would have come with us this morning, and let a five thousand dollar commission go. Do you know Mrs. Shorter?”

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"No," replied Honora. "She looks most attractive. I caught a glimpse of her at the polo that day with you."

"I've been at her house in Newport ever since. Came down yesterday to try to earn some money," he continued, cheerfully making himself agreeable. "Deuced clever woman, much too clever for me and Jerry too. Always in a tete-a-tete with an antiquarian or a pathologist, or a psychologist, and tells novelists what to put into their next books and jurists how to decide cases. Full of modern and liberal ideas—believes in free love and all that sort of thing, and gives Jerry the dickens for practising it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Honora.

Mr. Cuthbert, however, did not appear to realize that he had shocked her.

"By the way," he asked, "have you seen Cecil Grainger since the Quicksands game?"

"No," she replied. "Has Mr. Grainger been at Quicksands since?"

"Nobody knows where he's been," answered Mr. Cuthbert. "It's a mystery. He hasn't been home—at Newport, I mean—for a fortnight. He's never stayed away so long without letting any one know where he is. Naturally they thought he was at Mrs. Kame's in Banbury, but she hasn't laid eyes on him. It's a mystery. My own theory is that he went to sleep in a parlour car and was sent to the yards, and hasn't waked up."

"And isn't Mrs. Grainger worried?" asked Honora.

"Oh, you never can tell anything about her," he said. "Do you know her? She's a sphinx. All the Pendletons are Stoics. And besides, she's been so busy with this Charities Conference that she hasn't had time to think of Cecil. Who's that?"

"That" was a lady from Rivington, one of Honora's former neighbours, to whom she had bowed. Life, indeed, is full of contrasts. Mr. Cuthbert, too, was continually bowing and waving to acquaintances on the Avenue.

Thus pleasantly conversing, they arrived at the first house on the list, and afterwards went through a succession of them. Once inside, Honora would look helplessly about her in the darkness while her escort would raise the shades, admitting a gloomy light on bare interiors or shrouded furniture.

And the rents: Four, five, six, and seven and eight thousand dollars a year. Pride prevented her from discussing these prices with Mr. Cuthbert; and in truth, when lunch time came, she had seen nothing which realized her somewhat vague but persistent ideals.

"I'm so much obliged to you," she said, "and I hope you'll forgive me for wasting your time."

Mr. Cuthbert smiled broadly, and Honora smiled too.

Indeed, there was something ludicrous in the remark. He assumed an attitude of reflection.

"I imagine you wouldn't care to go over beyond Lexington Avenue, would you? I didn't think to ask you."

"No," she replied, blushing a little, "I shouldn't care to go over as far as that."

He pondered a while longer, when suddenly his face lighted up.

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"I've got it!" he cried, "the very thing—why didn't. I think of it? Dicky Farnham's house, or rather his wife's house. I'll get it straight after a while,—she isn't his wife any more, you know; she married Eustace Rindge last month. That's the reason it's for rent. Dicky says he'll never get married again—you bet! They planned it together, laid the corner-stone and all that sort of thing, and before it was finished she had a divorce and had gone abroad with Rindge. I saw her before she sailed, and she begged me to rent it. But it isn't furnished."

"I might look at it," said Honora, dubiously.

"I'm sure it will just suit you," he declared with enthusiasm. "It's a real find. We'll drive around by the office and get the keys."

The house was between Fifth Avenue and Madison, on a cross street not far below Fifty-Ninth, and Honora had scarcely entered the little oak-panelled hall before she had forgotten that Mr. Cuthbert was a real estate agent—a most difficult thing to remember.

Upstairs, the drawing-room was flooded with sunlight that poured in through a window with stone mullions and leaded panes extending the entire width of the house. Against the wall stood a huge stone mantel of the Tudor period, and the ceiling was of wood. Behind the little hall a cosy library lighted by a well, and behind that an ample dining-room. And Honora remembered to have seen, in a shop on Fourth Avenue, just the sideboard for such a setting.

On the third floor, as Mr. Cuthbert pointed out, there was a bedroom and boudoir for Mrs. Spence, and a bedroom and dressing-room for Mr. Spence. Into the domestic arrangement of the house, however important, we need not penetrate. The rent was eight thousand dollars, which Mr. Cuthbert thought extremely reasonable.

"Eight thousand dollars!" As she stood with her back turned, looking out on the street, some trick of memory brought into her mind the fact that she had once heard her uncle declare that he had bought his house and lot for that exact sum. And as cashier of Mr. Isham's bank, he did not earn so much in a year.

She had found the house, indeed, but the other and mightier half of the task remained, of getting Howard into it. In the consideration of this most difficult of problems Honora, who in her exaltation had beheld herself installed in every room, grew suddenly serious. She was startled out of her reflections by a remark of almost uncanny penetration on the part of Mr. Cuthbert.

"Oh, he'll come round all right, when he sees the house," that young gentleman declared.

Honora turned quickly, and, after a moment of astonishment, laughed in spite of herself. It was impossible not to laugh with Mr. Cuthbert, so irresistible and debonair was he, so confiding and sympathetic, that he became; before one knew it, an accomplice. Had he not poured out to Honora, with a charming gayety and frankness, many of his financial troubles?

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"I'm afraid he'll think it frightfully expensive," she answered, becoming thoughtful once more. And it did not occur to her that neither of them had mentioned the individual to whom they referred.

"Wait until he's feeling tiptop," Mr. Cuthbert advised, "and then bring him up here in a hurry. I say, I hope you do take the house," he added, with a boyish seriousness after she had refused his appeal to lunch with him, "and that you will let me come and see you once in a while."

She lunched alone, in a quiet corner of the dining-room of one of the large hotels, gazing at intervals absently out of the window. And by the middle of the afternoon she found herself, quite unexpectedly, in the antique furniture shop, gazing at the sideboard and a set of leather-seated Jacobean chairs, and bribing the dealer with a smile to hold them for a few days until she could decide whether she wished them. In a similar mood of abstraction she boarded the ferry, but it was not until the boat had started on its journey that she became aware of a trim, familiar figure in front of her, silhouetted against the ruffled blue waters of the river—Trixtton Brent's. And presently, as though the concentration of her thoughts upon his back had summoned him, he turned.

"Where have you been all this time?" she asked. "I haven't seen you for an age."

"To Seattle."

"To Seattle!" she exclaimed. "What were you doing there?"

"Trying to forget you," he replied promptly, "and incidentally attempting to obtain control of some properties. Both efforts, I may add, were unsuccessful."

"I'm sorry," said Honora.

"And what mischief," he demanded, "have you been up to?"

"You'll never guess!" she exclaimed.

"Preparing for the exodus," he hazarded.

"You surely don't expect me to stay in Quicksands all winter?" she replied, a little guiltily.

"Quicksands," he declared, "has passed into history."

"You always insist upon putting a wrong interpretation upon what I do," she complained.

He laughed.

"What interpretation do you put on it?" he asked.

“A most natural and praiseworthy one,” she answered. “Education, improvement, growth—these things are as necessary for a woman as for a man. Of course I don’t expect you to believe that—your idea of women not being a very exalted one.”

He did not reply, for at that instant the bell rang, the passengers pressed forward about them, and they were soon in the midst of the confusion of a landing. It was not until they were seated in adjoining chairs of the parlour-car that the conversation was renewed.

“When do you move to town?” he inquired.

However simple Mr. Brent’s methods of reasoning may appear to others, his apparent clairvoyance never failed to startle Honora.

“Somebody has told you that I’ve been looking at houses!” she exclaimed.

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“Have you found one?”

She hesitated.

“Yes—I have found one. It belongs to some people named Farnham—they’re divorced.”

“Dicky Farnham’s ex-wife,” he supplied. “I know where it is —unexceptionable neighbourhood and all that sort of thing.”

“And it’s just finished,” continued Honora, her enthusiasm gaining on her as she spoke of the object which had possessed her mind for four hours. “It’s the most enchanting house, and so sunny for New York. If I had built it myself it could not have suited me better. Only—”

“Only—” repeated Trixton Brent, smiling.

“Well,” she said slowly, “I really oughtn’t to talk about it. I—I haven’t said anything to Howard yet, and he may not like it. I ran across it by the merest accident.”

“What will you give me,” he said, “if I can induce Howard to like it?”

“My eternal friendship,” she laughed.

“That’s not enough,” said Trixton Brent.

CHAPTER IX

INTRODUCING A REVOLUTIONIZING VEHICLE

“Howard,” said Honora that evening, “I’ve been going through houses to-day.”

“Houses!” he exclaimed, looking up from his newspaper.

“And I’ve been most fortunate,” she continued. “I found one that Mrs. Farnham built—she is now Mrs. Rindge. It is just finished, and so attractive. If I’d looked until doomsday I couldn’t have done any better.”

“But great Scott!” he ejaculated, “what put the notion of a town house into your head?”

“Isn’t it high time to be thinking of the winter?” she asked. “It’s nearly the end of September.”

He was inarticulate for a few moments, in an evident desperate attempt to rally his forces to meet such an unforeseen attack.



"Who said anything about going to town?" he inquired.

"Now, Howard, don't be foolish," she replied. "Surely you didn't expect to stay in Quicksands all winter?"

"Foolish!" he repeated, and added inconsequently, "why not?"

"Because," said Honora, calmly, "I have a life to lead as well as you."

"But you weren't satisfied until you got to Quicksands, and now you want to leave it."

"I didn't bargain to stay here in the winter," she declared. "You know very well that if you were unfortunate it would be different. But you're quite prosperous."

"How do you know?" he demanded unguardedly.

"Quicksands tells me," she said. "It is—a little humiliating not to have more of your confidence, and to hear such things from outsiders."

"You never seemed interested in business matters," he answered uneasily.

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"I should be," said Honora, "if you would only take the trouble to tell me about them." She stood up. "Howard, can't you see that it is making us—grow apart? If you won't tell me about yourself and what you're doing, you drive me to other interests. I am your wife, and I ought to know—I want to know. The reason I don't understand is because you've never taken the trouble to teach me. I wish to lead my own life, it is true—to develop. I don't want to be like these other women down here. I—I was made for something better. I'm sure of it. But I wish my life to be joined to yours, too—and it doesn't seem to be. And sometimes—I'm afraid I can't explain it to you—sometimes I feel lonely and frightened, as though I might do something desperate. And I don't know what's going to become of me."

He laid down his newspaper and stared at her helplessly, with the air of a man who suddenly finds himself at sea in a small boat without oars.

"Oh, you can't understand!" she cried. "I might have known you never could."

He was, indeed, thoroughly perplexed and uncomfortable: unhappy might not be too strong a word. He got up awkwardly and put his hand on her arm. She did not respond. He drew her, limp and unresisting, down on the lounge beside him.

"For heaven's sake, what is the matter, Honora?" he faltered. "I—I thought we were happy. You were getting on all right, and seemed to be having a good time down here. You never said anything about—this."

She turned her head and looked at him—a long, searching look with widened eyes.

"No," she said slowly, "you don't understand. I suppose it isn't your fault."

"I'll try," he said, "I don't like to see you—upset like this. I'll do anything I can to make you happy."

"Not things, not—not toys," Trixton Brent's expression involuntarily coming to her lips. "Oh, can't you see I'm not that kind of a woman? I don't want to be bought. I want you, whatever you are, if you are. I want to be saved. Take care of me—see a little more of me—be a little interested in what I think. God gave me a mind, and—other men have discovered it. You don't know, you can't know, what temptations you subject me to. It isn't right, Howard. And oh, it is humiliating not to be able to interest one's husband."

"But you do interest me," he protested.

She shook her head.

"Not so much as your business," she said; "not nearly so much."

“Perhaps I have been too absorbed,” he confessed. “One thing has followed another. I didn’t suspect that you felt this way. Come, I’ll try to brace up.” He pressed her to him. “Don’t feel badly. You’re overwrought. You’ve exaggerated the situation, Honora. We’ll go in on the eight o’clock train together and look at the house—although I’m afraid it’s a little steep,” he added cautiously.

“I don’t care anything about the house,” said Honora. “I don’t want it.”

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"There!" he said soothingly, "you'll feel differently in the morning. We'll go and look at it, anyway."

Her quick ear, however, detected an undertone which, if not precisely resentment, was akin to the vexation that an elderly gentleman might be justified in feeling who has taken the same walk for twenty years, and is one day struck by a falling brick. Howard had not thought of consulting her in regard to remaining all winter in Quicksands. And, although he might not realize it himself, if he should consent to go to New York one reason for his acquiescence would be that the country in winter offered a more or less favourable atmosphere for the recurrence of similar unpleasant and unaccountable domestic convulsions. Business demands peace at any price. And the ultimatum at Rivington, though delivered in so different a manner, recurred to him.

The morning sunlight, as is well known, is a dispeller of moods, a disintegrator of the night's fantasies. It awoke Honora at what for her was a comparatively early hour, and as she dressed rapidly she heard her husband whistling in his room. It is idle to speculate on the phenomenon taking place within her, and it may merely be remarked in passing that she possessed a quality which, in a man, leads to a career and fame. Unimagined numbers of America's women possess that quality—a fact that is becoming more and more apparent every day.

"Why, Honora!" Howard exclaimed, as she appeared at the breakfast table. "What's happened to you?"

"Have you forgotten already," she asked, smilingly, as she poured out her coffee, "that we are going to town together?"

He readjusted his newspaper against the carafe.

"How much do you think Mrs. Farnham—or Mrs. Rindge—is worth?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied.

"Old Marshall left her five million dollars."

"What has that to do with it?" inquired Honora.

"She isn't going to rent, especially in that part of town, for nothing."

"Wouldn't it be wiser, Howard, to wait and see the house. You know you proposed it yourself, and it won't take very much of your time."

He returned to a perusal of the financial column, but his eye from time to time wandered from the sheet to his wife, who was reading her letters.

“Howard,” she said, “I feel dreadfully about Mrs. Holt. We haven’t been at Silverdale all summer. Here’s a note from her saying she’ll be in town to-morrow for the Charities Conference, asking me to come to see her at her hotel. I think I’ll go to Silverdale a little later.”

“Why don’t you?” he said. “It would do you good.”

“And you?” she asked.

“My only day of the week is Sunday, Honora. You know that. And I wouldn’t spend another day at Silverdale if they gave me a deed to the property,” he declared.

On the train, when Howard had returned from the smoking car and they were about to disembark at Long Island City, they encountered Mr. Trixton Brent.

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"Whither away?" he cried in apparent astonishment. "Up at dawn, and the eight o'clock train!"

"We were going to look at a house," explained Honora, "and Howard has no other time."

"I'll go, too," declared Mr. Brent, promptly. "You mightn't think me a judge of houses, but I am. I've lived in so many bad ones that I know a good one when I see it now."

"Honora has got a wild notion into her head that I'm going to take the Farnham house," said Howard, smiling. There, on the deck of the ferryboat, in the flooding sunlight, the idea seemed to give him amusement. With the morning light Pharaoh must have hardened his heart.

"Well, perhaps you are," said Mr. Brent, conveying to Honora his delight in the situation by a scarcely perceptible wink. "I shouldn't like to take the other end of the bet. Why shouldn't you? You're fat and healthy and making money faster than you can gather it in."

Howard coughed, and laughed a little, uncomfortably. Trixton Brent was not a man to offend.

"Honora has got that delusion, too," he replied. He steeled himself in his usual manner for the ordeal to come by smoking a cigarette, for the arrival of such a powerful ally on his wife's side lent a different aspect to the situation.

Honora, during this colloquy, was silent. She was a little uncomfortable, and pretended not to see Mr. Brent's wink.

"Incredible as it may seem, I expected to have my automobile ready this morning," he observed; "we might have gone in that. It landed three days ago, but so far it has failed to do anything but fire off revolver shots."

"Oh, I do wish you had it," said Honora, relieved by the change of subject. "To drive in one must be such a wonderful sensation."

"I'll let you know when it stops shooting up the garage and consents to move out," he said. "I'll take you down to Quicksands in it."

The prospective arrival of Mr. Brent's French motor car, which was looked for daily, had indeed been one of the chief topics of conversation at Quicksands that summer. He could appear at no lunch or dinner party without being subjected to a shower of questions as to where it was, and as many as half a dozen different women among whom was Mrs. Chandos —declared that he had promised to bring them out from New York on the occasion of its triumphal entry into the colony. Honora, needless to say, had betrayed no curiosity.



Neither Mr. Shorter nor Mr. Cuthbert had appeared at the real estate office when, at a little after nine o'clock; Honora asked for the keys. And an office boy, perched on the box seat of the carriage, drove with them to the house and opened the wrought-iron gate that guarded the entrance, and the massive front door. Honora had a sense of unreality as they entered, and told herself it was obviously ridiculous that she should aspire to such a dwelling. Yesterday, under the spell of that somewhat adventurous excursion with Mr. Cuthbert, she had pictured herself as installed. He had contrived somehow to give her a sense of intimacy with the people who lived thereabout—his own friends.

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Perhaps it was her husband who was the disillusionizing note as he stood on the polished floor of the sunflooded drawing-room. Although bare of furniture, it was eloquent to Honora of a kind of taste not to be found at Quicksands: it carried her back, by undiscernible channels of thought, to the impression which, in her childhood, the Hanbury mansion had always made. Howard, in her present whimsical fancy, even seemed a little grotesque in such a setting. His inevitable pink shirt and obviously prosperous clothes made discord there, and she knew in this moment that he was appraising the house from a commercial standpoint. His comment confirmed her guess.

"If I were starting out to blow myself, or you, Honora," he said, poking with his stick a marmouset of the carved stone mantel, "I'd get a little more for my money while I was about it."

Honora did not reply. She looked out of the window instead.

"See here, old man," said Trixton Brent, "I'm not a real estate dealer or an architect, but if I were in your place I'd take that carriage and hustle over to Jerry Shorter's as fast as I could and sign the lease."

Howard looked at him in some surprise, as one who had learned that Trixton Brent's opinions were usually worth listening to. Characteristically, he did not like to display his ignorance.

"I know what you mean, Brent," he replied, "and there may be something to the argument. It gives an idea of conservativeness and prosperity."

"You've made a bull's-eye," said Trixton Brent, succinctly.

"But—but I'm not ready to begin on this scale," objected Howard.

"Why," cried Brent, with evident zest—for he was a man who enjoyed sport in all its forms, even to baiting the husbands of his friends,—“when I first set eyes on you, old fellow, I thought you knew a thing or two, and you've made a few turns since that confirmed the opinion. But I'm beginning to perceive that you have limitations. I could sit down here now, if there were any place to sit, and calculate how much living in this house would be worth to me in Wall Street."

Honora, who had been listening uneasily, knew that a shrewder or more disturbing argument could not have been used on her husband; and it came from Trixton Brent—to Howard at least—ex cathedra. She was filled with a sense of shame, which was due not solely to the fact that she was a little conscience-stricken because of her innocent complicity, nor that her husband did not resent an obvious attempt of a high-handed man to browbeat him; but also to the feeling that the character of the discussion had in

some strange way degraded the house itself. Why was it that everything she touched seemed to become contaminated?

“There’s no use staying any longer,” she said. “Howard doesn’t like it.”

“I didn’t say so,” he interrupted. “There’s something about the place that grows on you. If I felt I could afford it—”

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"At any rate," declared Honora, trying to control her voice, "I've decided, now I've seen it a second time, that I don't want it. I only wished him to look at it," she added, scornfully aware that she was taking up the cudgels in his behalf. But she could not bring herself, in Brent's presence, to declare that the argument of the rent seemed decisive.

Her exasperation was somewhat increased by the expression on Trixton Brent's face, which plainly declared that he deemed her last remarks to be the quintessence of tactics; and he obstinately refused, as they went down the stairs to the street, to regard the matter as closed.

"I'll take him down town in the Elevated," he said, as he put her into the carriage. "The first round's a draw."

She directed the driver to the ferry again, and went back to Quicksands. Several times during the day she was on the point of telephoning Brent not to try to persuade Howard to rent the house, and once she even got so far as to take down the receiver. But when she reflected, it seemed an impossible thing to do. At four o'clock she herself was called to the telephone by Mr. Cray, a confidential clerk in Howard's office, who informed her that her husband had been obliged to leave town suddenly on business, and would not be home that night.

"Didn't he say where he was going?" asked Honora.

"He didn't even tell me, Mrs. Spence," Cray replied, and Mr. Dallam doesn't know."

"Oh, dear," said Honora, "I hope he realizes that people are coming for dinner to-morrow evening."

"I'm positive, from what he said, that he'll be back some time to-morrow," Cray reassured her.

She refused an invitation to dine out, and retired shortly after her own dinner with a novel so distracting that she gradually regained an equable frame of mind. The uneasiness, the vague fear of the future, wore away, and she slept peacefully. In the morning, however; she found on her breakfast tray a note from Trixton Brent.

Her first feeling after reading it was one of relief that he had not mentioned the house. He had written from a New York club, asking her to lunch with him at Delmonico's that day and drive home in the motor. No answer was required: if she did not appear at one o'clock, he would know she couldn't come.

Honora took the eleven o'clock train, which gave her an hour after she arrived in New York to do as she pleased. Her first idea, as she stood for a moment amidst the clamour of the traffic in front of the ferry house, was to call on Mrs. Holt at that lady's hotel; and then she remembered that the Charities Conference began at eleven, and

decided to pay a visit to Madame Dumond, who made a specialty of importing novelties in dress. Her costume for the prospective excursion in the automobile had cost Honora some thought that morning. As the day was cool, she had brought along an ulster that was irreproachable. But how about the hat and veil?

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Madame Dumond was enchanted. She had them both,—she had landed with them only last week. She tried them on Honora, and stood back with her hands clasped in an ecstasy she did not attempt to hide. What a satisfaction to sell things to Mrs. Spence! Some ladies she could mention would look like frights in them, but Madame Spence had ‘de la race’. She could wear anything that was chic. The hat and veil, said Madame, with a simper, were sixty dollars.

“Sixty dollars!” exclaimed Honora.

“Ah, madame, what would you?” Novelties were novelties, the United States Custom authorities robbers.

Having attended to these important details, Honora drove to the restaurant in her hansom cab, the blood coursing pleasantly in her veins. The autumn air sparkled, and New York was showing signs of animation. She glanced furtively into the little mirror at the side. Her veil was grey, and with the hat gave her somewhat the air of a religieuse, an aspect heightened by the perfect oval of her face; and something akin to a religious thrill ran through her.

The automobile, with its brass and varnish shining in the sunlight, was waiting a little way up the street, and the first person Honora met in the vestibule of Delmonico’s was Lula Chandos. She was, as usual, elaborately dressed, and gave one the impression of being lost, so anxiously was she scanning the face of every new arrival.

“Oh, my dear,” she cried, staring hard at the hat and the veil, “have you seen Clara Trowbridge anywhere?”

A certain pity possessed Honora as she shook her head.

“She was in town this morning,” continued Mrs. Chandos, “and I was sure she was coming here to lunch. Trixy just drove up a moment ago in his new car. Did you see it?”

Honora’s pity turned into a definite contempt.

“I saw an automobile as I came in,” she said, but the brevity of her reply seemed to have no effect upon Mrs. Chandos.

“There he is now, at the entrance to the cafe,” she exclaimed.

There, indeed, was Trixton Brent, staring at them from the end of the hall, and making no attempt to approach them.

“I think I’ll go into the dressing-room and leave my coat,” said Honora, outwardly calm but inwardly desperate. Fortunately, Lula made no attempt to follow her.

“You’re a dream in that veil, my dear,” Mrs. Chandos called after her. “Don’t forget that we’re all dining with you to-night in Quicksands.”

Once in the dressing-room, Honora felt like locking the doors and jumping out of the window. She gave her coat to the maid, rearranged her hair without any apparent reason, and was leisurely putting on her hat again, and wondering what she would do next, when Mrs. Kame appeared.

“Trixy asked me to get you,” she explained. “Mr. Grainger and I are going to lunch with you.”

“How nice!” said Honora, with such a distinct emphasis of relief that Mrs. Kame looked at her queerly.

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"What a fool Trixy was, with all his experience, to get mixed up with that Chandos woman," that lady remarked as they passed through the hallway. "She's like molasses—one can never get her off. Lucky thing he found Cecil and me here. There's your persistent friend, Trixy," she added, when they were seated. "Really, this is pathetic, when an invitation to lunch and a drive in your car would have made her so happy."

Honora looked around and beheld, indeed, Mrs. Chandos and two other Quicksands women, Mrs. Randall and Mrs. Barclay, at a table in the corner of the room.

"Where's Bessie to-day, Cecil—or do you know?" demanded Mrs. Kame, after an amused glance at Brent, who had not deigned to answer her. "I promised to go to Newport with her at the end of the week, but I haven't been able to find her."

"Cecil doesn't know," said Trixton Brent. "The police have been looking for him for a fortnight. Where the deuce have you been, Cecil?"

"To the Adirondacks," replied Mr Grainger, gravely.

This explanation, which seemed entirely plausible to Honora, appeared to afford great amusement to Brent, and even to Mrs. Kame.

"When did you come to life?" demanded Brent.

"Yesterday," said Mr. Grainger, quite as solemnly as before.

Mrs. Kame glanced curiously at Honora, and laughed again.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Trixy," she said.

"Why?" he asked innocently. "There's nothing wrong in going to the Adirondacks—is there, Cecil?"

"No," said Mr. Grainger, blinking rapidly.

"The Adirondacks," declared Mrs. Kame, "have now become classic."

"By the way," observed Mr. Grainger, "I believe Bessie's in town to-day at a charity pow-wow, reading a paper. I've half a mind to go over and listen to it. The white dove of peace—and all that kind of thing."

"You'd go to sleep and spoil it all," said Brent.

"But you can't, Cecil!" cried Mrs. Kame. "Don't you remember we're going to Westchester to the Faunces' to spend the night and play bridge? And we promised to arrive early."



"That's so, by George," said Mr. Grainger, and he drank the rest of his whiskey-and-soda.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, if Mrs. Spence is willing," suggested Brent. "If you start right after lunch, I'll take you out. We'll have plenty of time," he added to Honora, "to get back to Quicksands for dinner."

"Are you sure?" she asked anxiously. "I have people for dinner tonight."

"Oh, lots of time," declared Mrs. Kame. "Trixy's car is some unheard-of horse-power. It's only twenty-five miles to the Faunces', and you'll be back at the ferry by half-past four."

"Easily," said Trixton Brent.

CHAPTER X

ON THE ART OF LION TAMING

After lunch, while Mrs. Kame was telephoning to her maid and Mr. Grainger to Mrs. Faunce, Honora found herself alone with Trixton Brent in the automobile at a moment when the Quicksands party were taking a cab. Mrs. Chandos parsed long enough to wave her hand.

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"Bon voyage!" she cried. "What an ideal party! and the chauffeur doesn't understand English. If you don't turn up this evening, Honora, I'll entertain your guests."

"We must get back," said Honora, involuntarily to Brent. "It would be too dreadful if we didn't!"

"Are you afraid I'll run off with you?" he asked.

"I believe you're perfectly capable of it," she replied. "If I were wise, I'd take the train."

"Why don't you?" he demanded.

She smiled.

"I don't know. It's because of your deteriorating influence, I suppose. And yet I trust you, in spite of my instincts and—my eyes. I'm seriously put out with you."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you later, if you're at a loss," she said, as Mrs. Kame and Mr. Grainger appeared.

Eight years have elapsed since that day and this writing—an aeon in this rapidly moving Republic of ours. The roads, although far from perfect yet, were not then what they have since become. But the weather was dry and the voyage to Westchester accomplished successfully. It was half-past three when they drove up the avenue and deposited Mrs. Kame and Cecil Grainger at the long front of the Faunce house: and Brent, who had been driving, relinquished the wheel to the chauffeur and joined Honora in the tonneau. The day was perfect, the woods still heavy with summer foliage, and the only signs of autumn were the hay mounds and the yellowing cornstalks stacked amidst the stubble of the fields.

Brent sat silently watching her, for she had raised her veil in saying good-by to Mrs. Kame, and—as the chauffeur was proceeding slowly—had not lowered it. Suddenly she turned and looked him full in the face.

"What kind of woman do you think I am?" she demanded.

"That's rather a big order, isn't it?" he said.

"I'm perfectly serious," continued Honora, slowly.

"I'd really like to know."

"Before I begin on the somewhat lengthy list of your qualities," he replied, smiling, "may I ask why you'd like to know?"

“Yes,” she said quickly. “I’d like to know because I think you’ve misjudged me. I was really more angry than you have any idea of at the manner in which you talked to Howard. And did you seriously suppose that I was in earnest when we spoke about your assistance in persuading him to take the house?”

He laughed.

“You are either the cleverest woman in the world,” he declared, “or else you oughtn’t to be out without a guardian. And no judge in possession of his five senses would appoint your husband.”

Indignant as she was, she could not resist smiling. There was something in the way Brent made such remarks that fascinated her.

“I shouldn’t call you precisely eligible, either,” she retorted.

He laughed again. But his eyes made her vaguely uneasy.

“Are these harsh words the reward for my charity? he asked.

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"I'm by no means sure it's charity," she said. "That's what is troubling me. And you have no right to say such things about my husband."

"How was I to know you were sensitive on the subject?" he replied.

"I wonder what it would be like to be so utterly cynical as you," she said.

"Do you mean to say you don't want the house?"

"I don't want it under those conditions," she answered with spirit. "I didn't expect to be taken literally. And you've always insisted," she added, "in ascribing to me motives that—that never occurred to me. You make the mistake of thinking that because you have no ideals, other people haven't. I hope Howard hasn't said he'd take the house. He's gone off somewhere, and I haven't been able to see him."

Trixtan Brent looked at her queerly.

"After that last manoeuvre of yours," he said, "it was all I could do to prevent him from rushing over to Jerry Shorter's—and signing the lease."

She did not reply.

"What do these sudden, virtuous resolutions mean?" he asked. "Resignation? Quicksands for life? Abandonment of the whole campaign?"

"There isn't any I campaign," she said—and her voice caught in something like a sob. "I'm not that sordid kind of a person. And if I don't like Quicksands, it's because the whole atmosphere seems to be charged with—with just such a spirit."

Her hand was lying on the seat. He covered it with his own so quickly that she left it there for a moment, as though paralyzed, while she listened to the first serious words he had ever addressed to her.

"Honora, I admire you more than any woman I have ever known," he said.

Her breath came quickly, and she drew her hand away.

"I suppose I ought to feel complimented," she replied.

At this crucial instant what had been a gliding flight of the automobile became, suddenly, a more or less uneven and jerky progress, accompanied by violent explosions. At the first of these Honora, in alarm, leaped to her feet. And the machine, after what seemed an heroic attempt to continue, came to a dead stop. They were on the outskirts of a village; children coming home from school surrounded them in a ring. Brent jumped out, the chauffeur opened the hood, and they peered together into what was, to Honora,

an inexplicable tangle of machinery. There followed a colloquy, in technical French, between the master and the man.

“What’s the matter?” asked Honora, anxiously.

“Nothing much,” said Brent, “spark-plugs. We’ll fix it up in a few minutes.” He looked with some annoyance at the gathering crowd. “Stand back a little, can’t you?” he cried, “and give us room.”

After some minutes spent in wiping greasy pieces of steel which the chauffeur extracted, and subsequent ceaseless grinding on the crank, the engine started again, not without a series of protesting cracks like pistol shots. The chauffeur and Brent leaped in, the bystanders parted with derisive cheers, and away they went through the village, only to announce by another series of explosions a second disaster at the other end of the street. A crowd collected there, too.

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"Oh, dear!" said Honora, "don't you think we ought to take the train, Mr. Brent? If I were to miss a dinner at my own house, it would be too terrible!"

"There's nothing to worry about," he assured her. "Nothing broken. It's only the igniting system that needs adjustment."

Although this was so much Greek to Honora, she was reassured. Trixton Brent inspired confidence. There was another argument with the chauffeur, a little more animated than the first; more greasy plugs taken out and wiped, and a sharper exchange of compliments with the crowd; more grinding, until the chauffeur's face was steeped in perspiration, and more pistol shots. They were off again, but lamely, spurting a little at times, and again slowing down to the pace of an ox-cart. Their progress became a series of illustrations of the fable of the hare and the tortoise. They passed horses, and the horses shied into the ditch: then the same horses passed them, usually at the periods chosen by the demon under the hood to fire its pistol shots, and into the ditch went the horses once more, their owners expressing their thoughts in language at once vivid and unrestrained.

It is one of the blessed compensations of life that in times of prosperity we do not remember our miseries. In these enlightened days, when everybody owns an automobile and calmly travels from Chicago to Boston if he chooses, we have forgotten the dark ages when these machines were possessed by devils: when it took sometimes as much as three hours to go twenty miles, and often longer than that. How many of us have had the same experience as Honora!

She was always going to take the train, and didn't. Whenever her mind was irrevocably made up, the automobile whirled away on all four cylinders for a half a mile or so, until they were out of reach of the railroad. There were trolley cars, to be sure, but those took forever to get anywhere. Four o'clock struck, five and six, when at last the fiend who had conspired with fate, having accomplished his evident purpose of compelling Honora to miss her dinner, finally abandoned them as suddenly and mysteriously as he had come, and the automobile was a lamb once more. It was half-past six, and the sun had set, before they saw the lights twinkling all yellow on the heights of Fort George. At that hour the last train they could have taken to reach the dinner-party in time was leaving the New York side of the ferry.

"What will they think?" cried Honora. "They saw us leave Delmonico's at two o'clock, and they didn't know we were going to Westchester."

It needed no very vivid imagination to summon up the probable remarks of Mrs. Chandos on the affair. It was all very well to say the motor broke down; but unfortunately Trixton Brent's reputation was not much better than that of his car.

Trixton Brent, as might have been expected, was inclined to treat the matter as a joke.

“There’s nothing very formal about a Quicksands dinner-party,” he said. “We’ll have a cosey little dinner in town, and call ’em up on the telephone.”

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She herself was surprised at the spirit of recklessness stealing over her, for there was, after all, a certain appealing glamour in the adventure. She was thrilled by the swift, gliding motion of the automobile, the weird and unfamiliar character of these upper reaches of a great city in the twilight, where new houses stood alone or in rows on wide levelled tracts; and old houses, once in the country, were seen high above the roadway behind crumbling fences, surrounded by gloomy old trees with rotting branches. She stole a glance at the man close beside her; a delightful fear of him made her shiver, and she shrank closer into the corner of the seat.

"Honora!"

All at once he had seized her hand again, and held it in spite of her efforts to release it.

"Honora," he said, "I love you as I have never loved in my life. As I never shall love again."

"Oh—you mustn't say that!" she cried.

"Why not?" he demanded. "Why not, if I feel it?"

"Because," faltered Honora, "because I can't listen to you."

Brent made a motion of disdain with his free hand.

"I don't pretend that it's right," he said. "I'm not a hypocrite, anyway, thank God! It's undoubtedly wrong, according to all moral codes. I've never paid any attention to them. You're married. I'm happy to say I'm divorced. You've got a husband. I won't be guilty of the bad taste of discussing him. He's a good fellow enough, but he never thinks about you from the time the Exchange opens in the morning until he gets home at night and wants his dinner. You don't love him—it would be a miracle if a woman with any spirit did. He hasn't any more of an idea of what he possesses by legal right than the man I discovered driving in a cart one of the best hunters I ever had in my stables. To say that he doesn't appreciate you is a ludicrous understatement. Any woman would have done for him."

"Please don't!" she implored him. "Please don't!"

But for the moment she knew that she was powerless, carried along like a chip on the crest of his passion.

"I don't pretend to say how it is, or why it is," he went on, paying no heed to her protests. "I suppose there's one woman for every man in the world—though I didn't use to think so. I always had another idea of woman before I met you. I've thought I was in love with 'em, but now I understand it was only—something else. I say, I don't know what it is in you that makes me feel differently. I can't analyze it, and I don't want to."



You're not perfect, by a good deal, and God knows I'm not. You're ambitious, but if you weren't, you'd be humdrum—yet there's no pitiful artifice in you as in other women that any idiot can see through. And it would have paralyzed forever any ordinary woman to have married Howard Spence."

A new method of wooing, surely, and evidently peculiar to Trixton Brent. Honora, in the prey of emotions which he had aroused in spite of her, needless to say did not, at that moment, perceive the humour in it. His words gave her food for thought for many months afterwards.

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The lion was indeed aroused at last, and whip or goad or wile of no avail. There came a time when she no longer knew what he was saying: when speech, though eloquent and forceful, seemed a useless medium. Her appeals were lost, and she found herself fighting in his arms, when suddenly they turned into one of the crowded arteries of Harlem. She made a supreme effort of will, and he released her.

"Oh!" she cried, trembling.

But he looked at her, unrepentant, with the light of triumph in his eyes.

"I'll never forgive you!" she exclaimed, breathless.

"I gloried in it," he replied. "I shall remember it as long as I live, and I'll do it again."

She did not answer him. She dropped her veil, and for a long space was silent while they rapidly threaded the traffic, and at length turned into upper Fifth Avenue, skirting the Park. She did not so much as glance at him. But he seemed content to watch her veiled profile in the dusk.

Her breath, in the first tumult of her thought, came and went deeply. But gradually as the street lights burned brighter and familiar sights began to appear, she grew more controlled and became capable of reflection. She remembered that there was a train for Quicksands at seven-fifteen, which Howard had taken once or twice. But she felt that the interval was too short. In that brief period she could not calm herself sufficiently to face her guests. Indeed, the notion of appearing alone, or with Brent, at that dinner-party, appalled her. And suddenly an idea presented itself.

Brent leaned over, and began to direct the chauffeur to a well-known hotel. She interrupted him.

"No," she said, "I'd rather go to the Holland House."

"Very well," he said amicably, not a little surprised at this unlooked-for acquiescence, and then told his man to keep straight on down the Avenue.

She began mechanically to rearrange her hat and veil; and after that, sitting upright, to watch the cross streets with feverish anticipation, her hands in her lap.

"Honora?" he said.

She did not answer.

"Raise the veil, just for a moment, and look at me."

She shook her head. But for some reason, best known to herself, she smiled a little. Perhaps it was because her indignation, which would have frightened many men into repentance, left this one undismayed. At any rate, he caught the gleam of the smile through the film of her veil, and laughed.

“We’ll have a little table in the corner of the room,” he declared, “and you shall order the dinner. Here we are,” he cried to the chauffeur. “Pull up to the right.”

They alighted, crossed the sidewalk, the doors were flung open to receive them, and they entered the hotel.

Through the entrance to the restaurant Honora caught sight of the red glow of candles upon the white tables, and heard the hum of voices. In the hall, people were talking and laughing in groups, and it came as a distinct surprise to her that their arrival seemed to occasion no remark. At the moment of getting out of the automobile, her courage had almost failed her.

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Trixtan Brent hailed one of the hotel servants.

"Show Mrs. Spence to the ladies' parlour," said he. And added to Honora, "I'll get a table, and have the dinner card brought up in a few moments."

Honora stopped the boy at the elevator door.

"Go to the office," she said, "and find out if Mrs. Joshua Holt is in, and the number of her room. And take me to the telephone booths. I'll wait there."

She asked the telephone operator to call up Mr. Spence's house at Quicksands—and waited.

"I'm sorry, madam," he said, after a little while, which seemed like half an hour to Honora, "but they've had a fire in the Kingston exchange, and the Quicksands line is out of order."

Honora's heart sank; but the bell-boy had reappeared. Yes, Mrs. Holt was in.

"Take me to her room," she said, and followed him into the elevator.

In response to his knock the door was opened by Mrs. Holt herself. She wore a dove-coloured gown, and in her hand was a copy of the report of the Board of Missions. For a moment she peered at Honora over the glasses lightly poised on the uncertain rim of her nose.

"Why—my dear!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. Honora!"

"Oh," cried Honora, "I'm so glad you're here. I was so afraid you'd be out."

In the embrace that followed both the glasses and the mission report fell to the floor. Honora picked them up.

"Sit down, my dear, and tell me how you happen to be here," said Mrs. Holt. "I suppose Howard is downstairs."

"No, he isn't," said Honora, rather breathlessly; "that's the reason I came here. That's one reason, I mean. I was coming to see you this morning, but I simply didn't have time for a call after I got to town."

Mrs. Holt settled herself in the middle of the sofa, the only piece of furniture in the room in harmony with her ample proportions. Her attitude and posture were both judicial, and justice itself spoke in her delft-blue eyes.

"Tell me all about it," she said, thus revealing her suspicions that there was something to tell.

"I was just going to," said Honora, hastily, thinking of Trixton Brent waiting in the ladies' parlour. "I took lunch at Delmomico's with Mr. Grainger, and Mr. Brent, and Mrs. Kame —"

"Cecil Grainger?" demanded Mrs. Holt.

Honora trembled.

"Yes," she said.

"I knew his father and mother intimately," said Mrs. Holt, unexpectedly. "And his wife is a friend of mine. She's one of the most executive women we have in the 'Working Girls' Association,' and she read a paper today that was masterful. You know her, of course."

"No," said Honora, "I haven't met her yet."

"Then how did you happen to be lunching with her husband?"

"I wasn't lunching with him, Mrs. Holt," said Honora; "Mr. Brent was giving the lunch."

"Who's Mr. Brent?" demanded Mrs. Holt. "One of those Quicksands people?"

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"He's not exactly a Quicksands person. I scarcely know how to describe him. He's very rich, and goes abroad a great deal, and plays polo. That's the reason he has a little place at Quicksands. He's been awfully kind both to Howard and me," she added with inspiration.

"And Mrs. Kame?" said Mrs. Holt.

"She's a widow, and has a place at Banbury.

"I never heard of her," said Mrs. Holt, and Honora thanked her stars.

"And Howard approves of these mixed lunches, my dear? When I was young, husbands and wives usually went to parties together."

A panicky thought came to Honora, that Mrs. Holt might suddenly inquire as to the whereabouts of Mr. Brent's wife.

"Oh, Howard doesn't mind," she said hastily. "I suppose times have changed, Mrs. Holt. And after lunch we all went out in Mr. Brent's automobile to the Faunces' in Westchester—"

"The Paul Jones Faunces?" Mrs. Holt interrupted.

"What a nice woman that young Mrs. Faunce is! She was Kitty Esterbrook, you know. Both of them very old families."

"It was only," continued Honora, in desperation, "it was only to leave Mr. Grainger and Mrs. Kame there to spend the night. They all said we had plenty of time to go and get back to Quicksands by six o'clock. But coming back the automobile broke down—"

"Of course," said Mrs. Holt, "it serves any one right for trusting to them. I think they are an invention of the devil."

"And we've only just got back to New York this minute."

"Who?" inquired Mrs. Holt.

"Mr. Brent and I," said Honora, with downcast eyes.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the elder lady.

"I couldn't think of anything else to do but come straight here to you," said Honora, gazing at her friend. "And oh, I'm so glad to find you. There's not another train to Quicksands till after nine."

"You did quite right, my dear, under the circumstances. I don't say you haven't been foolish, but it's Howard's fault quite as much as yours. He has no business to let you do such things."

"And what makes it worse," said Honora, "is that the wires are down to Quicksands, and I can't telephone Howard, and we have people to dinner, and they don't know I went to Westchester, and there's no use telegraphing: it wouldn't be delivered till midnight or morning."

"There, there, my dear, don't worry. I know how anxious you feel on your husband's account—"

"Oh—Mrs. Holt, I was going to ask you a great, great favour. Wouldn't you go down to Quicksands with me and spend the night—and pay us a little visit? You know we would so love to have you!"

"Of course I'll go down with you, my dear," said Mrs. Holt. "I'm surprised that you should think for an instant that I wouldn't. It's my obvious duty. Martha!" she called, "Martha!"

The door of the bedroom opened, and Mrs. Holt's elderly maid appeared. The same maid, by the way, who had closed the shutters that memorable stormy night at Silverdale. She had, it seemed, a trick of appearing at crises.

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"Martha, telephone to Mrs. Edgerly—you know her number-and say that I am very sorry, but an unexpected duty calls me out of town to-night, and ask her to communicate with the Reverend Mr. Field. As for staying with you, Honora," she continued, "I have to be back at Silverdale to-morrow night. Perhaps you and Howard will come back with me. My frank opinion is, that a rest from the gayety of Quicksands will do you good."

"I will come, with pleasure," said Honora. "But as for Howard—I'm afraid he's too busy."

"And how about dinner?" asked Mrs. Holt.

"I forgot to say," said Honora, that Mr. Brent's downstairs. He brought me here, of course. Have you any objection to his dining with us?"

"No," answered Mrs. Holt, "I think I should like to see him."

After Mrs. Holt had given instructions to her maid to pack, and Honora had brushed some of the dust of the roads from her costume, they descended to the ladies' parlour. At the far end of it a waiter holding a card was standing respectfully, and Trixton Brent was pacing up and down between the windows. When he caught sight of them he stopped in his tracks, and stared, and stood as if rooted to the carpet. Honora came forward.

"Oh, Mr. Brent!" she cried, "my old friend, Mrs. Holt, is here, and she's going to take dinner with us and come down to Quicksands for the night. May I introduce Mr. Brent."

"Wasn't it fortunate, Mr. Brent, that Mrs. Spence happened to find me?" said Mrs. Holt, as she took his hand. "I know it is a relief to you."

It was not often, indeed, that Trixton Brent was taken off his guard; but some allowance must be made for him, since he was facing a situation unparalleled in his previous experience. Virtue had not often been so triumphant, and never so dramatic as to produce at the critical instant so emblematic a defender as this matronly lady in dove colour. For a moment, he stared at her, speechless, and then he gathered himself together.

"A relief?" he asked.

"It would seem so to me," said Mrs. Holt. "Not that I do not think you are perfectly capable of taking care of her, as an intimate friend of her husband. I was merely thinking of the proprieties. And as I am a guest in this hotel, I expect you both to do me the honour to dine with me before we start for Quicksands."

After all, Trixton Brent had a sense of humour, although it must not be expected that he should grasp at once all the elements of a joke on himself so colossal.

"I, for one," he said, with a slight bow which gave to his words a touch somewhat elaborate, "will be delighted." And he shot at Honora a glance compounded of many feelings, which she returned smilingly.

"Is that the waiter?" asked Mrs. Holt.

"That is a waiter," said Trixton Brent, glancing at the motionless figure. "Shall I call him?"

"If you please," said Mrs. Holt. "Honora, you must tell me what you like."

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"Anything, Mrs. Holt," said Honora.

"If we are to leave a little after nine," said that lady, balancing her glasses on her nose and glancing at the card, "we have not, I'm afraid, time for many courses."

The head waiter greeted them at the door of the dining-room. He, too, was a man of wisdom and experience. He knew Mrs. Holt, and he knew Trixton Brent. If gravity had not been a life-long habit with him, one might have suspected him of a desire to laugh. As it was, he seemed palpably embarrassed,—for Mr. Brent had evidently been conversing with him.

"Two, sir?" he asked.

"Three," said Mrs. Holt, with dignity.

The head waiter planted them conspicuously in the centre of the room; one of the strangest parties, from the point of view of a connoisseur of New York, that ever sat down together. Mrs. Holt with her curls, and her glasses laid flat on the bosom of her dove-coloured dress; Honora in a costume dedicated to the very latest of the sports, and Trixton Brent in English tweeds. The dining-room was full. But here and there amongst the diners, Honora observed, were elderly people who smiled discreetly as they glanced in their direction—friends, perhaps, of Mrs. Holt. And suddenly, in one corner, she perceived a table of six where the mirth was less restrained.

Fortunately for Mr. Brent, he had had a cocktail, or perhaps two, in Honora's absence. Sufficient time had elapsed since their administration for their proper soothing and exhilarating effects. At the sound of the laughter in the corner he turned his head, a signal for renewed merriment from that quarter. Whereupon he turned back again and faced his hostess once more with a heroism that compelled Honora's admiration. As a sportsman, he had no intention of shirking the bitterness of defeat.

"Mrs. Grainger and Mrs. Shorter," he remarked, "appear to be enjoying themselves."

Honora felt her face grow hot as the merriment at the corner table rose to a height it had not heretofore attained. And she did not dare to look again.

Mrs. Holt was blissfully oblivious to her surroundings. She was, as usual, extremely composed, and improved the interval, while drinking her soup, with a more or less undisguised observation of Mr. Brent; evidently regarding him somewhat in the manner that a suspicious householder would look upon a strange gentleman whom he accidentally found in his front hall. Explanations were necessary. That Mr. Brent's appearance, on the whole, was in his favour did not serve to mitigate her suspicions. Good-looking men were apt to be unscrupulous.

"Are you interested in working girls, Mr. Brent?" she inquired presently.

Honora, in spite of her discomfort, had an insane desire to giggle. She did not dare to raise her eyes.

“I can’t say that I’ve had much experience with them, Mrs. Holt,” he replied, with a gravity little short of sublime.

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"Naturally you wouldn't have had," said Mrs. Holt. "What I meant was, are you interested in the problems they have to face?"

"Extremely," said he, so unexpectedly that Honora choked. "I can't say that I've given as many hours as I should have liked to a study of the subject, but I don't know of any class that has a harder time. As a rule, they're underpaid and overworked, and when night comes they are either tired to death or bored to death, and the good-looking ones are subject to temptations which some of them find impossible to resist, in a natural desire for some excitement to vary the routine of their lives."

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Holt, "that you are fairly conversant with the subject. I don't think I ever heard the problem stated so succinctly and so well. Perhaps," she added, "it might interest you to attend one of our meetings next month. Indeed, you might be willing to say a few words."

"I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me, Mrs. Holt. I'm a rather busy man, and nothing of a public speaker, and it is rarely I get off in the daytime."

"How about automobiling?" asked Mrs. Holt, with a smile.

"Well," said Trixton Brent, laughing in spite of himself, "I like the working girls, I have to have a little excitement occasionally. And I find it easier to get off in the summer than in the winter."

"Men cover a multitude of sins under the plea of business," said Mrs. Holt, shaking her head. "I can't say I think much of your method of distraction. Why any one desires to get into an automobile, I don't see."

"Have you ever been in one?" he asked. "Mine is here, and I was about to invite you to go down to the ferry in it. I'll promise to go slow."

"Well," said Mrs. Holt, "I don't object to going that distance, if you keep your promise. I'll admit that I've always had a curiosity."

"And in return," said Brent, gallantly, "allow me to send you a cheque for your working girls."

"You're very good," said Mrs. Holt.

"Oh," he protested, "I'm not in the habit of giving much to charities, I'm sorry to say. I'd like to know how it feels."

"Then I hope the sensation will induce you to try it again," said Mrs. Holt.

"Nobody, Mrs. Holt," cried Honora, "could be kinder to his friends than Mr. Brent!"

"We were speaking of disinterested kindness, my dear," was Mrs. Holt's reply.

"You're quite right, Mrs. Holt," said Trixton Brent, beginning, as the dinner progressed, to take in the lady opposite a delight that surprised him. "I'm willing to confess that I've led an extremely selfish existence."

"The confession isn't necessary," she replied. "It's written all over you. You're the type of successful man who gets what he wants. I don't mean to say that you are incapable of kindly instincts." And her eye twinkled a little.

"I'm very grateful for that concession, at any rate," he declared.

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"There might be some hope for you if you fell into the hands of a good woman," said Mrs. Holt. "I take it you are a bachelor. Mark my words, the longer you remain one, the more steeped in selfishness you are likely to become in this modern and complex and sense-satisfying life which so many people lead."

Honora trembled for what he might say to this, remembering his bitter references of that afternoon to his own matrimonial experience. Visions of a scene arose before her in the event that Mrs. Holt should discover his status. But evidently Trixton Brent had no intention of discussing his marriage.

"Judging by some of my married friends and acquaintances," he said, "I have no desire to try matrimony as a remedy for unselfishness."

"Then," replied Mrs. Holt, "all I can say is, I should make new friends amongst another kind of people, if I were you. You are quite right, and if I were seeking examples of happy marriages, I should not begin my search among the so-called fashionable set of the present day. They are so supremely selfish that if the least difference in taste develops, or if another man or woman chances along whom they momentarily fancy more than their own husbands or wives, they get a divorce. Their idea of marriage is not a mutual sacrifice which brings happiness through trials borne together and through the making of character. No, they have a notion that man and wife may continue to lead their individual lives. That isn't marriage. I've lived with Joshua Holt thirty-five years last April, and I haven't pleased myself in all that time."

"All men," said Trixton Brent, "are not so fortunate as Mr. Holt."

Honora began to have the sensations of a witness to a debate between Mephistopheles and the powers of heaven. Her head swam. But Mrs. Holt, who had unlooked-for flashes of humour, laughed, and shook her curls at Brent.

"I should like to lecture you some time," she said; "I think it would do you good."

He shook his head.

"I'm beyond redemption. Don't you think so, Honora?" he asked, with an unexpected return of his audacity.

"I'm afraid I'm not worthy to judge you," she replied, and coloured.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Mrs. Holt; "women are superior to men, and it's our duty to keep them in order. And if we're really going to risk our lives in your automobile, Mr. Brent, you'd better make sure it's there," she added, glancing at her watch.

Having dined together in an apparent and inexplicable amity, their exit was of even more interest to the table in the corner than their entrance had been. Mrs. Holt's elderly

maid was waiting in the hall, Mrs. Holt's little trunk was strapped on the rear of the car; and the lady herself, with something of the feelings of a missionary embarking for the wilds of Africa, was assisted up the little step and through the narrow entrance of the tonneau by the combined efforts of Honora and Brent. An expression of resolution, emblematic of a determination to die, if necessary, in the performance of duty, was on her face as the machinery started; and her breath was not quite normal when, in an incredibly brief period, they descended at the ferry.

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The journey to Quicksands was accomplished in a good fellowship which Honora, an hour before, would not have dreamed of. Even Mrs. Holt was not wholly proof against the charms of Trixton Brent when he chose to exert himself; and for some reason he did so choose. As they stood in the starlight on the platform of the deserted little station while he went across to Whelen's livery stable to get a carriage, Mrs. Holt remarked to Honora:

"Mr. Brent is a fascinating man, my dear."

"I am so glad that you appreciate him," exclaimed Honora.

"And a most dangerous one," continued Mrs. Holt. "He has probably, in his day, disturbed the peace of mind of a great many young women. Not that I haven't the highest confidence in you, Honora, but honesty forces me to confess that you are young and pleasure-loving, and a little heedless. And the atmosphere in which you live is not likely to correct those tendencies. If you will take my advice, you will not see too much of Mr. Trixton Brent when your husband is not present."

Indeed, as to the probable effect of this incident on the relations between Mr. Brent and herself Honora was wholly in the dark. Although, from her point of view, what she had done had been amply justified by the plea of self-defence, it could not be expected that he would accept it in the same spirit. The apparent pleasure he had taken in the present situation, once his amazement had been overcome, profoundly puzzled her.

He returned in a few minutes with the carriage and driver, and they started off. Brent sat in front, and Honora explained to Mrs. Holt the appearance of the various places by daylight, and the names of their owners. The elderly lady looked with considerable interest at the blazing lights of the Club, with the same sensations she would no doubt have had if she had been suddenly set down within the Moulin Rouge. Shortly afterwards they turned in at the gate of "The Brackens." The light streamed across the porch and driveway, and the sound of music floated out of the open windows. Within, the figure of Mrs. Barclay could be seen; she was singing vaudeville songs at the piano. Mrs. Holt's lips were tightly shut as she descended and made her way up the steps.

"I hope you'll come in," said Honora to Trixton Brent, in a low voice.

"Come in!" he replied, "I wouldn't miss it for ten thousand dollars."

Mrs. Holt was the first of the three to appear at the door of the drawing-room, and Mrs. Barclay caught sight of her, and stopped in the middle of a bar, with her mouth open. Some of the guests had left. A table in the corner, where Lula Chandos had insisted on playing bridge, was covered with scattered cards and some bills, a decanter of whiskey, two soda bottles, and two glasses. The blue curling smoke from Mrs. Chandos'

cigarette mingled with the haze that hung between the ceiling and the floor, and that lady was in the act of saying cheerfully to Howard, who sat opposite,—“Trixy’s run off with her.”

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Suddenly the chill of silence pervaded the room. Lula Chandos, whose back was turned to the door, looked from Mrs. Barclay to Howard, who, with the other men had risen to his feet.

"What's the matter?" she said in a frightened tone. And, following the eyes of the others, turned her head slowly towards the doorway.

Mrs. Holt, who filled it, had been literally incapable of speech. Close behind her stood Honora and Trixton whose face was inscrutable.

"Howard," said Honora, summoning all the courage that remained in her, "here's Mrs. Holt. We dined with her, and she was good enough to come down for the night. I'm so sorry not to have been here," she added to her guests, "but we went to Westchester with Mrs. Kame and Mr. Grainger, and the automobile broke down on the way back."

Mrs. Holt made no attempt to enter, but stared fixedly at the cigarette that Mrs. Chandos still held in her trembling fingers. Howard crossed the room in the midst of an intense silence.

"Glad to see you, Mrs. Holt," he said. "Er—won't you come in and—and sit down?"

"Thank you, Howard" she replied, "I do not wish to interrupt your party. It is my usual hour for retiring.

"And I think, my dear," she added, turning to Honora, "that I'll ask you to excuse me, and show me to my room."

"Certainly, Mrs. Holt," said Honora, breathlessly.

"Howard, ring the bell."

She led the way up the stairs to the guest-chamber with the rose paper and the little balcony. As she closed the door gusts of laughter reached them from the floor below, and she could plainly distinguish the voices of May Barclay and Trixton Brent.

"I hope you'll be comfortable, Mrs. Holt," she said. "Your maid will be in the little room across the hall and I believe you like breakfast at eight."

"You mustn't let me keep you from your guests, Honora."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she said, on the verge of tears, "I don't want to go to them. Really, I don't."

"It must be confessed," said Mrs. Holt, opening her handbag and taking out the copy of the mission report, which had been carefully folded, "that they seem to be able to get

along very well without you. I suppose I am too old to understand this modern way of living. How well I remember one night—it was in 1886—I missed the train to Silverdale, and my telegram miscarried. Poor Mr. Holt was nearly out of his head.”

She fumbled for her glasses and dropped them. Honora picked them up, and it was then she perceived that the tears were raining down the good lady’s cheeks. At the same moment they sprang into Honora’s eyes, and blinded her. Mrs. Holt looked at her long and earnestly.

“Go down, my dear,” she said gently, “you must not neglect your friends. They will wonder where you are. And at what time do you breakfast?”

“At—at any time you like.”

“I shall be down at eight,” said Mrs. Holt, and she kissed her.

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Honora, closing the door, stood motionless in the hall, and presently the footsteps and the laughter and the sound of carriage wheels on the gravel died away.

CHAPTER XI

CONTAINING SOME REVELATIONS

Honora, as she descended, caught a glimpse of the parlour maid picking up the scattered cards on the drawing-room floor. There were voices on the porch, where Howard was saying good-by to Mrs. Chandos and Trixton Brent. She joined them.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Mrs. Chandos, interrupting Honora's apologies, "I'm sure I shan't sleep a wink—she gave me such a fright. You might have sent Trixy ahead to prepare us. When I first caught sight of her, I thought it was my own dear mother who had come all the way from Cleveland, and the cigarette burned my fingers. But I must say I think it was awfully clever of you to get hold of her and save Trixy's reputation. Good night, dear."

And she got into her carriage.

"Give my love to Mrs. Holt," said Brent, as he took Honora's hand, "and tell her I feel hurt that she neglected to say good night to me. I thought I had made an impression. Tell her I'll send her a cheque for her rescue work. She inspires me with confidence."

Howard laughed.

"I'll see you to-morrow, Brent," he called out as they drove away. Though always assertive, it seemed to Honora that her husband had an increased air of importance as he turned to her now with his hands in his pockets. He looked at her for a moment, and laughed again. He, too, had apparently seen the incident only in a humorous light. "Well, Honora," he remarked, "you have a sort of a P. T. Barnum way of doing things once in a while—haven't you? Is the old lady really tucked away for the night, or is she coming down to read us a sermon? And how the deuce did you happen to pick her up?"

She had come downstairs with confession on her lips, and in the agitation of her mind had scarcely heeded Brent's words or Mrs. Chandos'. She had come down prepared for any attitude but the one in which she found him; for anger, reproaches, arraignments. Nay, she was surprised to find now that she had actually hoped for these. She deserved to be scolded: it was her right. If he had been all of a man, he would have called her to account. There must be—there was something lacking in his character. And it came to her suddenly, with all the shock of a great contrast, with what different eyes she had looked upon him five years before at Silverdale.

He went into the house and started to enter the drawing-room, still in disorder and reeking with smoke.

“No, not in there!” she cried sharply.

He turned to her puzzled. Her breath was coming and going quickly. She crossed the hall and turned on the light in the little parlour there, and he followed her.

“Don’t you feel well?” he asked.

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"Howard," she said, "weren't you worried?"

"Worried? No, why should I have been? Lula Chandos and May Barclay had seen you in the automobile in town, and I knew you were high and dry somewhere."

"High and dry," she repeated. "What?"

"Nothing. They said I had run off with Mr. Brent, didn't they?"

He laughed.

"Yes, there was some joking to that effect."

"You didn't take it seriously?"

"No—why should I?"

She was appalled by his lack of knowledge of her. All these years she had lived with him, and he had not grasped even the elements of her nature. And this was marriage! Trixton Brent—short as their acquaintance had been—had some conception of her character and possibilities her husband none. Where was she to begin? How was she to tell him the episode in the automobile in order that he might perceive something of its sinister significance?

Where was she to go to be saved from herself, if not to him?

"I might have run away with him, if I had loved him," she said after a pause. "Would you have cared?"

"You bet your life," said Howard, and put his arm around her.

She looked up into his face. So intent had she been on what she had meant to tell him that she did not until now perceive he was preoccupied, and only half listening to what she was saying.

"You bet your life," he said, patting her shoulder. "What would I have done, all alone, in the new house?"

"In the new house?" she cried. "Oh, Howard—you haven't taken it!"

"I haven't signed the lease," he replied importantly, smiling down at her, and thrusting his hands in his pockets.

"I don't want it," said Honora; "I don't want it. I told you that I'd decided I didn't want it when we were there. Oh, Howard, why did you take it?"

He whistled. He had the maddening air of one who derives amusement from the tantrums of a spoiled child.

“Well,” he remarked, “women are too many for me. If there’s any way of pleasing ’em I haven’t yet discovered it. The night before last you had to have the house. Nothing else would do. It was the greatest find in New York. For the first time in months you get up for breakfast—a pretty sure sign you hadn’t changed your mind. You drag me to see it, and when you land me there, because I don’t lose my head immediately, you say you don’t want it. Of course I didn’t take you seriously—I thought you’d set your heart on it, so I wired an offer to Shorter to-day, and he accepted it. And when I hand you this pleasant little surprise, you go right up in the air.”

He had no air of vexation, however, as he delivered this somewhat reproachful harangue in the picturesque language to which he commonly resorted. Quite the contrary. He was still smiling, as Santa Claus must smile when he knows he has another pack up the chimney.

“Why this sudden change of mind?” he demanded. “It can’t be because you want to spend the winter in Quicksands.”

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She was indeed at a loss what to say. She could not bring herself to ask him whether he had been influenced by Trixton Brent. If he had, she told herself, she did not wish to know. He was her husband, after all, and it would be too humiliating. And then he had taken the house.

"Have you hit on a palace you like better?" he inquired, with a clumsy attempt at banter. "They tell me the elder Maitlands are going abroad —perhaps we could get their house on the Park."

"You said you couldn't afford Mrs. Rindge's house," she answered uneasily, "and I—I believed you."

"I couldn't," he said mysteriously, and paused.

It seemed to her, as she recalled the scene afterwards, that in this pause he gave the impression of physically swelling. She remembered staring at him with wide, frightened eyes and parted lips.

"I couldn't," he repeated, with the same strange emphasis and a palpable attempt at complacency. "But—er—circumstances have changed since then."

"What do you mean, Howard?" she whispered.

The corners of his mouth twitched in the attempt to repress a smile.

"I mean," he said, "that the president of a trust company can afford to live in a better house than the junior partner of Dallam and Spence."

"The president of a trust company!" Honora scarcely recognized her own voice—so distant it sounded. The room rocked, and she clutched the arm of a chair and sat down. He came and stood over her.

"I thought that would surprise you some," he said, obviously pleased by these symptoms. "The fact is, I hadn't meant to break it to you until morning. But I think I'll go in on the seven thirty-five." (He glanced significantly up at the ceiling, as though Mrs. Holt had something to do with this decision.) "President of the Orange Trust Company at forty isn't so bad, eh?"

"The Orange Trust Company? Did you say the Orange Trust Company?"

"Yes." He produced a cigarette. "Old James Wing and Brent practically control it. You see, if I do say it myself, I handled some things pretty well for Brent this summer, and he's seemed to appreciate it. He and Wing were buying in traction stocks out West. But you could have knocked me down with a paper-knife when he came to me—"

“When did he come to you?” she asked breathlessly.

“Yesterday. We went down town together, you remember, and he asked me to step into his office. Well, we talked it over, and I left on the one o’clock for Newport to see Mr. Wing. Wonderful old man! I sat up with him till midnight—it wasn’t any picnic” . . .

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More than once during the night Honora awoke with a sense of oppression, and each time went painfully through the whole episode from the evening —some weeks past when Trixton Brent had first mentioned the subject of the trust company, to the occurrence in the automobile and Howard's triumphant announcement. She had but a vague notion of how that scene had finished; or of how, limply, she had got to bed. Round and round the circle she went in each waking period. To have implored him to relinquish the place had been waste of breath; and then—her reasons? These were the moments when the current was strongest, when she grew incandescent with humiliation and pain; when stray phrases in red letters of Brent's were illuminated. Merit! He had a contempt for her husband which he had not taken the trouble to hide. But not a business contempt. "As good as the next man," Brent had said—or words to that effect. "As good as the next man!" Then she had tacitly agreed to the bargain, and refused to honour the bill! No, she had not, she had not. Before God, she was innocent of that! When she reached this point it was always to James Wing that she clung—the financier, at least, had been impartial. And it was he who saved her.

At length she opened her eyes to discover with bewilderment that the room was flooded with light, and then she sprang out of bed and went to the open window. To seaward hung an opal mist, struck here and there with crimson. She listened; some one was whistling an air she had heard before—Mrs. Barclay had been singing it last night! Wheels crunched the gravel—Howard was going off. She stood motionless until the horse's hoofs rang on the highroad, and then hurried into her dressing-gown and slippers and went downstairs to the telephone and called a number.

"Is this Mr. Brent's? Will you say to Mr. Brent that Mrs. Spence would be greatly obliged if he stopped a moment at her house before going to town? Thank you."

She returned to her room and dressed with feverish haste, trying to gather her wits for an ordeal which she felt it would have killed her to delay. At ten minutes to eight she emerged again and glanced anxiously at Mrs. Holt's door; and scarcely had she reached the lower hall before he drove into the circle. She was struck more forcibly than ever by the physical freshness of the man, and he bestowed on her, as he took her hand, the peculiar smile she knew so well, that always seemed to have an enigma behind it. At sight and touch of him the memory of what she had prepared to say vanished.

"Behold me, as ever, your obedient servant," he said, as he followed her into the screened-off portion of the porch.

"You must think it strange that I sent for you, I know," she cried, as she turned to him. "But I couldn't wait. I—I did not know until last night. Howard only told me then. Oh, you didn't do it for me! Please say you didn't do it for me!"

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"My dear Honora," replied Trixton Brent, gravely, "we wanted your husband for his abilities and the valuable services he can render us."

She stood looking into his eyes, striving to penetrate to the soul behind, ignorant or heedless that others before her had tried and failed. He met her gaze unflinchingly, and smiled.

"I want the truth," she craved.

"I never lie—to a woman," he said.

"My life—my future depends upon it," she went on. "I'd rather scrub floors, I'd rather beg—than to have it so. You must believe me!"

"I do believe you," he affirmed. And he said it with a gentleness and a sincerity that startled her.

"Thank you," she answered simply. And speech became very difficult. "If—if I haven't been quite fair with you—Mr. Brent, I am sorry. I—I liked you, and I like you to-day better than ever before. And I can quite see now how I must have misled you into thinking—queer things about me. I didn't mean to. I have learned a lesson."

She took a deep, involuntary breath. The touch of lightness in his reply served to emphasize the hitherto unsuspected fact that sportsmanship in Trixton Brent was not merely a code, but assumed something of the grandeur of a principle.

"I, too, have learned a lesson," he replied. "I have learned the difference between nature and art. I am something of a connoisseur in art. I bow to nature, and pay my bets."

"Your bets?" she asked, with a look.

"My renunciations, forfeits, whatever you choose to call them. I have been fairly and squarely beaten—but by nature, not by art. That is my consolation."

Laughter struck into her eyes like a shaft of sunlight into a well; her emotions were no longer to be distinguished. And in that moment she wondered what would have happened if she had loved this man, and why she had not. And when next he spoke, she started.

"How is my elderly dove-coloured friend this morning?" he asked. "That dinner with her was one of the great events of my life. I didn't suppose such people existed any more."

"Perhaps you'll stay to breakfast with her," suggested Honora, smiling. "I know she'd like to see you again."

“No, thanks,” he said, taking her hand, “I’m on my way to the train—I’d quite forgotten it. Au revoir!” He reached the end of the porch, turned, and called back, “As a ‘dea ex machina’, she has never been equalled.”

Honora stood for a while looking after him, until she heard a footstep behind her,—Mrs. Holt’s.

“Who was that, my dear?” she asked, “Howard?”

“Howard has gone, Mrs. Holt,” Honora replied, rousing herself. “I must make his apologies. It was Mr. Brent.”

“Mr. Brent!” the good lady repeated, with a slight upward lift of the faint eyebrows. “Does he often call this early?”

Honora coloured a little, and laughed.

“I asked him to breakfast with you, but he had to catch a train. He —wished to be remembered. He took such a fancy to you.”

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“I am afraid,” said Mrs. Holt, “that his fancy is a thing to be avoided. Are you coming to Silverdale with me, Honora?”

“Yes, Mrs. Holt,” she replied, slipping her arm through that of her friend, “for as long as you will let me stay.”

And she left a note for Howard to that effect.