

Modern Chronicle, a — Volume 06 eBook

Modern Chronicle, a — Volume 06 by Winston Churchill

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CHAPTER VI

Clio, or Thalia?

According to the ordinary and inaccurate method of measuring time, a fortnight may have gone by since the event last narrated, and Honora had tasted at last the joys of authorship. Her name was not to appear, to be sure, on the cover of the *Life and Letters of General Angus Chiltern*; nor indeed, so far, had she written so much as a chapter or a page of a work intended to inspire young and old with the virtues of citizenship. At present the biography was in the crucial constructive stage. Should the letters be put in one volume, and the life in another? or should the letters be inserted in the text of the life? or could not there be a third and judicious mixture of both of these methods? Honora's counsel on this and other problems was, it seems, invaluable. Her own table was fairly littered with biographies more or less famous which had been fetched from the library, and the method of each considered.

Even as Mr. Garrick would never have been taken for an actor in his coach and four, so our heroine did not in the least resemble George Eliot, for instance, as she sat before her mirror at high noon with Monsieur Cadron and her maid Mathilde in worshipful attendance. Some of the ladies, indeed, who have left us those chatty memoirs of the days before the guillotine, she might have been likened to. Monsieur Cadron was an artist, and his branch of art was hair-dressing. It was by his own wish he was here to-day, since he had conceived a new coiffure especially adapted, he declared, to the type of Madame Spence. Behold him declaring ecstatically that seldom in his experience had he had such hairs to work with.

"Avec une telle chevelure, l'on peut tout faire, madame. Etre simple, c'est le comble de l'art. Ca vous donne," he added, with clasped hands and a step backward, "ca vous donne tout a fait l'air d'une dame de Nattier."

Madame took the hand-glass, and did not deny that she was eblouissante. If madame, suggested Monsieur Cadron, had but a little dress a la Marie Antoinette? Madame had, cried madame's maid, running to fetch one with little pink flowers and green leaves on an ecru ground. Could any coiffure or any gown be more appropriate for an entertainment at which Clio was to preside?

It is obviously impossible that a masterpiece should be executed under the rules laid down by convention. It would never be finished. Mr. Chiltern was coming to lunch, and it was not the first time. On her appearance in the doorway he halted abruptly in his pacing of the drawing-room, and stared at her.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting," she said.

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“It was worth it,” he said. And they entered the dining room. A subdued, golden-green light came in through the tall glass doors that opened out on the little garden which had been Mrs. Forsythe’s pride. The scent of roses was in the air, and a mass of them filled a silver bowl in the middle of the table. On the dark walls were Mrs. Forsythe’s precious prints, and above the mantel a portrait of a thin, aristocratic gentleman who resembled the poet Tennyson. In the noonday shadows of a recess was a dark mahogany sideboard loaded with softly gleaming silver—Honora’s. Chiltern sat down facing her. He looked at Honora over the roses,—and she looked at him. A sense of unreality that was, paradoxically, stronger than reality itself came over her, a sense of fitness, of harmony. And for the moment an imagination, ever straining at its leash, was allowed to soar. It was Chiltern who broke the silence.

“What a wonderful bowl!” he said.

“It has been in my father’s family a great many years. He was very fond of it,” she answered, and with a sudden, impulsive movement she reached over and set the bowl aside.

“That’s better,” he declared, “much as I admire the bowl, and the roses.”

She coloured faintly, and smiled. The feast of reason that we are impatiently awaiting is deferred. It were best to attempt to record the intangible things; the golden-green light, the perfumes, and the faint musical laughter which we can hear if we listen. Thalia’s laughter, surely, not Clio’s. Thalia, enamoured with such a theme, has taken the stage herself—and as Vesta, goddess of hearths. It was Vesta whom they felt to be presiding. They lingered, therefore, over the coffee, and Chiltern lighted a cigar. He did not smoke cigarettes.

“I’ve lived long enough,” he said, “to know that I have never lived at all. There is only one thing in life worth having.”

“What is it?” asked Honora.

“This,” he answered, with a gesture; “when it is permanent.”

She smiled.

“And how is one to know whether it would be—permanent?”

“Through experience and failure,” he answered quickly, “we learn to distinguish the reality when it comes. It is unmistakable.”

“Suppose it comes too late?” she said, forgetting the ancient verse inscribed in her youthful diary: “Those who walk on ice will slide against their wills.”



“To admit that is to be a coward,” he declared.

“Such a philosophy may be fitting for a man,” she replied, “but for a woman—”

“We are no longer in the dark ages,” he interrupted. “Every one, man or woman, has the right to happiness. There is no reason why we should suffer all our lives for a mistake.”

“A mistake!” she echoed.

“Certainly,” he said. “It is all a matter of luck, or fate, or whatever you choose to call it. Do you suppose, if I could have found fifteen years ago the woman to have made me happy, I should have spent so much time in seeking distraction?”



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“Perhaps you could not have been capable of appreciating her—fifteen years ago,” suggested Honora. And, lest he might misconstrue her remark, she avoided his eyes.

“Perhaps,” he admitted. “But suppose I have found her now, when I know the value of things.”

“Suppose you should find her now—within a reasonable time. What would you do?”

“Marry her,” he exclaimed promptly. “Marry her and take her to Grenoble, and live the life my father lived before me.”

She did not reply, but rose, and he followed her to the shaded corner of the porch where they usually sat. The bundle of yellow-stained envelopes he had brought were lying on the table, and Honora picked them up mechanically.

“I have been thinking,” she said as she removed the elastics, “that it is a mistake to begin a biography by the enumeration of one’s ancestors. Readers become frightfully bored before they get through the first chapter.”

“I’m beginning to believe,” he laughed, “that you will have to write this one alone. All the ideas I have got so far have been yours. Why shouldn’t you write it, and I arrange the material, and talk about it! That appears to be all I’m good for.”

If she allowed her mind to dwell on the vista he thus presented, she did not betray herself.

“Another thing,” she said, “it should be written like fiction.”

“Like fiction?”

“Fact should be written like fiction, and fiction like fact. It’s difficult to express what I mean. But this life of your father deserves to be widely known, and it should be entertainingly done, like Lockhart, or Parton’s works—”

An envelope fell to the floor, spilling its contents. Among them were several photographs.

“Oh,” she exclaimed, “how beautiful! What place is this?”

“I hadn’t gone over these letters,” he answered. “I only got them yesterday from Cecil Grainger. These are some pictures of Grenoble which must have been taken shortly before my father died.”

She gazed in silence at the old house half hidden by great maples and beeches, their weighted branches sweeping the ground. The building was of wood, painted white, and



through an archway of verdure one saw the generous doorway with its circular steps, with its fan-light above, and its windows at the side. Other quaint windows, some of them of triple width, suggested an interior of mystery and interest.

“My great-great-grandfather, Alexander Chiltern, built it,” he said, “on land granted to him before the Revolution. Of course the house has been added to since then, but the simplicity of the original has always been kept. My father put on the conservatory, for instance,” and Chiltern pointed to a portion at the end of one of the long low wings. “He got the idea from the orangery of a Georgian house in England, and an English architect designed it.”

Honora took up the other photographs. One of them, over which she lingered, was of a charming, old-fashioned garden spattered with sunlight, and shut out from the world by a high brick wall. Behind the wall, again, were the dense masses of the trees, and at the end of a path between nodding foxgloves and Canterbury bells, in a curved recess, a stone seat.



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She turned her face. His was at her shoulder.

“How could you ever have left it?” she asked reproachfully.

She voiced his own regrets, which the crowding memories had awakened.

“I don’t know,” he answered, not without emotion. “I have often asked myself that question.” He crossed over to the railing of the porch, swung about, and looked at her. Her eyes were still on the picture. “I can imagine you in that garden,” he said.

Did the garden cast the spell by which she saw herself on the seat? or was it Chiltern’s voice? She would indeed love and cherish it. And was it true that she belonged there, securely infolded within those peaceful walls? How marvellously well was Thalia playing her comedy! Which was the real, and which the false? What of true value, what of peace and security was contained in her present existence? She had missed the meaning of things, and suddenly it was held up before her, in a garden.

A later hour found them in Honora’s runabout wandering northward along quiet country roads on the eastern side of the island. Chiltern, who was driving, seemed to take no thought of their direction, until at last, with an exclamation, he stopped the horse; and Honora beheld an abandoned mansion of a bygone age sheltered by ancient trees, with wide lands beside it sloping to the water.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Beaulieu,” he replied. “It was built in the seventeenth century, I believe, and must have been a fascinating place in colonial days.” He drove in between the fences and tied the horse, and came around by the side of the runabout. “Won’t you get out and look at it?”

She hesitated, and their eyes met as he held out his hand, but she avoided it and leaped quickly to the ground neither spoke as they walked around the deserted house and gazed at the quaint facade, broken by a crumbling, shaded balcony let in above the entrance door. No sound broke the stillness of the summer’s day—a pregnant stillness. The air was heavy with perfumes, and the leaves formed a tracery against the marvellous blue of the sky. Mystery brooded in the place. Here, in this remote paradise now in ruins, people had dwelt and loved. Thought ended there; and feeling, which is unformed thought, began. Again she glanced at him, and again their eyes met, and hers faltered. They turned, as with one consent, down the path toward the distant water. Paradise overgrown! Could it be reconstructed, redeemed?

In former days the ground they trod had been a pleasance the width of the house, bordered, doubtless, by the forest. Trees grew out of the flower beds now, and underbrush choked the paths. The box itself, that once primly lined the alleys, was gnarled and shapeless. Labyrinth had replaced order, nature had reaped her



vengeance. At length, in the deepening shade, they came, at what had been the edge of the old terrace, to the daintiest of summer-houses, crumbling too, the shutters off their hinges, the floor-boards loose. Past and gone were the idyls of which it had been the stage.



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They turned to the left, through tangled box that wound hither and thither, until they stopped at a stone wall bordering a tree-arched lane. At the bottom of the lane was a glimpse of blue water.

Honora sat down on the wall with her back to a great trunk. Chiltern, with a hand on the stones, leaped over lightly, and stood for some moments in the lane, his feet a little apart and firmly planted, his hands behind his back.

What had Thalia been about to allow the message of that morning to creep into her comedy? a message announcing the coming of an intruder not in the play, in the person of a husband bearing gifts. What right had he, in the eternal essence of things, to return? He was out of all time and place. Such had been her feeling when she had first read the hastily written letter, but even when she had burned it it had risen again from the ashes. Anything but that! In trying not to think of it, she had picked up the newspaper, learned of a railroad accident,—and shuddered. Anything but his return! Her marriage was a sin,—there could be no sacrament in it. She would flee first, and abandon all rather than submit to it.

Chiltern's step aroused her now. He came back to the wall where she was sitting, and faced her.

"You are sad," he said.

She shook her head at him, slowly, and tried to smile.

"What has happened?" he demanded rudely. "I can't bear to see you sad."

"I am going away," she said. The decision had suddenly come to her. Why had she not seen before that it was inevitable?

He seized her wrist as it lay on the wall, and she winced from the sudden pain of his grip.

"Honora, I love you," he said, "I must have you—I will have you. I will make you happy. I promise it on my soul. I can't, I won't live without you."

She did not listen to his words—she could not have repeated them afterwards. The very tone of his voice was changed by passion; creation spoke through him, and she heard and thrilled and swayed and soared, forgetting heaven and earth and hell as he seized her in his arms and covered her face with kisses. Thus Eric the Red might have wooed. And by what grace she spoke the word that delivered her she never knew. As suddenly as he had seized her he released her, and she stood before him with flaming cheeks and painful breath.



“I love you,” he said, “I love you. I have searched the world for you and found you, and by all the laws of God you are mine.”

And love was written in her eyes. He had but to read it there, though her lips might deny it. This was the man of all men she would have chosen, and she was his by right of conquest. Yet she held up her hand with a gesture of entreaty.

“No, Hugh—it cannot be,” she said.

“Cannot!” he cried. “I will take you. You love me.”

“I am married.”

“Married! Do you mean that you would let that man stand between you and happiness?”



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“What do you mean?” she asked, in a frightened voice.

“Just what I say,” he cried, with incredible vehemence. “Leave him —divorce him. You cannot live with him. He isn’t worthy to touch your hand.”

The idea planted itself with the force of a barbed arrow from a strong-bow. Struggle as she might, she could not henceforth extract it.

“Oh!” she cried.

He took her arm, gently, and forced her to sit down on the wall. Such was the completeness of his mastery that she did not resist. He sat down beside her.

“Listen, Honora,” he said, and tried to speak calmly, though his voice was still vibrant; “let us look the situation in the face. As I told you once, the days of useless martyrdom are past. The world is more enlightened today, and recognizes an individual right to happiness.”

“To happiness,” she repeated after him, like a child. He forgot his words as he looked into her eyes: they were lighted as with all the candles of heaven in his honour.

“Listen,” he said hoarsely, and his fingers tightened on her arm.

The current running through her from him made her his instrument. Did he say the sky was black, she would have exclaimed at the discovery.

“Yes—I am listening.”

“Honora!”

“Hugh,” she answered, and blinded him. He was possessed by the tragic fear that she was acting a dream; presently she would awake—and shatter the universe. His dominance was too complete.

“I love you—I respect you. You are making it very hard for me. Please try to understand what I am saying,” he cried almost fiercely. “This thing, this miracle, has happened in spite of us. Henceforth you belong to me—do you hear?”

Once more the candles flared up.

“We cannot drift. We must decide now upon some definite action. Our lives are our own, to make as we choose. You said you were going away. And you meant—alone?”

The eyes were wide, now, with fright.



“Oh, I must—I must,” she said. “Don’t—don’t talk about it.” And she put forth a hand over his.

“I will talk about it,” he declared, trembling. “I have thought it all out,” and this time it was her fingers that tightened. “You are going away. And presently—when you are free—I will come to you.”

For a moment the current stopped.

“No, no!” she cried, almost in terror. The first fatalist must have been a woman, and the vision of rent prison bars drove her mad. “No, we could never be happy.”

“We can—we will be happy,” he said, with a conviction that was unshaken. “Do you hear me? I will not debase what I have to say by resorting to comparisons. But—others I know have been happy are happy, though their happiness cannot be spoken of with ours. Listen. You will go away—for a little while—and afterwards we shall be together for all time. Nothing shall separate us: We never have known life, either of us, until now. I, missing you, have run after the false gods. And you—I say it with truth-needed me. We will go to live at Grenoble, as my father and mother lived. We will take up their duties there. And if it seems possible, I will go into public life. When I return, I shall find you—waiting for me—in the garden.”



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So real had the mirage become, that Honora did not answer. The desert and its journey fell away. Could such a thing, after all, be possible? Did fate deal twice to those whom she had made novices? The mirage, indeed, suddenly became reality—a mirage only because she had proclaimed it such. She had beheld in it, as he spoke, a Grenoble which was paradise regained. And why should paradise regained be a paradox? Why paradise regained? Paradise gained. She had never known it, until he had flung wide the gates. She had sought for it, and never found it until now, and her senses doubted it. It was a paradise of love, to be sure; but one, too, of duty. Duty made it real. Work was there, and fulfilment of the purpose of life itself. And if his days hitherto had been useless, hers had in truth been barren.

It was only of late, after a life-long groping, that she had discovered their barrenness. The right to happiness! Could she begin anew, and found it upon a rock? And was he the rock?

The question startled her, and she drew away from him first her hand, and then she turned her body, staring at him with widened eyes. He did not resist the movement; nor could he, being male, divine what was passing within her, though he watched her anxiously. She had no thought of the first days,—but afterwards. For at such times it is the woman who scans the veil of the future. How long would that beacon burn which flamed now in such prodigal waste? Would not the very springs of it dry up? She looked at him, and she saw the Viking. But the Viking had fled from the world, and they—they would be going into it. Could love prevail against its dangers and pitfalls and—duties? Love was the word that rang out, as one calling through the garden, and her thoughts ran molten. Let love overflow—she gloried in the waste! And let the lean years come,—she defied them to-day.

“Oh, Hugh!” she faltered.

“My dearest!” he cried, and would have seized her in his arms again but for a look of supplication. That he had in him this innate and unsuspected chivalry filled her with an exquisite sweetness.

“You will—protect me?” she asked.

“With my life and with my honour,” he answered. “Honora, there will be no happiness like ours.”

“I wish I knew,” she sighed: and then, her look returning from the veil, rested on him with a tenderness that was inexpressible. “I—I don’t care, Hugh. I trust you.”

The sun was setting. Slowly they went back together through the paths of the tangled garden, which had doubtless seen many dramas, and the courses changed of many



lives: overgrown and outworn now, yet love was loth to leave it. Honora paused on the lawn before the house, and looked back at him over her shoulder.

“How happy we could have been here, in those days,” she sighed.

“We will be happier there,” he said.



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Honora loved. Many times in her life had she believed herself to have had this sensation, and yet had known nothing of these aches and ecstasies! Her mortal body, unattended, went out to dinner that evening. Never, it is said, was her success more pronounced. The charm of Randolph Leffingwell, which had fascinated the nobility of three kingdoms, had descended on her, and hostesses had discovered that she possessed the magic touch necessary to make a dinner complete. Her quality, as we know, was not wit: it was something as old as the world, as new as modern psychology. It was, in short, the power to stimulate. She infused a sense of well-being; and ordinary people, in her presence, surprised themselves by saying clever things.

Lord Ayllington, a lean, hard-riding gentleman, who was supposed to be on the verge of contracting an alliance with the eldest of the Grenfell girls, regretted that Mrs. Spence was neither unmarried nor an heiress.

"You know," he said to Cecil Grainger, who happened to be gracing his wife's dinner-party, "she's the sort of woman for whom a man might consent to live in Venice."

"And she's the sort of woman," replied, "a man couldn't get to go to Venice."

Lord Ayllington's sigh was a proof of an intimate knowledge of the world.

"I suppose not," he said. "It's always so. And there are few American women who would throw everything overboard for a grand passion."

"You ought to see her on the beach," Mr. Grainger suggested.

"I intend to," said Ayllington. "By the way, not a few of your American women get divorced, and keep their cake and eat it, too. It's a bit difficult, here at Newport, for a stranger, you know."

"I'm willing to bet," declared Mr. Grainger, "that it doesn't pay. When you're divorced and married again you've got to keep up appearances—the first time you don't. Some of these people are working pretty hard."

Whereupon, for the Englishman's enlightenment, he recounted a little gossip.

This, of course, was in the smoking room. In the drawing-room, Mrs. Grainger's cousin did not escape, and the biography was the subject of laughter.

"You see something of him, I hear," remarked Mrs. Playfair, a lady the deficiency of whose neck was supplied by jewels, and whose conversation sounded like liquid coming out of an inverted bottle. "Is he really serious about the biography?"

"You'll have to ask Mr. Grainger," replied Honora.



“Hugh ought to marry,” Mrs. Grenfell observed.

“Why did he come back?” inquired another who had just returned from a prolonged residence abroad. “Was there a woman in the case?”

“Put it in the plural, and you’ll be nearer right,” laughed Mrs. Grenfell, and added to Honora, “You’d best take care, my dear, he’s dangerous.”

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Honora seemed to be looking down on them from a great height, and to Reginald Farwell alone is due the discovery of this altitude; his reputation for astuteness, after that evening, was secure. He had sat next her, and had merely put two and two together—an operation that is probably at the root of most prophecies. More than once that summer Mr. Farwell had taken sketches down Honora's lane, for she was on what was known as his list of advisers: a sheepfold of ewes, some one had called it, and he was always piqued when one of them went astray. In addition to this, intuition told him that he had taken the name of a deity in vain—and that deity was Chiltern. These reflections resulted in another after-dinner conversation to which we are not supposed to listen.

He found Jerry Shorter in a receptive mood, and drew him into Cecil Grainger's study, where this latter gentleman, when awake, carried on his lifework of keeping a record of prize winners.

"I believe there is something between Mrs. Spence and Hugh Chiltern, after all, Jerry," he said.

"By jinks, you don't say so!" exclaimed Mr. Shorter, who had a profound respect for his friend's diagnoses in these matters. "She was dazzling to-night, and her eyes were like stars. I passed her in the hall just now, and I might as well have been in Halifax."

"She fairly withered me when I made a little fun of Chiltern," declared Farwell.

"I tell you what it is, Reggie," remarked Mr. Shorter, with more frankness than tact, "you could talk architecture with 'em from now to Christmas, and nothing'd happen, but it would take an iceberg to write a book with Hugh and see him alone six days out of seven. Chiltern knocks women into a cocked hat. I've seen 'em stark raving crazy. Why, there was that Mrs. Slicer six or seven years ago—you remember—that Cecil Grainger had such a deuce of a time with. And there was Mrs. Dutton—I was a committee to see her, when the old General was alive,—to say nothing about a good many women you and I know."

Mr. Farwell nodded.

"I'm confoundedly sorry if it's so," Mr. Shorter continued, with sincerity. "She has a brilliant future ahead of her. She's got good blood in her, she's stunning to look at, and she's made her own way in spite of that Billycock of a husband who talks like the original Rothschild. By the bye, Wing is using him for a good thing. He's sent him out West to pull that street railway chestnut out of the fire. I'm not particularly squeamish, Reggie, though I try to play the game straight myself—the way my father played it. But by the lord Harry, I can't see the difference between Dick Turpin and Wing and Trixy Brent. It's hold and deliver with those fellows. But if the police get anybody, their get Spence."



“The police never get anybody,” said Farwell, pessimistically; for the change of topic bored him.

“No, I suppose they don’t,” answered Mr. Shorter, cheerfully finishing his chartreuse, and fixing his eye on one of the coloured lithographs of lean horses on Cecil Grainger’s wall. “I’d talk to Hugh, if I wasn’t as much afraid of him as of Jim Jeffries. I don’t want to see him ruin her career.”



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“Why should an affair with him ruin it?” asked Farwell, unexpectedly. “There was Constance Witherspoon. I understand that went pretty far.”

“My dear boy,” said Mr. Shorter, “it’s the women. Bessie Grainger here, for instance—she’d go right up in the air. And the women had—well, a childhood-interest in Constance. Self-preservation is the first law—of women.”

“They say Hugh has changed—that he wants to settle down,” said Farwell.

“If you’d ever gone to church, Reggie,” said Mr. Shorter, “you’d know something about the limitations of the leopard.”

CHAPTER VII

“Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”

That night was Honora’s soul played upon by the unknown musician of the sleepless hours. Now a mad, ecstatic chorus dinned in her ears and set her blood coursing; and again despair seized her with a dirge. Periods of semiconsciousness only came to her, and from one of these she was suddenly startled into wakefulness by her own words. “I have the right to make of my life what I can.” But when she beheld the road of terrors that stretched between her and the shining places, it seemed as though she would never have the courage to fare forth along its way. To look back was to survey a prospect even more dreadful.

The incidents of her life ranged by in procession. Not in natural sequence, but a group here and a group there. And it was given her, for the first time, to see many things clearly. But now she loved. God alone knew what she felt for this man, and when she thought of him the very perils of her path were dwarfed. On returning home that night she had given her maid her cloak, and had stood for a long time immobile,—gazing at her image in the pierglass.

“Madame est belle comme l’Imperatrice d’Autriche!” said the maid at length.

“Am I really beautiful, Mathilde?”

Mathilde raised her eyes and hands to heaven in a gesture that admitted no doubt. Mathilde, moreover, could read a certain kind of history if the print were large enough.

Honora looked in the glass again. Yes, she was beautiful. He had found her so, he had told her so. And here was the testimony of her own eyes. The bloom on the nectarines that came every morning from Mr. Chamberlin’s greenhouse could not compare with the colour of her cheeks; her hair was like the dusk; her eyes like the blue pools among the



rocks, and touched now by the sun; her neck and arms of the whiteness of sea-foam. It was meet that she should be thus for him and for the love he brought her.

She turned suddenly to the maid.

“Do you love me, Mathilde?” she asked.

Mathilde was not surprised. She was, on the contrary, profoundly touched.

“How can madame ask?” she cried impulsively, and seized Honora’s hand. How was it possible to be near madame, and not love her?



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“And would you go—anywhere with me?”

The scene came back to her in the night watches. For the little maid had wept and vowed eternal fidelity.

It was not—until the first faint herald of the morning that Honora could bring herself to pronounce the fateful thing that stood between her and happiness, that threatened to mar the perfection of a heaven-born love —Divorce! And thus, having named it resolutely several times, the demon of salvation began gradually to assume a kindly aspect that at times became almost benign. In fact, this one was not a demon at all, but a liberator: the demon, she perceived, stalked behind him, and his name was Notoriety. It was he who would flay her for coquetting with the liberator.

What if she were flayed? Once married to Chiltern, once embarked upon that life of usefulness, once firmly established on ground of her own tilling, and she was immune. And this led her to a consideration of those she knew who had been flayed. They were not few, and a surfeit of publicity is a sufficient reason for not enumerating them here. And during this process of exorcism Notoriety became a bogey, too: he had been powerless to hurt them. It must be true what Chiltern had said that the world was changing. The tragic and the ridiculous here joining hands, she remembered that Reggie Farwell had told her that he had recently made a trip to western New York to inspect a house he had built for a “remarried” couple who were not wholly unknown. The dove-cote, he had called it. The man, in his former marriage, had been renowned all up and down tidewater as a rake and a brute, and now it was an exception when he did not have at least one baby on his knee. And he knew, according to Mr. Farwell, more about infant diet than the whole staff of a maternity hospital.

At length, as she stared into the darkness, dissolution came upon it. The sills of her windows outlined themselves, and a blurred foliage was sketched into the frame. With a problem but half solved the day had surprised her. She marvelled to see that it grew apace, and presently arose to look out upon a stillness like that of eternity: in the grey light the very leaves seemed to be holding their breath in expectancy of the thing that was to come. Presently the drooping roses raised their heads, from pearl to silver grew the light, and comparison ended. The reds were aflame, the greens resplendent, the lawn sewn with the diamonds of the dew.

A little travelling table was beside the window, and Honora took her pen and wrote.

“My dearest, above all created things I love you. Morning has come, and it seems to me that I have travelled far since last I saw you. I have come to a new place, which is neither hell nor heaven, and in the mystery of it you—you alone are real. It is to your strength that I cling, and I know that you will not fail me.”“Since I saw you, Hugh, I have



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been through the Valley of the Shadow. I have thought of many things. One truth alone is clear—that I love you transcendently.. You have touched and awakened me into life. I walk in a world unknown.“There is the glory of martyrdom in this message I send you now. You must not come to me again until I send for you. I cannot, I will not trust myself or you. I will keep this love which has come to me undefiled. It has brought with it to me a new spirit, a spirit with a scorn for things base and mean. Though it were my last chance in life, I would not see you if you came. If I thought you would not understand what I feel, I could not love you as I do.

“I will write to you again, when I see my way more clearly. I told you in the garden before you spoke that I was going away. Do not seek to know my plans. For the sake of the years to come, obey me.

“Honora.”

She reread the letter, and sealed it. A new and different exaltation had come to her—begotten, perhaps, in the act of writing. A new courage filled her, and now she contemplated the ordeal with a tranquillity that surprised her. The disorder and chaos of the night were passed, and she welcomed the coming day, and those that were to follow it. As though the fates were inclined to humour her impatience, there was a telegram on her breakfast tray, dated at New York, and informing her that her husband would be in Newport about the middle of the afternoon. His western trip was finished a day earlier than he expected. Honora rang her bell.

“Mathilde, I am going away.”

“Oui, madame.”

“And I should like you to go with me.”

“Oui, madame.”

“It is only fair that you should understand, Mathilde. I am going away alone. I am not—coming back.”

The maid’s eyes filled with sudden tears.

“Oh, madame,” she cried, in a burst of loyalty, “if madame will permit me to stay with her!”

Honora was troubled, but her strange calmness did not forsake her. The morning was spent in packing, which was a simple matter. She took only such things as she needed, and left her dinner-gowns hanging in the closets. A few precious books of her own she chose, but the jewellery her husband had given her was put in boxes and laid upon the



dressing-table. In one of these boxes was her wedding ring. When luncheon was over, an astonished and perturbed butler packed the Leffingwell silver and sent it off to storage.

There had been but one interruption in Honora's labours. A note had arrived—from him—a note and a box. He would obey her! She had known he would understand, and respect her the more. What would their love have been, without that respect? She shuddered to think. And he sent her this ring, as a token of that love, as undying as the fire in its stones. Would she wear it, that in her absence she might think of him? Honora kissed it and slipped it on her finger, where it sparkled. The letter was beneath her gown, though she knew it by heart. Chiltern had gone at last: he could not, he said, remain in Newport and not see her.



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At midday she made but the pretence of a meal. It was not until afterwards, in wandering through the lower rooms of this house, become so dear to her, that agitation seized her, and a desire to weep. What was she leaving so precipitately? and whither going? The world indeed was wide, and these rooms had been her home. The day had grown blue-grey, and in the dining room the gentle face seemed to look down upon her compassionately from the portrait. The scent of the roses overpowered her. As she listened, no sound brake the quiet of the place.

Would Howard never come? The train was in—had been in ten minutes. Hark, the sound of wheels! Her heart beating wildly, she ran to the windows of the drawing-room and peered through the lilacs. Yes, there he was, ascending the steps.

“Mrs. Spence is out, I suppose,” she heard him say to the butler, who followed with his bag.

“No, sir, she’s in the drawing-room.”

The sight of him, with his air of satisfaction and importance, proved an unexpected tonic to her strength. It was as though he had brought into the room, marshalled behind him, all the horrors of her marriage, and she marvelled and shuddered anew at the thought of the years of that sufferance.

“Well, I’m back,” he said, “and we’ve made a great killing, as I wrote you. They were easier than I expected.”

He came forward for the usual perfunctory kiss, but she recoiled, and it was then that his eye seemed to grasp the significance of her travelling suit and veil, and he glanced at her face.

“What’s up? Where are you going?” he demanded. “Has anything happened?”

“Everything,” she said, and it was then, suddenly, that she felt the store of her resolution begin to ebb, and she trembled. “Howard, I am going away.”

He stopped short, and thrust his hands into the pockets of his checked trousers.

“Going away,” he repeated. “Where?”

“I don’t know,” said Honora; “I’m going away.”

As though to cap the climax of tragedy, he smiled as he produced his cigarette case. And she was swept, as it were, by a scarlet flame that deprived her for the moment of speech.



“Well,” he said complacently, “there’s no accounting for women. A case of nerves—eh, Honora? Been hitting the pace a little too hard, I guess.” He lighted a match, blissfully unaware of the quality of her look. “All of us have to get toned up once in a while. I need it myself. I’ve had to drink a case of Scotch whiskey out West to get this deal through. Now what’s the name of that new boat with everything on her from a cafe to a Stock Exchange? A German name.”

“I don’t know,” said Honora. She had answered automatically.

To the imminent peril of one of the frailest of Mrs. Forsythe’s chairs, he sat down on it, placed his hands on his knees, flung back his head, and blew the smoke towards the ceiling. Still she stared at him, as in a state of semi-hypnosis.



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“Instead of going off to one of those thousand-dollar-a-minute doctors, let me prescribe for you,” he said. “I’ve handled some nervous men in my time, and I guess nervous women aren’t much different. You’ve had these little attacks before, and they blow over—don’t they? Wing owes me a vacation. If I do say it myself, there are not five men in New York who would have pulled off this deal for him. Now the proposition I was going to make to you is this: that we get cosey in a cabin de luxe on that German boat, hire an automobile on the other side, and do up Europe. It’s a sort of a handicap never to have been over there.”

“Oh, you’re making it very hard for me, Howard,” she cried. “I might have known that you couldn’t understand, that you never could understand—why I am going away. I’ve lived with you all this time, and you do not know me any better than you know—the scrub-woman. I’m going away from you—forever.”

In spite of herself, she ended with an uncontrollable sob.

“Forever!” he repeated, but he continued to smoke and to look at her without any evidences of emotion, very much as though he had received an ultimatum in a business transaction. And then there crept into his expression something of a complacent pity that braced her to continue. “Why?” he asked.

“Because—because I don’t love you. Because you don’t love me. You don’t know what love is—you never will.”

“But we’re married,” he said. “We get along all right.”

“Oh, can’t you see that that makes it all the worse!” she cried. “I can stand it no longer. I can’t live with you—I won’t live with you. I’m of no use to you—you’re sufficient unto yourself. It was all a frightful mistake. I brought nothing into your life, and I take nothing out of it. We are strangers—we have always been so. I am not even your housekeeper. Your whole interest in life is in your business, and you come home to read the newspapers and to sleep! Home! The very word is a mockery. If you had to choose between me and your business you wouldn’t hesitate an instant. And I—I have been starved. It isn’t your fault, perhaps, that you don’t understand that a woman needs something more than dinner-gowns and jewels and—and trips abroad. Her only possible compensation for living with a man is love. Love—and you haven’t the faintest conception of it. It isn’t your fault, perhaps. It’s my fault for marrying you. I didn’t know any better.”

She paused with her breast heaving. He rose and walked over to the fireplace and flicked his ashes into it before he spoke. His calmness maddened her.

“Why didn’t you say something about this before?” he asked.



“Because I didn’t know it—I didn’t realize it—until now.”

“When you married me,” he went on, “you had an idea that you were going to live in a house on Fifth Avenue with a ballroom, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” said Honora. “I do not say I am not to blame. I was a fool. My standards were false. In spite of the fact that my aunt and uncle are the most unworldly people that ever lived—perhaps because of it—I knew nothing of the values of life. I have but one thing to say in my defence. I thought I loved you, and that you could give me—what every woman needs.”



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“You were never satisfied from the first,” he retorted. “You wanted money and position—a mania with American women. I’ve made a success that few men of my age can duplicate. And even now you are not satisfied when I come back to tell you that I have money enough to snap my fingers at half these people you know.”

“How,” asked Honora, “how did you make it?”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

She turned away from him with a gesture of weariness.

“No, you wouldn’t understand that, either, Howard.”

It was not until then that he showed feeling.

“Somebody has been talking to you about this deal. I’m not surprised. A lot of these people are angry because we didn’t let them in. What have they been saying?” he demanded.

Her eyes flashed.

“Nobody has spoken to me on the subject,” she said. “I only know what I have read, and what you have told me. In the first place, you deceived the stockholders of these railways into believing their property was worthless, and in the second place, you intend to sell it to the public for much more than it is worth.”

At first he stared at her in surprise. Then he laughed.

“By George, you’d make something of a financier yourself, Honora,” he exclaimed. And seeing that she did not answer, continued: “Well, you’ve got it about right, only it’s easier said than done. It takes brains. That’s what business is—a survival of the fittest. If you don’t do the other man, he’ll do you.” He opened the cigarette case once more. “And now,” he said, “let me give you a little piece of advice. It’s a good motto for a woman not to meddle with what doesn’t concern her. It isn’t her business to make the money, but to spend it; and she can usually do that to the queen’s taste.”

“A high ideal?” she exclaimed.

“You ought to have some notion of where that ideal came from,” he retorted. “You were all for getting rich, in order to compete with these people. Now you’ve got what you want—”

“And I am going to throw it away. That is like a woman, isn’t it?”

He glanced at her, and then at his watch.



“See here, Honora, I ought to go over to Mr. Wing’s. I wired him I’d be there at four-thirty.”

“Don’t let me keep you,” she replied.

“By gad, you are pale!” he said. “What’s got into the women these days? They never used to have these confounded nerves. Well, if you are bent on it, I suppose there’s no use trying to stop you. Go off somewhere and take a rest, and when you come back you’ll see things differently.”

She held out her hand.

“Good-by, Howard,” she said. “I wanted you to know that I didn’t—bear you any ill-will—that I blame myself as much as you. More, if anything. I hope you will be happy—I know you will. But I must ask you to believe me when I say that I shan’t come back. I—I am leaving all the valuable things you gave me. You will find them on my dressing-table. And I wanted to tell you that my uncle sent me a little legacy from my father—an unexpected one—that makes me independent.”



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He did not take her hand, but was staring at her now, incredulously.

“You mean you are actually going?” he exclaimed.

“Yes.”

“But—what shall I say to Mr. Wing? What will he think?”

Despite the ache in her heart, she smiled.

“Does it make any difference what Mr. Wing thinks?” she asked gently. “Need he know? Isn’t this a matter which concerns us alone? I shall go off, and after a certain time people will understand that I am not coming back.”

“But—have you considered that it may interfere with my prospects?” he asked.

“Why should it? You are invaluable to Mr. Wing. He can’t afford to dispense with your services just because you will be divorced. That would be ridiculous. Some of his own associates are divorced.”

“Divorced!” he cried, and she saw that he had grown pasty white. “On what grounds? Have you been—”

He did not finish.

“No,” she said, “you need fear no scandal. There will be nothing in any way harmful to your—prospects.”

“What can I do?” he said, though more to himself than to her. Her quick ear detected in his voice a note of relief. And yet, he struck in her, standing helplessly smoking in the middle of the floor, chords of pity.

“You can do nothing, Howard,” she said. “If you lived with me from now to the millennium you couldn’t make me love you, nor could you love me—the way I must be loved. Try to realize it. The wrench is what you dread. After it is over you will be much more contented, much happier, than you have been with me. Believe me.”

His next remark astonished her.

“What’s the use of being so damned precipitate?” he demanded.

“Precipitate!”

“Because I can stand it no longer. I should go mad,” she answered.



He took a turn up and down the room, stopped suddenly, and stared at her with eyes that had grown smaller. Suspicion is slow to seize the complacent. Was it possible that he had been supplanted?

Honora, with an instinct of what was coming, held up her head. Had he been angry, had he been a man, how much humiliation he would have spared her!

“So you’re in love!” he said. “I might have known that something was at the bottom of this.”

She took account of and quivered at the many meanings behind his speech —meanings which he was too cowardly to voice in words.

“Yes,” she answered, “I am in love—in love as I never hoped to be—as I did not think it possible to be. My love is such that I would go through hell fire for the sake of it. I do not expect you to believe me when I tell you that such is not the reason why I am leaving you. If you had loved me with the least spark of passion, if I thought I were in the least bit needful to you as a woman and as a soul, as a helper and a confidante, instead of a mere puppet to advertise your prosperity, this would not—could not—have happened. I love a man who would give up the world for me to-morrow. I have but one life to live, and I am going to find happiness if I can.”



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She paused, afire with an eloquence that had come unsought. But her husband only stared at her. She was transformed beyond his recognition. Surely he had not married this woman! And, if the truth be told, down in his secret soul whispered a small, congratulatory voice. Although he did not yet fully realize it, he was glad he had not.

Honora, with an involuntary movement, pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

“Good-by, Howard,” she said. “I—I did not expect you to understand. If I had stayed, I should have made you miserably unhappy.”

He took her hand in a dazed manner, as though he knew not in the least what he was doing. He muttered something and found speech impossible. He gulped once, uncomfortably. The English language had ceased to be a medium. Great is the force of habit! In the emergency he reached for his cigarette case.

Honora had given orders that the carriage was to wait at the door. The servants might suspect, but that was all. Her maid had been discreet. She drew down her veil as she descended the steps, and told the coachman to drive to the station.

It was raining. Leaning forward from under the hood as the horses started, she took her last look at the lilacs.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH THE LAW BETRAYS A HEART

It was still raining when she got into a carriage at Boston and drove under the elevated tracks, through the narrow, slippery business streets, to the hotel. From the windows of her room, as the night fell, she looked out across the dripping foliage of the Common. Below her, and robbed from that sacred ground, were the little granite buildings that housed the entrances to the subway, and for a long time she stood watching the people crowding into these. Most of them had homes to go to! In the gathering gloom the arc-lights shone, casting yellow streaks on the glistening pavement; wagons and carriages plunged into the maelstrom at the corner; pedestrians dodged and slipped; lightnings flashed from overhead wires, and clanging trolley cars pushed their greater bulk through the mass. And presently the higher toned and more ominous bell of an ambulance sounded on its way to the scene of an accident.

It was Mathilde who ordered her dinner and pressed her to eat. But she had no heart for food. In her bright sitting-room, with the shades tightly drawn, an inexpressible loneliness assailed her. A large engraving of a picture of a sentimental school hung on the wall: she could not bear to look at it, and yet her eyes, from time to time, were fatally drawn thither. It was of a young girl taking leave of her lover, in early Christian



times, before entering the arena. It haunted Honora, and wrought upon her imagination to such a pitch that she went into her bedroom to write.

For a long time nothing more was written of the letter than “Dear Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary”: what to say to them?



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“I do not know what you will think of me. I do not know, to-night, what to think of myself. I have left Howard. It is not because he was cruel to me, or untrue. He does not love me, nor I him. I cannot expect you, who have known the happiness of marriage, to realize the tortures of it without love. My pain in telling you this now is all the greater because I realize your belief as to the sacredness of the tie—and it is not your fault that you did not instil that belief into me. I have had to live and to think and to suffer for myself. I do not attempt to account for my action, and I hesitate to lay the blame upon the modern conditions and atmosphere in which I lived; for I feel that, above all things, I must be honest with myself.” My marriage with Howard was a frightful mistake, and I have grown slowly to realize it, until life with him became insupportable. Since he does not love me, since his one interest is his business, my departure makes no great difference to him.

“Dear Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom, I realize that I owe you much—everything that I am. I do not expect you to understand or to condone what I have done. I only beg that you will continue to—love your niece,

“*Honora.*”

She tried to review this letter. Incoherent though it were and incomplete, in her present state of mind she was able to add but a few words as a postscript. “I will write you my plans in a day or two, when I see my way more clearly. I would fly to you—but I cannot. I am going to get a divorce.”

She sat for a time picturing the scene in the sitting-room when they should read it, and a longing which was almost irresistible seized her to go back to that shelter. One force alone held her in misery where she was,—her love for Chiltern; it drew her on to suffer the horrors of exile and publicity. When she suffered most, his image rose before her, and she kissed the ring on her hand. Where was he now, on this rainy night? On the seas?

At the thought she heard again the fog-horns and the sirens.

Her sleep was fitful. Many times she went over again her talk with Howard, and she surprised herself by wondering what he had thought and felt since her departure. And ever and anon she was startled out of chimerical dreams by the clamour of bells—the trolley cars on their ceaseless round passing below. At last came the slumber of exhaustion.

It was nine o'clock when she awoke and faced the distasteful task she had set herself for the day. In her predicament she descended to the office, where the face of one of the clerks attracted her, and she waited until he was unoccupied.



“I should like you to tell me—the name of some reputable lawyer,” she said.

“Certainly, Mrs. Spence,” he replied, and Honora was startled at the sound of her name. She might have realized that he would know her. “I suppose a young lawyer would do—if the matter is not very important.”



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“Oh, no!” she cried, blushing to her temples. “A young lawyer would do very well.”

The clerk reflected. He glanced at Honora again; and later in the day she divined what had been going on in his mind.

“Well,” he said, “there are a great many. I happen to think of Mr. Wentworth, because he was in the hotel this morning. He is in the Tremont Building.”

She thanked him hurriedly, and was driven to the Tremont Building, through the soggy street that faced the still dripping trees of the Common. Mounting in the elevator, she read on the glass door amongst the names of the four members of the firm that of Alden Wentworth, and suddenly found herself face to face with the young man, in his private office. He was well groomed and deeply tanned, and he rose to meet her with a smile that revealed a line of perfect white teeth.

“How do you do, Mrs. Spence?” he said. “I did not think, when I met you at Mrs. Grenfell’s, that I should see you so soon in Boston. Won’t you sit down?”

Honora sat down. There seemed nothing else to do. She remembered him perfectly now, and she realized that the nimble-witted clerk had meant to send her to a gentleman.

“I thought,” she faltered, “I thought I was coming to a—a stranger. They gave me your address at the hotel—when I asked for a lawyer.”

“Perhaps,” suggested Mr. Wentworth, delicately, “perhaps you would prefer to go to some one else. I can give you any number of addresses, if you like.”

She looked up at him gratefully. He seemed very human and understanding, —very honourable. He belonged to her generation, after all, and she feared an older man.

“If you will be kind enough to listen to me, I think I will stay here. It is only a matter of—of knowledge of the law.” She looked at him again, and the pathos of her smile went straight to his heart. For Mr. Wentworth possessed that organ, although he did not wear it on his sleeve.

He crossed the room, closed the door, and sat down beside her.

“Anything I can do,” he said.

She glanced at him once more, helplessly.

“I do not know how to tell you,” she began. “It all seems so dreadful.” She paused, but he had the lawyer’s gift of silence—of sympathetic silence. “I want to get a divorce from my husband.”



If Mr. Wentworth was surprised, he concealed it admirably. His attitude of sympathy did not change, but he managed to ask her, in a business-like tone which she welcomed:—"On what grounds?"

"I was going to ask you that question," said Honora.

This time Mr. Wentworth was surprised—genuinely so, and he showed it.

"But, my dear Mrs. Spence," he protested, "you must remember that—that I know nothing of the case."

"What are the grounds one can get divorced on?" she asked.

He coloured a little under his tan.

"They are different in different states," he replied. "I think—perhaps—the best way would be to read you the Massachusetts statutes."



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“No—wait a moment,” she said. “It’s very simple, after all, what I have to tell you. I don’t love my husband, and he doesn’t love me, and it has become torture to live together. I have left him with his knowledge and consent, and he understands that I will get a divorce.”

Mr. Wentworth appeared to be pondering—perhaps not wholly on the legal aspects of the case thus naively presented. Whatever may have been his private comments, they were hidden. He pronounced tentatively, and a little absently, the word “desertion.”

“If the case could possibly be construed as desertion on your husband’s part, you could probably get a divorce in three years in Massachusetts.”

“Three years!” cried Honora, appalled. “I could never wait three years!”

She did not remark the young lawyer’s smile, which revealed a greater knowledge of the world than one would have suspected. He said nothing, however.

“Three years!” she repeated. “Why, it can’t be, Mr. Wentworth. There are the Waterfords—she was Mrs. Boutwell, you remember. And—and Mrs. Rindge—it was scarcely a year before—”

He had the grace to nod gravely, and to pretend not to notice the confusion in which she halted. Lawyers, even young ones with white teeth and clear eyes, are apt to be a little cynical. He had doubtless seen from the beginning that there was a man in the background. It was not his business to comment or to preach.

“Some of the western states grant divorces on—on much easier terms,” he said politely. “If you care to wait, I will go into our library and look up the laws of those states.”

“I wish you would,” answered Honora. “I don’t think I could bear to spend three years in such—in such an anomalous condition. And at any rate I should much rather go West, out of sight, and have it all as quickly over with as possible.”

He bowed, and departed on his quest. And Honora waited, at moments growing hot at the recollection of her conversation with him. Why—she asked herself should the law make it so difficult, and subject her to such humiliation in a course which she felt to be right and natural and noble? Finally, her thoughts becoming too painful, she got up and looked out of the window. And far below her, through the mist, she beheld the burying-ground of Boston’s illustrious dead which her cabman had pointed out to her as he passed. She did not hear the door open as Mr. Wentworth returned, and she started at the sound of his voice.

“I take it for granted that you are really serious in this matter, Mrs. Spence,” he said.



“Oh!” she exclaimed.

“And that you have thoroughly reflected,” he continued imperturbably. Evidently, in spite of the cold impartiality of the law, a New England conscience had assailed him in the library. “I cannot take er—the responsibility of advising you as to a course of action. You have asked me the laws of certain western states as to divorce I will read them.”



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An office boy followed him, deposited several volumes on the table, and Mr. Wentworth read from them in a voice magnificently judicial.

"There's not much choice, is there?" she faltered, when he had finished.

He smiled.

"As places of residence—" he began, in an attempt to relieve the pathos.

"Oh, I didn't mean that," she cried. "Exile is—is exile." She flushed. After a few moments of hesitation she named at random a state the laws of which required a six months' residence. She contemplated him. "I hardly dare to ask you to give me the name of some reputable lawyer out there."

He had looked for an instant into her eyes. Men of the law are not invulnerable, particularly at Mr. Wentworth's age, and New England consciences to the contrary notwithstanding. In spite of himself, her eyes had made him a partisan: an accomplice, he told himself afterwards.

"Really, Mrs. Spence," he began, and caught another appealing look. He remembered the husband now, and a lecture on finance in the Grenfell smoking room which Howard Spence had delivered, and which had grated on Boston sensibility. "It is only right to tell you that our firm does not—does not—take divorce cases—as a rule. Not that we are taking this one," he added hurriedly. "But as a friend—"

"Oh, thank you!" said Honora.

"Merely as a friend who would be glad to do you a service," he continued, "I will, during the day, try to get you the name of—of as reputable a lawyer as possible in that place."

And Mr. Wentworth paused, as red as though he had asked her to marry him.

"How good of you!" she cried. "I shall be at the Touraine until this evening."

He escorted her through the corridor, bowed her into the elevator, and her spirits had risen perceptibly as she got into her cab and returned to the hotel. There, she studied railroad folders. One confidant was enough, and she dared not even ask the head porter the way to a locality where—it was well known—divorces were sold across a counter. And as she worked over the intricacies of this problem the word her husband had applied to her action recurred to her—precipitate. No doubt Mr. Wentworth, too, had thought her precipitate. Nearly every important act of her life had been precipitate. But she was conscious in this instance of no regret. Delay, she felt, would have killed her. Let her exile begin at once.



She had scarcely finished luncheon when Mr. Wentworth was announced. For reasons best known to himself he had come in person; and he handed her, written on a card, the name of the Honourable David Beckwith.

“I’ll have to confess I don’t know much about him, Mrs. Spence,” he said, “except that he has been in Congress, and is one of the prominent lawyers of that state.”

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The gift of enlisting sympathy and assistance was peculiarly Honora's. And if some one had predicted that morning to Mr. Wentworth that before nightfall he would not only have put a lady in distress on the highroad to obtaining a western divorce (which he had hitherto looked upon as disgraceful), but that likewise he would miss his train for Pride's Crossing, buy the lady's tickets, and see her off at the South Station for Chicago, he would have regarded the prophet as a lunatic. But that is precisely what Mr. Wentworth did. And when, as her train pulled out, Honora bade him goodby, she felt the tug at her heartstrings which comes at parting with an old friend.

"And anything I can do for you here in the East, while—while you are out there, be sure to let me know," he said.

She promised and waved at him from the platform as he stood motionless, staring after her. Romance had spent a whole day in Boston! And with Mr. Alden Wentworth, of all people!

Fortunately for the sanity of the human race, the tension of grief is variable. Honora, closed in her stateroom, eased herself that night by writing a long, if somewhat undecipherable, letter to Chiltern; and was able, the next day, to read the greater portion of a novel. It was only when she arrived in Chicago, after nightfall, that loneliness again assailed her. She was within nine hours—so the timetable said—of St. Louis! Of all her trials, the homesickness which she experienced as she drove through the deserted streets of the metropolis of the Middle West was perhaps the worst. A great city on Sunday night! What traveller has not felt the depressing effect of it? And, so far as the incoming traveller is concerned, Chicago does not put her best foot forward. The way from the station to the Auditorium Hotel was hacked and bruised—so it seemed—by the cruel battle of trade. And she stared, in a kind of fascination that increased the ache in her heart; at the ugliness and cruelty of the twentieth century.

To have imagination is unquestionably to possess a great capacity for suffering, and Honora was paying the penalty for hers. It ran riot now. The huge buildings towered like formless monsters against the blackness of the sky under the sickly blue of the electric lights, across the dirty, foot-scarred pavements, strange black human figures seemed to wander aimlessly: an elevated train thundered overhead. And presently she found herself the tenant of two rooms in that vast refuge of the homeless, the modern hotel, where she sat until the small hours looking down upon the myriad lights of the shore front, and out beyond them on the black waters of an inland sea.

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From Newport to Salomon City, in a state not far from the Pacific tier, is something of a transition in less than a week, though in modern life we should be surprised at nothing.



Limited trains are wonderful enough; but what shall be said of the modern mind, that travels faster than light? and much too fast for the pages of a chronicle. Martha Washington and the good ladies of her acquaintance knew nothing about the upper waters of the Missouri, and the words "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer" were not merely literature to them.



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'Nous avons change tout cela', although there are yet certain crudities to be eliminated. In these enlightened times, if in one week a lady is not entirely at home with husband number one, in the next week she may have travelled in comparative comfort some two-thirds across a continent, and be on the highroad to husband number two. Why travel? Why have to put up with all this useless expense and worry and waste of time? Why not have one's divorce sent, C.O.D., to one's door, or establish a new branch of the Post-office Department? American enterprise has surely lagged in this.

Seated in a plush-covered rocking-chair that rocked on a track of its own, and thus saved the yellow-and-red hotel carpet, the Honourable Dave Beckwith patiently explained the vexatious process demanded by his particular sovereign state before she should consent to cut the Gordian knot of marriage. And his state—the Honourable Dave remarked—was in the very forefront of enlightenment in this respect: practically all that she demanded was that ladies in Mrs. Spence's predicament should become, pro tempore, her citizens. Married misery did not exist in the Honourable Dave's state, amongst her own bona fide citizens. And, by a wise provision in the Constitution of our glorious American Union, no one state could tie the nuptial knot so tight that another state could not cut it at a blow.

Six months' residence, and a whole year before the divorce could be granted! Honora looked at the plush rocking-chair, the yellow-and-red carpet, the inevitable ice-water on the marble-topped table, and the picture of a lady the shape of a liqueur bottle playing tennis in the late eighties, and sighed. For one who is sensitive to surroundings, that room was a torture chamber.

"But Mr. Beckwith," she exclaimed, "I never could spend a year here! Isn't there a—house I could get that is a—a little—a little better furnished? And then there is a certain publicity about staying at a hotel."

The Honourable Dave might have been justly called the friend of ladies in a temporary condition of loneliness. His mission in life was not merely that of a liberator, but his natural goodness led him to perform a hundred acts of kindness to make as comfortable as possible the purgatory of the unfortunates under his charge. He was a man of a remarkable appearance, and not to be lightly forgotten. His hair, above all, fascinated Honora, and she found her eyes continually returning to it. So incredibly short it was, and so incredibly stiff, that it reminded her of the needle points on the cylinder of an old-fashioned music-box; and she wondered, if it were properly inserted, what would be the resultant melody.

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The Honourable Dave's head was like a cannon-ball painted white. Across the top of it (a blemish that would undoubtedly have spoiled the tune) was a long scar,—a relic of one of the gentleman's many personal difficulties. He who made the sear, Honora reflected, must have been a strong man. The Honourable Dave, indeed, had fought his way upward through life to the Congress of the United States; and many were the harrowing tales of frontier life he told Honora in the long winter evenings when the blizzards came down the river valley. They would fill a book; unfortunately, not this book. The growing responsibilities of taking care of the lonely ladies that came in increasing numbers to Salomon City from the effeter portions of the continent had at length compelled him to give up his congressional career. The Honourable Dave was unmarried; and, he told Honora, not likely to become so. He was thus at once human and invulnerable, a high priest dedicated to freedom.

It is needless to say that the plush rocking-chair and the picture of the liqueur-bottle lady did not jar on his sensibilities. Like an eminent physician who has never himself experienced neurosis, the Honourable Dave firmly believed that he understood the trouble from which his client was suffering. He had seen many cases of it in ladies from the Atlantic coast: the first had surprised him, no doubt. Salomon City, though it contained the great Boon, was not esthetic. Being a keen student of human nature, he rightly supposed that she would not care to join the colony, but he thought it his duty to mention that there was a colony.

Honora repeated the word.

"Out there," he said, waving his cigar to the westward, "some of the ladies have ranches." Some of the gentlemen, too, he added, for it appeared that exiles were not confined to one sex. "It's social—a little too social, I guess," declared Mr. Beckwith, "for you." A delicate compliment of differentiation that Honora accepted gravely. "They've got a casino, and they burn a good deal of electricity first and last. They don't bother Salomon City much. Once in a while, in the winter, they come in a bunch to the theatre. Soon as I looked at you I knew you wouldn't want to go there."

Her exclamation was sufficiently eloquent.

"I've got just the thing for you," he said. "It looks a little as if I was reaching out into the sanitarium business. Are you acquainted by any chance with Mrs. Boutwell, who married a fellow named Waterford?" he asked, taking momentarily out of his mouth the cigar he was smoking by permission.

Honora confessed, with no great enthusiasm, that she knew the present Mrs. Waterford. Not the least of her tribulations had been to listen to a partial recapitulation, by the Honourable Dave, of the ladies he had assisted to a transfer of husbands. What, indeed, had these ladies to do with her? She felt that the very mention of them tended to soil the pure garments of her martyrdom.



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“What I was going to say was this,” the Honourable Dave continued. “Mrs. Boutwell—that is to say Mrs. Waterford—couldn’t stand this hotel any more than you, and she felt like you do about the colony, so she rented a little house up on Wylie Street and furnished it from the East. I took the furniture off her hands: it’s still in the house, by the way, which hasn’t been rented. For I figured it out that another lady would be coming along with the same notions. Now you can look at the house any time you like.”

Although she had to overcome the distaste of its antecedents, the house, or rather the furniture, was too much of a find in Salomon City to be resisted. It had but six rooms, and was of wood, and painted grey, like its twin beside it. But Mrs. Waterford had removed the stained-glass window-lights in the front door, deftly hidden the highly ornamental steam radiators, and made other eliminations and improvements, including the white bookshelves that still contained the lady’s winter reading fifty or more yellow-and-green-backed French novels and plays. Honora’s first care, after taking possession, was to order her maid to remove these from her sight: but it is to be feared that they found their way, directly, to Mathilde’s room. Honora would have liked to fumigate the house; and yet, at the same time, she thanked her stars for it. Mr. Beekwith obligingly found her a cook, and on Thursday evening she sat down to supper in her tiny dining room. She had found a temporary haven, at last.

Suddenly she remembered that it was an anniversary. One week ago that day, in the old garden at Beaulieu, had occurred the momentous event that had changed the current of her life!

CHAPTER IX

WYLIE STREET

There was a little spindle-supported porch before Honora’s front door, and had she chosen she might have followed the example of her neighbours and sat there in the evenings. She preferred to watch the life about her from the window-seat in the little parlour. The word exile suggests, perhaps, to those who have never tried it, empty wastes, isolation, loneliness. She had been prepared for these things, and Wylie Street was a shock to her: in sending her there at this crisis in her life fate had perpetrated nothing less than a huge practical joke. Next door, for instance, in the twin house to hers, flaunted in the face of liberal divorce laws, was a young couple with five children. Honora counted them, from the eldest ones that ran over her little grass plot on their way to and from the public school, to the youngest that spent much of his time gazing skyward from a perambulator on the sidewalk. Six days of the week, about six o’clock in the evening, there was a celebration in the family. Father came home from work! He was a smooth-faced young man whom a fortnight in the woods might have helped wonderfully—a clerk in the big department store.

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He radiated happiness. When opposite Honora's front door he would open his arms—the signal for a race across her lawn. Sometimes it was the little girl, with pigtails the colour of pulled molasses candy, who won the prize of the first kiss: again it was her brother, a year her junior; and when he was raised it was seen that the seat of his trousers was obviously double. But each of the five received a reward, and the baby was invariably lifted out of the perambulator. And finally there was a conjugal kiss on the spindled porch.

The wife was a roly-poly little body. In the mornings, at the side windows, Honora heard her singing as she worked, and sometimes the sun struck with a blinding flash the pan she was in the act of shining. And one day she looked up and nodded and smiled. Strange indeed was the effect upon our heroine of that greeting! It amazed Honora herself. A strange current ran through her and left her hot, and even as she smiled and nodded back, unbidden tears rose scalding to her eyes. What was it? Why was it?

She went downstairs to the little bookcase, filled now with volumes that were not trash. For Hugh's sake, she would try to improve herself this winter by reading serious things. But between her eyes and the book was the little woman's smile. A month before, at Newport, how little she would have valued it.

One morning, as Honora was starting out for her lonely walk—that usually led her to the bare clay banks of the great river—she ran across her neighbour on the sidewalk. The little woman was settling the baby for his airing, and she gave Honora the same dazzling smile.

“Good morning, Mrs. Spence,” she said.

“Good morning,” replied Honora, and in her strange confusion she leaned over the carriage. “Oh, what a beautiful baby!”

“Isn't he!” cried the little woman. “Of all of 'em, I think he's the prize. His father says so. I guess,” she added, “I guess it was because I didn't know so much about 'em when they first began to come. You take my word for it, the best way is to leave 'em alone. Don't dandle 'em. It's hard to keep your hands off 'em, but it's right.”

“I'm sure of it,” said Honora, who was very red.

They made a strange contrast as they stood on that new street, with its new vitrified brick paving and white stone curbs, and new little trees set out in front of new little houses: Mrs. Mayo (for such, Honora's cook had informed her, was her name) in a housekeeper's apron and a shirtwaist, and Honora, almost a head taller, in a walking costume of dark grey that would have done justice to Fifth Avenue. The admiration in the little woman's eyes was undisguised.



“You’re getting a bill, I hear,” she said, after a moment.

“A bill?” repeated Honora.

“A bill of divorce,” explained Mrs. Mayo.

Honora was conscious of conflicting emotions: astonishment, resentment, and—most curiously—of relief that the little woman knew it.



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“Yes,” she answered.

But Mrs. Mayo did not appear to notice or resent her brevity.

“I took a fancy to you the minute I saw you,” she said. “I can’t say as much for the other Easterner that was here last year. But I made up my mind that it must be a mighty mean man who would treat you badly.”

Honora stood as though rooted to the pavement. She found a reply impossible.

“When I think of my luck,” her neighbour continued, “I’m almost ashamed. We were married on fifteen dollars a week. Of course there have been trials, we must always expect that; and we’ve had to work hard, but—it hasn’t hurt us.” She paused and looked up at Honora, and added contritely: “There! I shouldn’t have said anything. It’s mean of me to talk of my happiness. I’ll drop in some afternoon—if you’ll let me —when I get through my work,” said the little woman.

“I wish you would,” replied Honora.

She had much to think of on her walk that morning, and new resolutions to make. Here was happiness growing and thriving, so far as she could see, without any of that rarer nourishment she had once thought so necessary. And she had come two thousand miles to behold it.

She walked many miles, as a part of the regimen and discipline to which she had set herself. Her haunting horror in this place, as she thought of the colony of which Mr. Beckwith had spoken and of Mrs. Boutwell’s row of French novels, was degeneration. She was resolved to return to Chiltern a better and a wiser and a truer woman, unstained by the ordeal. At the outskirts of the town she halted by the river’s bank, breathing deeply of the pure air of the vast plains that surrounded her.

She was seated that afternoon at her desk in the sitting-room upstairs when she heard the tinkle of the door-bell, and remembered her neighbour’s promise to call. With something of a pang she pushed back her chair. Since the episode of the morning, the friendship of the little woman had grown to have a definite value; for it was no small thing, in Honora’s situation, to feel the presence of a warm heart next door. All day she had been thinking of Mrs. Mayo and her strange happiness, and longing to talk with her again, and dreading it. And while she was bracing herself for the trial Mathilde entered with a card.

“Tell Mrs. Mayo I shall be down in a minute,” she said.

It was not a lady, Mathilde replied, but a monsieur.



Honora took the card. For a long time she sat staring at it, while Mathilde waited. It read:

Mr. Peter Erwin.

“Madame will see monsieur?”

A great sculptor once said to the statesman who was to be his model: “Wear your old coat. There is as much of a man in the back of his old coat, I think, as there is in his face.” As Honora halted on the threshold, Peter was standing looking out of the five-foot plate-glass window, and his back was to her.



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She was suddenly stricken. Not since she had been a child, not even in the weeks just passed, had she felt that pain. And as a child, self-pity seized her—as a lost child, when darkness is setting in, and the will fails and distance appalls. Scalding tears welled into her eyes as she seized the frame of the door, but it must have been her breathing that he heard. He turned and crossed the room to her as she had known he would, and she clung to him as she had so often done in days gone by when, hurt and bruised, he had rescued and soothed her. For the moment, the delusion that his power was still limitless prevailed, and her faith whole again, so many times had he mended a world all awry.

He led her to the window-seat and gently disengaged her hands from his shoulders and took one of them and held it between his own. He did not speak, for his was a rare intuition; and gradually her hand ceased to tremble, and the uncontrollable sobs that shook her became less frequent.

“Why did you come? Why did you come?” she cried.

“To see you, Honora.”

“But you might have—warned me.”

“Yes,” he said, “it’s true, I might.”

She drew her hand away, and gazed steadfastly at his face.

“Why aren’t you angry?” she said. “You don’t believe in what I have done—you don’t sympathize with it—you don’t understand it.”

“I have come here to try,” he said.

She shook her head.

“You can’t—you can’t—you never could.”

“Perhaps,” he answered, “it may not be so difficult as you think.”

Grown calmer, she considered this. What did he mean by it? to imply a knowledge of herself?

“It will be useless,” she said inconsequently.

“No,” he said, “it will not be useless.”

She considered this also, and took the broader meaning that such acts are not wasted.



“What do you intend to try to do?” she asked.

He smiled a little.

“To listen to as much as you care to tell me, Honora.”

She looked at him again, and an errant thought slipped in between her larger anxieties. Wherever he went, how extraordinarily he seemed to harmonize with his surroundings. At Silverdale, and in the drawing-room of the New York house, and in the little parlour in this far western town. What was it? His permanence? Was it his power? She felt that, but it was a strange kind of power—not like other men’s. She felt, as she sat there beside him, that his was a power more difficult to combat. That to defeat it was at once to make it stronger, and to grow weaker. She summoned her pride, she summoned her wrongs: she summoned the ego which had winged its triumphant flight far above his kindly, disapproving eye. He had the ability to make her taste defeat in the very hour of victory. And she knew that, when she fell, he would be there in his strength to lift her up.

“Did—did they tell you to come?” she asked.



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“There was no question of that, Honora. I was away when—when they learned you were here. As soon as I returned, I came.”

“Tell me how they feel,” she said, in a low voice.

“They think only of you. And the thought that you are unhappy overshadows all others. They believe that it is to them you should have come, if you were in trouble instead of coming here.”

“How could I?” she cried. “How can you ask? That is what makes it so hard, that I cannot be with them now. But I should only have made them still more unhappy, if I had gone. They would not have understood—they cannot understand who have every reason to believe in marriage, why those to whom it has been a mockery and a torture should be driven to divorce.”

“Why divorce?” he said.

“Do you mean—do you mean that you wish me to give you the reasons why I felt justified in leaving my husband?”

“Not unless you care to,” he replied. “I have no right to demand them. I only ask you to remember, Honora, that you have not explained these reasons very clearly in your letters to your aunt and uncle. They do not understand them. Your uncle was unable, on many accounts, to come here; and he thought that—that as an old friend, you might be willing to talk to me.”

“I can’t live with—with my husband,” she cried. “I don’t love him, and he doesn’t love me. He doesn’t know what love is.”

Peter Erwin glanced at her, but she was too absorbed then to see the thing in his eyes. He made no comment.

“We haven’t the same tastes, nor—nor the same way of looking at things—the same views about making money—for instance. We became absolute strangers. What more is there to say?” she added, a little defiantly.

“Your husband committed no—flagrant offence against you?” he inquired.

“That would have made him human, at least,” she cried. “It would have proved that he could feel—something. No, all he cares for in the world is to make money, and he doesn’t care how he makes it. No woman with an atom of soul can live with a man like that.”

If Peter Erwin deemed this statement a trifle revolutionary, he did not say so.



“So you just—left him,” he said.

“Yes,” said Honora. “He didn’t care. He was rather relieved than otherwise. If I had lived with him till I died, I couldn’t have made him happy.”

“You tried, and failed,” said Peter.

She flushed.

“I couldn’t have made him happier,” she declared, correcting herself. “He has no conception of what real happiness is. He thinks he is happy,-he doesn’t need me. He’ll be much more—contented without me. I have nothing against him. I was to blame for marrying him, I know. But I have only one life to live, and I can’t throw it away, Peter, I can’t. And I can’t believe that a woman and a man were intended to live together without love. It is too horrible. Surely that isn’t your idea of marriage!”



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“My idea of marriage isn’t worth very much, I’m afraid,” he said. “If I talked about it, I should have to confine myself to theories and—and dreams.”

“The moment I saw your card, Peter, I knew why you had come here,” she said, trying to steady her voice. “It was to induce me to go back to my husband. You don’t know how it hurts me to give you pain. I love you—I love you as I love Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary. You are a part of me. But oh, you can’t understand! I knew you could not. You have never made any mistakes—you have never lived. It is useless. I won’t go back to him. If you stayed here for weeks you could not make me change my mind.”

He was silent.

“You think that I could have prevented—this, if I had been less selfish,” she said.

“Where you are concerned, Honora, I have but one desire,” he answered, “and that is to see you happy—in the best sense of the term. If I could induce you to go back and give your husband another trial, I should return with a lighter heart. You ask me whether I think you have been selfish. I answer frankly that I think you have. I don’t pretend to say your husband has not been selfish also. Neither of you have ever tried, apparently, to make your marriage a success. It can’t be done without an honest effort. You have abandoned the most serious and sacred enterprise in the world as lightly as though it had been a piece of embroidery. All that I can gather from your remarks is that you have left your husband because you have grown tired of him.”

“Yes,” said Honora, “and you can never realize how tired, unless you knew him as I did. When love dies, it turns into hate.”

He rose, and walked to the other end of the room, and turned.

“Could you be induced,” he said, “for the sake of your aunt and uncle, if not for your own, to consider a legal separation?”

For an instant she stared at him hopelessly, and then she buried her face in her hands.

“No,” she cried. “No, I couldn’t. You don’t know what you ask.”

He went to her, and laid his hand lightly on her shoulder.

“I think I do,” he said.

There was a moment’s tense silence, and then she got to her feet and looked at him proudly.

“Yes,” she cried, “it is true. And I am not ashamed of it. I have discovered what love is, and what life is, and I am going to take them while I can.”



She saw the blood slowly leave his face, and his hands tighten. It was not until then that she guessed at the depth of his wound, and knew that it was unhealed. For him had been reserved this supreme irony, that he should come here to plead for her husband and learn from her own lips that she loved another man. She was suddenly filled with awe, though he turned away from her that she might not see his face: And she sought in vain for words. She touched his hand, fearfully, and now it was he who trembled.



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“Peter,” she exclaimed, “why do you bother with me? I—I am what I am. I can’t help it. I was made so. I cannot tell you that I am sorry for what I have done—for what I am going to do. I will not lie to you—and you forced me to speak. I know that you don’t understand, and that I caused you pain, and that I shall cause—their pain. It may be selfishness—I don’t know. God alone knows. Whatever it is, it is stronger than I. It is what I am. Though I were to be thrown into eternal fire I would not renounce it.”

She looked at him again, and her breath caught. While she had been speaking, he had changed. There was a fire in his eyes she had never seen before, in all the years she had known him.

“Honora,” he said quietly, “the man who has done this is a scoundrel.”

She stared at him, doubting her senses, her pupils wide with terror.

“How dare you, Peter! How dare you!” she cried.

“I dare to speak the truth,” he said, and crossed the room to where his hat was lying and picked it up. She watched him as in a trance. Then he came back to her.

“Some day, perhaps, you will forgive me for saying that, Honora. I hope that day will come, although I shall never regret having said it. I have caused you pain. Sometimes, it seems, pain is unavoidable. I hope you will remember that, with the exception of your aunt and uncle, you have no better friend than I. Nothing can alter that friendship, wherever you go, whatever you do. Goodby.”

He caught her hand, held it for a moment in his own, and the door had closed before she realized that he had gone. For a few moments she stood motionless where he had left her, and then she went slowly up the stairs to her own room

CHAPTER X

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

Had he, Hugh Chiltern, been anathematized from all the high pulpits of the world, Honora’s belief in him could not have been shaken. Ivanhoe and the Knights of the Round Table to the contrary, there is no chivalry so exalted as that of a woman who loves, no courage higher, no endurance greater. Her knowledge is complete; and hers the supreme faith that is unmoved by calumny and unbelief. She alone knows. The old Chiltern did not belong to her: hers was the new man sprung undefiled from the sacred fire of their love; and in that fire she, too, had been born again. Peter—even Peter had no power to share such a faith, though what he had said of Chiltern had wounded her—wounded her because Peter, of all others, should misjudge and condemn him. Sometimes she drew consolation from the thought that Peter had never seen him. But



she knew he could not understand him, or her, or what they had passed through: that kind of understanding comes alone through experience.

In the long days that followed she thought much about Peter, and failed to comprehend her feelings towards him. She told herself that she ought to hate him for what he had so cruelly said, and at times indeed her resentment was akin to hatred: again, his face rose before her as she had seen it when he had left her, and she was swept by an incomprehensible wave of tenderness and reverence. And yet—paradox of paradoxes—Chiltern possessed her!



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On the days when his letters came it was as his emissary that the sun shone to give her light in darkness, and she went about the house with a song on her lips. They were filled, these letters, with an elixir of which she drank thirstily to behold visions, and the weariness of her exile fell away. The elixir of High Purpose. Never was love on such a plane! He lifting her,—no marvel in this; and she—by a magic power of levitation at which she never ceased to wonder—sustaining him. By her aid he would make something of himself which would be worthy of her. At last he had the incentive to enable him to take his place in the world. He pictured their future life at Grenoble until her heart was strained with yearning for it to begin. Here would be duty,—let him who would gainsay it, duty and love combined with a wondrous happiness. He at a man's labour, she at a woman's; labour not for themselves alone, but for others. A paradise such as never was heard of—a God-fearing paradise, and the reward of courage.

He told her he could not go to Grenoble now and begin the life without her. Until that blessed time he would remain a wanderer, avoiding the haunts of men. First he had cruised in the 'Folly, and then camped and shot in Canada; and again, as winter drew on apace, had chartered another yacht, a larger one, and sailed away for the West Indies, whence the letters came, stamped in strange ports, and sometimes as many as five together. He, too, was in exile until his regeneration should begin.

Well he might be at such a time. One bright day in early winter Honora, returning from her walk across the bleak plains in the hope of letters, found newspapers and periodicals instead, addressed in an unknown hand. It matters not whose hand: Honora never sought to know. She had long regarded as inevitable this acutest phase of her martyrdom, and the long nights of tears when entire paragraphs of the loathed stuff she had burned ran ceaselessly in her mind. Would she had burned it before reading it! An insensate curiosity had seized her, and she had read and read again until it was beyond the reach of fire.

Save for its effect upon Honora, it is immaterial to this chronicle. It was merely the heaviest of her heavy payments for liberty. But what, she asked herself shamefully, would be its effect upon Chiltern? Her face burned that she should doubt his loyalty and love; and yet—the question returned. There had been a sketch of Howard, dwelling upon the prominence into which he had sprung through his connection with Mr. Wing. There had been a sketch of her; and how she had taken what the writer was pleased to call Society by storm: it had been intimated, with a cruelty known only to writers of such paragraphs, that ambition to marry a Chiltern had been her motive! There had been a sketch of Chiltern's career, in carefully veiled but thoroughly comprehensible language, which might have made a Bluebeard shudder. This, of course, she bore best of all; or, let it be said rather, that it cost her the least suffering. Was it not she who had changed and redeemed him?



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What tortured her most was the intimation that Chiltern's family connections were bringing pressure to bear upon him to save him from this supremest of all his follies. And when she thought of this the strange eyes and baffling expression of Mrs. Grainger rose before her. Was it true? And if true, would Chiltern resist, even as she, Honora, had resisted, loyally? Might this love for her not be another of his mad caprices?

How Honora hated herself for the thought that thus insistently returned at this period of snows and blasts! It was January. Had he seen the newspapers? He had not, for he was cruising: he had, for of course they had been sent him. And he must have received, from his relatives, protesting letters. A fortnight passed, and her mail contained nothing from him! Perhaps something had happened to his yacht! Visions of shipwreck cause her to scan the newspapers for storms at sea,—but the shipwreck that haunted her most was that of her happiness. How easy it is to doubt in exile, with happiness so far away! One morning, when the wind dashed the snow against her windows, she found it impossible to rise.

If the big doctor suspected the cause of her illness, Mathilde knew it. The maid tended her day and night, and sought, with the tact of her nation, to console and reassure her. The little woman next door came and sat by her bedside. Cruel and infinitely happy little woman, filled with compassion, who brought delicacies in the making of which she had spent precious hours, and which Honora could not eat! The Lord, when he had made Mrs. Mayo, had mercifully withheld the gift of imagination. One topic filled her, she lived to one end: her Alpha and Omega were husband and children, and she talked continually of their goodness and badness, of their illnesses, of their health, of their likes and dislikes, of their accomplishments and defects, until one day a surprising thing happened. Surprising for Mrs. Mayo.

"Oh, don't!" cried Honora, suddenly. "Oh, don't! I can't bear it."

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Mayo, frightened out of her wits. "A turn? Shall I telephone for the doctor?"

"No," replied Honora, "but—but I can't talk any more—to-day."

She apologized on the morrow, as she held Mrs. Mayo's hand. "It—it was your happiness," she said; "I was unstrung. I couldn't listen to it. Forgive me."

The little woman burst into tears, and kissed her as she sat in bed.

"Forgive you, deary!" she cried. "I never thought."

"It has been so easy for you," Honora faltered.

"Yes, it has. I ought to thank God, and I do—every night."



She looked long and earnestly, through her tears, at the young lady from the far away East as she lay against the lace pillows, her paleness enhanced by the pink gown, her dark hair in two great braids on her shoulders.

“And to think how pretty you are!” she exclaimed.



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It was thus she expressed her opinion of mankind in general, outside of her own family circle. Once she had passionately desired beauty, the high school and the story of Helen of Troy notwithstanding. Now she began to look at it askance, as a fatal gift; and to pity, rather than envy, its possessors.

As a by-industry, Mrs. Mayo raised geraniums and carnations in her front cellar, near the furnace, and once in a while Peggy, with the pulled-molasses hair, or chubby Abraham Lincoln, would come puffing up Honora's stairs under the weight of a flower-pot and deposit it triumphantly on the table at Honora's bedside. Abraham Lincoln did not object to being kissed: he had, at least, grown to accept the process as one of the unaccountable mysteries of life. But something happened to him one afternoon, on the occasion of his giving proof of an intellect which may eventually bring him, in the footsteps of his great namesake, to the White House. Entering Honora's front door, he saw on the hall table a number of letters which the cook (not gifted with his brains) had left there. He seized them in one fat hand, while with the other he hugged the flower-pot to his breast, mounted the steps, and arrived, breathless but radiant, on the threshold of the beautiful lady's room, and there calamity overtook him in the shape of one of the thousand articles which are left on the floor purposely to trip up little boys.

Great was the disaster. Letters, geranium, pieces of flower-pot, a quantity of black earth, and a howling Abraham Lincoln bestrewed the floor. And similar episodes, in his brief experience with this world, had not brought rewards. It was from sheer amazement that his tears ceased to flow—amazement and lack of breath—for the beautiful lady sprang up and seized him in her arms, and called Mathilde, who eventually brought a white and gold box. And while Abraham sat consuming its contents in ecstasy he suddenly realized that the beautiful lady had forgotten him. She had picked up the letters, every one, and stood reading them with parted lips and staring eyes.

It was Mathilde who saved him from a violent illness, closing the box and leading him downstairs, and whispered something incomprehensible in his ear as she pointed him homeward.

“Le vrai medecin—c'est toi, mon mignon.”

There was a reason why Chiltern's letters had not arrived, and great were Honora's self-reproach and penitence. With a party of Englishmen he had gone up into the interior of a Central American country to visit some famous ruins. He sent her photographs of them, and of the Englishmen, and of himself. Yes, he had seen the newspapers. If she had not seen them, she was not to read them if they came to her. And if she had, she was to remember that their love was too sacred to be soiled, and too perfect to be troubled. As for himself, as she knew, he was a changed man, who thought of his former life with loathing. She had made him clean, and filled him with a new strength.



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The winter passed. The last snow melted on the little grass plot, which changed by patches from brown to emerald green; and the children ran over it again, and tracked it in the soft places, but Honora only smiled. Warm, still days were interspersed between the windy ones, when the sky was turquoise blue, when the very river banks were steeped in new colours, when the distant, shadowy mountains became real. Liberty ran riot within her. If he thought with loathing on his former life, so did she. Only a year ago she had been penned up in a New York street in that prison-house of her own making, hemmed in by surroundings which she had now learned to detest from her soul.

A few more penalties remained to be paid, and the heaviest of these was her letter to her aunt and uncle. Even as they had accepted other things in life, so had they accepted the hardest of all to bear—Honora's divorce. A memorable letter her Uncle Tom had written her after Peter's return to tell them that remonstrances were useless! She was their daughter in all but name, and they would not forsake her. When she should have obtained her divorce, she should go back to them. Their house, which had been her home, should always remain so. Honora wept and pondered long over that letter. Should she write and tell them the truth, as she had told Peter? It was not because she was ashamed of the truth that she had kept it from them throughout the winter: it was because she wished to spare them as long as possible. Cruellest circumstance of all, that a love so divine as hers should not be understood by them, and should cause them infinite pain!

The weeks and months slipped by. Their letters, after that first one, were such as she had always received from them: accounts of the weather, and of the doings of her friends at home. But now the time was at hand when she must prepare them for her marriage with Chiltern; for they would expect her in St. Louis, and she could not go there. And if she wrote them, they might try to stop the marriage, or at least to delay it for some years.

Was it possible that a lingering doubt remained in her mind that to postpone her happiness would perhaps be to lose it? In her exile she had learned enough to know that a divorced woman is like a rudderless ship at sea, at the mercy of wind and wave and current. She could not go back to her life in St. Louis: her situation there would be unbearable: her friends would not be the same friends. No, she had crossed her Rubicon and destroyed the bridge deep within her she felt that delay would be fatal, both to her and Chiltern. Long enough had the banner of their love been trailed in the dust.

Summer came again, with its anniversaries and its dragging, interminable weeks: demoralizing summer, when Mrs. Mayo quite frankly appeared at her side window in a dressing sacque, and Honora longed to do the same. But time never stands absolutely still, and the day arrived when Mr. Beckwith called in a carriage. Honora, with an audibly beating heart, got into it, and they drove down town, past the department store where Mr. Mayo spent his days, and new blocks of banks and business houses that

flanked the wide street, where the roaring and clanging of the ubiquitous trolley cars resounded.



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Honora could not define her sensations—excitement and shame and fear and hope and joy were so commingled. The colours of the red and yellow brick had never been so brilliant in the sunshine. They stopped before the new court-house and climbed the granite steps. In her sensitive state, Honora thought that some of the people paused to look after them, and that some were smiling. One woman, she thought, looked compassionate. Within, they crossed the marble pavement, the Honourable Dave handed her into an elevator, and when it stopped she followed him as in a dream to an oak-panelled door marked with a legend she did not read. Within was an office, with leather chairs, a large oak desk, a spittoon, and portraits of grave legal gentlemen on the wall.

“This is Judge Whitman’s office,” explained the Honourable Dave. “He’ll let you stay here until the case is called.”

“Is he the judge—before whom—the case is to be tried?” asked Honora.

“He surely is,” answered the Honourable Dave. “Whitman’s a good friend of mine. In fact, I may say, without exaggeration, I had something to do with his election. Now you mustn’t get flustered,” he added. “It isn’t anything like as bad as goin’ to the dentist. It don’t amount to shucks, as we used to say in Missouri.”

With these cheerful words of encouragement he slipped out of a side door into what was evidently the court room, for Honora heard a droning. After a long interval he reappeared and beckoned her with a crooked finger. She arose and followed him into the court room.

All was bustle and confusion there, and her counsel whispered that they were breaking up for the day. The judge was stretching himself; several men who must have been lawyers, and with whom Mr. Beckwith was exchanging amenities behind the railing, were arranging their books and papers; some of the people were leaving, and others talking in groups about the room. The Honourable Dave whispered to the judge, a tall, lank, cadaverous gentleman with iron-grey hair, who nodded. Honora was led forward. The Honourable Dave, standing very close to the judge and some distance from her, read in a low voice something that she could not catch—supposedly the petition. It was all quite as vague to Honora as the trial of the Jack of Hearts; the buzzing of the groups still continued around the court room, and nobody appeared in the least interested. This was a comfort, though it robbed the ceremony of all vestige of reality. It seemed incredible that the majestic and awful Institution of the ages could be dissolved with no smoke or fire, with such infinite indifference, and so much spitting. What was the use of all the pomp and circumstance and ceremony to tie the knot if it could be cut in the routine of a day’s business?

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The solemn fact that she was being put under oath meant nothing to her. This, too, was slurred and mumbled. She found herself, trembling, answering questions now from her counsel, now from the judge; and it is to be doubted to this day whether either heard her answers. Most convenient and considerate questions they were. When and where she was married, how long she had lived with her husband, what happened when they ceased to live together, and had he failed ever since to contribute to her support? Mercifully, Mr. Beckwith was in the habit of coaching his words beforehand. A reputable citizen of Salomon City was produced to prove her residence, and somebody cried out something, not loudly, in which she heard the name of Spence mentioned twice. The judge said, "Take your decree," and picked up a roll of papers and walked away. Her knees became weak, she looked around her dizzily, and beheld the triumphant professional smile of the Honourable Dave Beckwith.

"It didn't hurt much, did it?" he asked. "Allow me to congratulate you."

"Is it—is it all over?" she said, quite dazed.

"Just like that," he said. "You're free."

"Free!" The word rang in her ears as she drove back to the little house that had been her home. The Honourable Dave lifted his felt hat as he handed her out of the carriage, and said he would call again in the evening to see if he could do anything further for her. Mathilde, who had been watching from the window, opened the door, and led her mistress into the parlour.

"It's—it's all over, Mathilde," she said.

"Mon dieu, madame," said Mathilde, "c'est simple comme bonjour!"