

# Modern Chronicle, a — Volume 07 eBook

## Modern Chronicle, a — Volume 07 by Winston Churchill

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# Page 1

## IN WHICH IT IS ALL DONE OVER AGAIN

All morning she had gazed on the shining reaches of the Hudson, their colour deepening to blue as she neared the sea. A gold-bound volume of Shelley, with his name on the fly-leaf, lay in her lap. And two lines she repeated softly to herself—two lines that held a vision:

“He was as the sun in his fierce youth,  
As terrible and lovely as a tempest;”

She summoned him out of the chaos of the past, and the past became the present, and he stood before her as though in the flesh. Nay, she heard his voice, his laugh, she even recognized again the smouldering flames in his eyes as he glanced into hers, and his characteristic manners and gestures. Honora wondered. In vain, during those long months of exile had she tried to reconstruct him thus the vision in its entirety would not come: rare, fleeting, partial, and tantalizing glimpses she had been vouchsafed, it is true. The whole of him had been withheld until this breathless hour before the dawn of her happiness.

Yet, though his own impatient spirit had fared forth to meet her with this premature gift of his attributes, she had to fight the growing fear within her. Now that the days of suffering were as they had not been, insistent questions dinned in her ears: was she entitled to the joys to come? What had she done to earn them? Had hers not been an attempt, on a gigantic scale, to cheat the fates? Nor could she say whether this feeling were a wholly natural failure to grasp a future too big, or the old sense of the unreality of events that had followed her so persistently.

The Hudson disappeared. Factories, bridges, beflagged week-end resorts, ramshackle houses, and blocks of new buildings were scattered here and there. The train was running on a causeway between miles of tenements where women and children, overtaken by lassitude, hung out of the windows: then the blackness of the tunnel, and Honora closed her eyes. Four minutes, three minutes, two minutes . . . The motion ceased. At the steps of the car a uniformed station porter seized her bag; and she started to walk down the long, narrow platform. Suddenly she halted.

“Drop anything, Miss?” inquired the porter.

“No,” answered Honora, faintly. He looked at her in concern, and she began to walk on again, more slowly.

It had suddenly come over her that the man she was going to meet she scarcely knew! Shyness seized her, a shyness that bordered on panic. And what was he really like, that she should put her whole trust in him? She glanced behind her: that way was closed: she had a mad desire to get away, to hide, to think. It must have been an

obsession that had possessed her all these months. The porter was looking again, and he voiced her predicament.

“There’s only one way out, Miss.”



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And then, amongst the figures massed behind the exit in the grill, she saw him, his face red-bronze with the sea tan, his crisp, curly head bared, his eyes alight with a terrifying welcome; and a tremor of a fear akin to ecstasy ran through her: the fear of the women of days gone by whose courage carried them to the postern or the strand, and fainted there. She could have taken no step farther—and there was no need. New strength flowed from the hand she held that was to carry her on and on.

He spoke her name. He led her passive, obedient, through the press to the side street, and then he paused and looked into her burning face.

“I have you at last,” he said. “Are you happy?”

“I don’t know,” she faltered. “Oh, Hugh, it all seems so strange! I don’t know what I have done.”

“I know,” he said exultantly; “but to save my soul I can’t believe it.”

She watched him, bewildered, while he put her maid into a cab, and by an effort roused herself.

“Where are you going, Hugh?”

“To get married,” he replied promptly.

She pulled down her veil.

“Please be sensible,” she implored. “I’ve arranged to go to a hotel.”

“What hotel?”

“The—the Barnstable,” she said. The place had come to her memory on the train. “It’s very nice and—and quiet—so I’ve been told. And I’ve telegraphed for my rooms.”

“I’ll humour you this once,” he answered, and gave the order.

She got into the carriage. It had blue cushions with the familiar smell of carriage upholstery, and the people in the street still hurried about their business as though nothing in particular were happening. The horses started, and some forgotten key in her brain was touched as Chiltern raised her veil again.

“You’ll tear it, Hugh,” she said, and perforce lifted it herself. Her eyes met his—and she awoke. Not to memories or regrets, but to the future, for the recording angel had mercifully destroyed his book.

“Did you miss me?” she said.



“Miss you! My God, Honora, how can you ask? When I look back upon these last months, I don’t see how I ever passed through them. And you are changed,” he said. “I could not have believed it possible, but you are. You are—you are finer.”

He had chosen his word exquisitely. And then, as they trotted sedately through Madison Avenue, he strained her in his arms and kissed her.

“Oh, Hugh!” she cried, scarlet, as she disengaged, herself, “you mustn’t —here!”

“You’re free!” he exclaimed. “You’re mine at last! I can’t believe it! Look at me, and tell me so.”

She tried.

“Yes,” she faltered.

“Yes—what?”

“Yes. I—I am yours.”

She looked out of the window to avoid those eyes. Was this New York, or Jerusalem? Were these the streets through which she had driven and trod in her former life? Her whole soul cried out denial. No episode, no accusing reminiscences stood out—not one: the very corners were changed. Would it all change back again if he were to lessen the insistent pressure on the hand in her lap.



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“Honora?”

“Yes?” she answered, with a start.

“You missed me? Look at me and tell me the truth.”

“The truth!” she faltered, and shuddered. The contrast was too great—the horror of it too great for her to speak of. The pen of Dante had not been adequate. “Don’t ask me, Hugh,” she begged, “I can’t talk about it—I never shall be able to talk about it. If I had not loved you, I should have died.”

How deeply he felt and understood and sympathized she knew by the quivering pressure on her hand. Ah, if he had not! If he had failed to grasp the meaning of her purgatory.

“You are wonderful, Honora,” was what he said in a voice broken by emotion.

She thanked him with one fleeting, tearful glance that was as a grant of all her priceless possessions. The carriage stopped, but it was some moments before they realized it.

“You may come up in a little while,” she whispered, “and lunch with me—if you like.”

“If I like!” he repeated.

But she was on the sidewalk, following the bell boy into the cool, marble-lined area of the hotel. A smiling clerk handed her a pen, and set the new universe to rocking.

“Mrs. Leffingwell, I presume? We have your telegram.”

Mrs. Leffingwell! Who was that person? For an instant she stood blankly holding the pen, and then she wrote rapidly, if a trifle unsteadily: “Mrs. Leffingwell and maid.” A pause. Where was her home? Then she added the words, “St. Louis.”

Her rooms were above the narrow canon of the side street, looking over the roofs of the inevitable brownstone fronts opposite. While Mathilde, in the adjoining chamber, unpacked her bag, Honora stood gazing out of the sitting-room windows, trying to collect her thoughts. Her spirits had unaccountably fallen, the sense of homelessness that had pursued her all these months overtaken her once more. Never, never, she told herself, would she enter a hotel again alone; and when at last he came she clung to him with a passion that thrilled him the more because he could not understand it.

“Hugh—you will care for me?” she cried.

He kissed away her tears. He could not follow her; he only knew that what he held to him was a woman such as he had never known before. Tender, and again strangely



and fiercely tender: an instrument of such miraculous delicacy as to respond, quivering, to the lightest touch; an harmonious and perfect blending of strength and weakness, of joy and sorrow,—of all the warring elements in the world. What he felt was the supreme masculine joy of possession.

At last they sat down on either side of the white cloth the waiter had laid, for even the gods must eat. Not that our deified mortals ate much on this occasion. Vesta presided once more, and after the feast was over gently led them down the slopes until certain practical affairs began to take shape in the mind of the man. Presently he looked at his watch, and then at the woman, and made a suggestion.

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“Marry you now—this of afternoon!” she cried, aghast. “Hugh, are you in your right senses?”

“Yes,” he said, “I’m reasonable for the first time in my life.”

She laughed, and immediately became serious. But when she sought to marshal her arguments, she found that they had fled.

“Oh, but I couldn’t,” she answered. “And besides, there are so many things I ought to do. I—I haven’t any clothes.”

But this was a plea he could not be expected to recognize. He saw no reason why she could not buy as many as she wanted after the ceremony.

“Is that all?” he demanded.

“No—that isn’t all. Can’t you see that—that we ought to wait, Hugh?”

“No,” he exclaimed, “No I can’t see it. I can only see that every moment of waiting would be a misery for us both. I can only see that the situation, as it is to-day, is an intolerable one for you.”

She had not expected him to see this.

“There are others to be thought of,” she said, after a moment’s hesitation.

“What others?”

The answer she should have made died on her lips.

“It seems so-indecorous, Hugh.”

“Indecorous!” he cried, and pushed back his chair and rose. “What’s indecorous about it? To leave you here alone in a hotel in New York would not only be indecorous, but senseless. How long would you put it off? a week—a month—a year? Where would you go in the meantime, and what would you do?”

“But your friends, Hugh—and mine?”

“Friends! What have they got to do with it?”

It was the woman, now, who for a moment turned practical—and for the man’s sake. She loved, and the fair fabric of the future which they were to weave together, and the plans with which his letters had been filled and of which she had dreamed in exile, had become to-day as the stuff of which moonbeams are made. As she looked up at him,



eternity itself did not seem long enough for the fulfilment of that love. But he? Would the time not come when he would demand something more? and suppose that something were denied? She tried to rouse herself, to think, to consider a situation in which her instinct had whispered just once—there must be some hidden danger: but the electric touch of his hand destroyed the process, and made her incapable of reason.

“What should we gain by a week’s or a fortnight’s delay,” he was saying, “except so much misery?”

She looked around the hotel sitting-room, and tried to imagine the desolation of it, stripped of his presence. Why not? There was reason in what he said. And yet, if she had known it, it was not to reason she yielded, but to the touch of his hand.

“We will be married to-day,” he decreed. “I have planned it all. I have bought the ‘Adhemar’, the yacht which I chartered last winter. She is here. We’ll go off on her together, away from the world, for as long as you like. And then,” he ended triumphantly, “then we’ll go back to Grenoble and begin our life.”

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“And begin our life!” she repeated. But it was not to him that she spoke. “Hugh, I positively have to have some clothes.”

“Clothes!” His voice expressed his contempt for the mundane thought.

“Yes, clothes,” she repeated resolutely.

He looked at his watch once more.

“Very well,” he said, “we’ll get ’em on the way.”

“On the way?” she asked.

“We’ll have to have a marriage license, I’m afraid,” he explained apologetically.

Honora grew crimson. A marriage license!

She yielded, of course. Who could resist him? Nor need the details of that interminable journey down the crowded artery of Broadway to the Centre of Things be entered into. An ignoble errand, Honora thought; and she sat very still, with flushed cheeks, in the corner of the carriage. Chiltern’s finer feelings came to her rescue. He, too, resented this senseless demand of civilization as an indignity to their Olympian loves. And he was a man to chafe at all restraints. But at last the odious thing was over, grim and implacable Law satisfied after he had compelled them to stand in line for an interminable period before his grill, and mingle with those whom he chose, in his ignorance, to call their peers. Honora felt degraded as they emerged with the hateful paper, bought at such a price. The City Hall Park, with its moving streams of people, etched itself in her memory.

“Leave me, Hugh,” she said; “I will take this carriage—you must get another one.”

For once, he accepted his dismissal with comparative meekness.

“When shall I come?” he asked.

“She smiled a little, in spite of herself.

“You may come for me at six o’clock,” she replied.

“Six o’clock!” he exclaimed; but accepted with resignation and closed the carriage door. Enigmatical sex!

Enigmatical sex indeed! Honora spent a feverish afternoon, rest and reflection being things she feared. An afternoon in familiar places; and (strangest of all facts to be recorded!) memories and regrets troubled her not at all. Her old dressmakers, her old



milliners, welcomed her as one risen, radiant, from the grave; risen, in their estimation, to a higher life. Honora knew this, and was indifferent to the wealth of meaning that lay behind their discretion. Milliners and dressmakers read the newspapers and periodicals—certain periodicals. Well they knew that the lady they flattered was the future Mrs. Hugh Chiltern.

Nothing whatever of an indelicate nature happened. There was no mention of where to send the bill, or of whom to send it to. Such things as she bought on the spot were placed in her carriage. And happiest of all omissions, she met no one she knew. The praise that Madame Barriere lavished on Honora's figure was not flattery, because the Paris models fitted her to perfection. A little after five she returned to her hotel, to a Mathilde in a high state of suppressed excitement. And at six, the appointed fateful hour, arrayed in a new street gown of dark green cloth, she stood awaiting him.



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He was no laggard. The bell on the church near by was still singing from the last stroke when he knocked, flung open the door, and stood for a moment staring at her. Not that she had been shabby when he had wished to marry her at noon: no self-respecting woman is ever shabby; not that her present costume had any of the elements of overdress; far from it. Being a woman, she had her thrill of triumph at his exclamation. Diana had no need, perhaps, of a French dressmaker, but it is an open question whether she would have scorned them. Honora stood motionless, but her smile for him was like the first quivering shaft of day. He opened a box, and with a strange mixture of impetuosity and reverence came forward. And she saw that he held in his hand a string of great, glistening pearls.

"They were my mother's," he said. "I have had them restrung—for you."

"Oh, Hugh!" she cried. She could find no words to express the tremor within. And she stood passively, her eyes half closed, while he clasped the string around the lace collar that pressed the slender column of her neck and kissed her.

Even the humble beings who work in hotels are responsive to unusual disturbances in the ether. At the Barnstable, a gala note prevailed: bell boys, porters, clerk, and cashier, proud of their sudden wisdom, were wreathed in smiles. A new automobile, in Chiltern's colours, with his crest on the panel, was panting beside the curb.

"I meant to have had it this morning," he apologized as he handed her in, "but it wasn't ready in time."

Honora heard him, and said something in reply. She tried in vain to rouse herself from the lethargy into which she had fallen, to cast off the spell. Up Fifth Avenue they sped, past meaningless houses, to the Park. The crystal air of evening was suffused with the level evening light; and as they wound in and out under the spreading trees she caught glimpses across the shrubbery of the deepening blue of waters. Pools of mystery were her eyes.

The upper West Side is a definite place on the map, and full, undoubtedly, of palpitating human joys and sorrows. So far as Honora was concerned, it might have been Bagdad. The automobile had stopped before a residence, and she found herself mounting the steps at Chiltern's side. A Swedish maid opened the door.

"Is Mr. White at home?" Chiltern asked.

It seemed that "the Reverend Mr. White" was. He appeared, a portly gentleman with frock coat and lawn tie who resembled the man in the moon. His head, like polished ivory, increased the beaming effect of his welcome, and the hand that pressed Honora's was large and soft and warm. But dreams are queer things, in which no events surprise us.

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The reverend gentleman, as he greeted Chiltern, pronounced his name with unction. His air of hospitality, of good-fellowship, of taking the world as he found it, could not have been improved upon. He made it apparent at once that nothing could surprise him. It was the most natural circumstance in life that two people should arrive at his house in an automobile at half-past six in the evening and wish to get married: if they chose this method instead of the one involving awnings and policemen and uncomfortably-arrayed relations and friends, it was none of Mr. White's affair. He led them into the Gothic sanctum at the rear of the house where the famous sermons were written that shook the sounding-board of the temple where the gentleman preached,—the sermons that sometimes got into the newspapers. Mr. White cleared his throat.

"I am—very familiar with your name, Mr. Chiltern," he said, "and it is a pleasure to be able to serve you, and the lady who is so shortly to be your wife. Your servant arrived with your note at four o'clock. Ten minutes later, and I should have missed him."

And then Honora heard Chiltern saying somewhat coldly:—"In order to save time, Mr. White, I wish to tell you that Mrs. Leffingwell has been divorced—"

The Reverend Mr. White put up a hand before him, and looked down at the carpet, as one who would not dwell upon painful things.

"Unfortunate—ahem—mistakes will occur in life, Mr. Chiltern—in the best of lives," he replied. "Say no more about it. I am sure, looking at you both—"

"Very well then," said Chiltern brusquely, "I knew you would have to know. And here," he added, "is an essential paper."

A few minutes later, in continuation of the same strange dream, Honora was standing at Chiltern's side and the Reverend Mr. White was addressing them: What he said—apart of it at least—seemed curiously familiar. Chiltern put a ring on a finger of her ungloved hand. It was a supreme moment in her destiny—this she knew. Between her responses she repeated it to herself, but the mighty fact refused to be registered. And then, suddenly, rang out the words:

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man Put asunder."

Those whom God hath joined together! Mr. White was congratulating her. Other people were in the room—the minister's son, his wife, his brother-in-law. She was in the street again, in the automobile, without knowing how she got there, and Chiltern close beside her in the limousine.

"My wife!" he whispered.

Was she? Could it be true, be lasting, be binding for ever and ever? Her hand pressed his convulsively.



“Oh, Hugh!” she cried, “care for me—stay by me forever. Will you promise?”

“I promise, Honora,” he repeated. “Henceforth we are one.”

Honora would have prolonged forever that honeymoon on summer seas. In those blissful days she was content to sit by the hour watching him as, bareheaded in the damp salt breeze, he sailed the great schooner and gave sharp orders to the crew. He was a man who would be obeyed, and even his flashes of temper pleased her. He was her master, too, and she gloried in the fact. By the aid of the precious light within her, she studied him.



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He loved her mightily, fiercely, but withal tenderly. With her alone he was infinitely tender, and it seemed that something in him cried out for battle against the rest of the world. He had his way, in port and out of it. He brooked no opposition, and delighted to carry, against his captain's advice, more canvas than was wise when it blew heavily. But the yacht, like a woman, seemed a creature of his will; to know no fear when she felt his guiding hand, even though the green water ran in the scuppers.

And every day anew she scanned his face, even as he scanned the face of the waters. What was she searching for? To have so much is to become miserly, to fear lest a grain of the precious store be lost. On the second day they had anchored, for an hour or two, between the sandy headlands of a small New England port, and she had stood on the deck watching his receding figure under the flag of the gasoline launch as it made its way towards the deserted wharves. Beyond the wharves was an elm-arched village street, and above the verdure rose the white cupola of the house of some prosperous sea-captain of bygone times. Honora had not wished to go ashore. First he had begged, and then he had laughed as he had leaped into the launch. She lay in a chaise longue, watching it swinging idly at the dock.

The night before he had written letters and telegrams. Once he had looked up at her as she sat with a book in her hand across the saloon, and caught her eyes. She had been pretending not to watch him.

"Wedding announcements," he said.

And she had smiled back at him bravely. Such was the first acknowledgment between them that the world existed.

"A little late," he observed, smiling in his turn as he changed his pen, "but they'll have to make allowances for the exigencies of the situation. And they've been after me to settle down for so many years that they ought to be thankful to get them at all. I've told them that after a decent period they may come to Grenoble—in the late autumn. We don't want anybody before then, do we, Honora?"

"No," she said faintly; and added, "I shall always be satisfied with you alone, Hugh."

He laughed happily, and presently she went up on deck and stood with her face to the breeze. There were no sounds save the musical beat of the water against the strakes, and the low hum of wind on the towering vibrant sails. One moulted silver star stood out above all others. To the northward, somewhere beyond the spot where sea and sky met in the hidden kiss of night, was Newport,—were his relations and her friends. What did they think? He, at least, had no anxieties about the world, why should she? Their defiance of it had been no greater than that of an hundred others on whom it had smiled benignly. But had not the others truckled more to its conventions? Little she cared

about it, indeed, and if he had turned the prow of the 'Adhemar' towards the unpeopled places of the earth, her joy would have been untroubled.



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One after another the days glided by, while with the sharpened senses of a great love she watched for a sign of the thing that slept in him—of the thing that had driven him home from his wanderings to re-create his life. When it awoke, she would have to share him; now he was hers alone. Her feelings towards this thing did not assume the proportions of jealousy or fear; they were merely alert, vaguely disquieting. The sleeping thing was not a monster. No, but it might grow into one, if its appetite were not satisfied, and blame her.

She told herself that, had he lacked ambition, she could not have loved him, and did not stop to reflect upon the completeness of her satisfaction with the Viking. He seemed, indeed, in these weeks, one whom the sea has marked for its own, and her delight in watching him as he moved about the boat never palled. His nose reminded her of the prow of a ship of war, and his deep-set eyes were continually searching the horizon for an enemy. Such were her fancies. In the early morning when he donned his sleeveless bathing suit, she could never resist the temptation to follow him on deck to see him plunge into the cold ocean: it gave her a delightful little shiver—and he was made like one of the gods of Valhalla.

She had discovered, too, in these intimate days, that he had the Northman's temperament; she both loved and dreaded his moods. And sometimes, when the yacht glided over smoother seas, it was his pleasure to read to her, even poetry and the great epics. That he should be fond of the cruel Scotch ballads she was not surprised; but his familiarity with the book of Job, and his love for it, astonished her. It was a singular library that he had put on board the 'Adhemar'.

One evening when the sails flapped idly and the blocks rattled, when they had been watching in silence the flaming orange of the sunset above the amethystine Camden hills, he spoke the words for which she had been waiting.

"Honora, what do you say to going back to Grenoble?"

She succeeded in smiling at him.

"Whenever you like, Hugh," she said.

So the bowsprit of the 'Adhemar' was turned homewards; and with every league of water they left behind them his excitement and impatience seemed to grow.

"I can't wait to show it to you, Honora—to see you in it," he exclaimed. "I have so long pictured you there, and our life as it will be."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ENTRANCE INTO EDEN



They had travelled through the night, and in the early morning left the express at a junction. Honora sat in the straight-backed seat of the smaller train with parted lips and beating heart, gazing now and again at the pearly mists rising from the little river valley they were climbing. Chiltern was like a schoolboy.



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“We’ll soon be there,” he cried, but it was nearly nine o’clock when they reached the Gothic station that marked the end of the line. It was a Chiltern line, he told her, and she was already within the feudal domain. Time indeed that she awoke! She reached the platform to confront a group of upturned, staring faces, and for the moment her courage failed her. Somehow, with Chiltern’s help, she made her way to a waiting omnibus backed up against the boards. The footman touched his hat, the grey-headed coachman saluted, and they got in. As the horses started off at a quick trot, Honora saw that the group on the station platform had with one consent swung about to stare after them.

They passed through the main street of the town, lined with plate-glass windows and lively signs, and already bustling with the business of the day, through humbler thoroughfares, and presently rumbled over a bridge that spanned a rushing stream confined between the foundation walls of mills. Hundreds of yards of mills stretched away on either side; mills with windows wide open, and within them Honora heard the clicking and roaring of machinery, and saw the men and women at their daily tasks. Life was a strange thing that they should be doing this while she should be going to live in luxury at a great country place. On one of the walls she read the legend Chiltern and Company.

“They still keep our name,” said Hugh, “although they are in the trust.”

He pointed out to her, with an air of pride, every landmark by the roadside. In future they were to have a new meaning—they were to be shared with her. And he spoke of the times—as child and youth, home from the seashore or college, he had driven over the same road. It wound to the left, behind the mills, threaded a village of neat wooden houses where the better class of operatives lived, reached the river again, and turned at last through a brick gateway, past a lodge in the dense shade of sheltering boughs, into a wooded drive that climbed, by gentle degrees, a slope. Human care for generations had given to the place a tradition. People had lived here and loved those trees—his people. And could it be that she was to inherit all this, with him? Was her name really Chiltern?

The beating of her heart became a pain when in the distance through the spreading branches she caught a glimpse of the long, low outline of the house, a vision at once familiar and unreal. How often in the months gone by had she called up the memory of the photograph she had once seen, only to doubt the more that she should ever behold that house and these trees with him by her side! They drew up before the door, and a venerable, ruddy-faced butler stood gravely on the steps to welcome them. Hugh leaped out. He was still the schoolboy.

“Starling,” he said, “this is Mrs. Chiltern.”

Honora smiled tremulously.

“How do you do, Starling?” she said.



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“Starling’s an old friend, Honora. He’s been here ever since I can remember.”

The blue eyes of the old servant were fixed on her with a strange, searching expression. Was it compassion she read in them, on this that should be the happiest of her days? In that instant, unaccountably, her heart went out to the old man; and something of what he had seen, and something of what was even now passing within him, came to her intuitively. It was as though, unexpectedly, she had found a friend—and a friend who had had no previous intentions of friendship.

“I’m sure I wish you happiness, madame,—and Mr. Hugh, he said in a voice not altogether firm.

“Happiness!” cried Hugh. “I’ve never known what it was before now, Starling.”

The old man’s eyes glistened.

“And you’ve come to stay, sir?”

“All my life, Starling,” said Hugh.

They entered the hall. It was wide and cool, white panelled to the ceiling, with a dark oak floor. At the back of it was an eighteenth-century stairway, with a band of red carpet running up the steps, and a wrought-iron guard with a velvet-covered rail. Halfway up, the stairway divided at a landing, lighted by great triple windows of small panes.

“You may have breakfast in half an hour, Starling,” said Chiltern, and led Honora up the stairs into the east wing, where he flung open one of the high mahogany doors on the south side. “These are your rooms, Honora. I have had Keller do them all over for you, and I hope you’ll like them. If you don’t, we’ll change them again.”

Her answer was an exclamation of delight. There was a bedroom in pink, with brocaded satin on the walls, and an oriel window thrust out over the garden; a panelled boudoir at the corner of the house, with a marble mantel before which one of Marie Antoinette’s duchesses had warmed her feet; and shelves lined with gold-lettered books. From its windows, across the flowering shrubbery and through the trees, she saw the gleaming waters of a lake, and the hills beyond. From this view she turned, and caught her breath, and threw her arms about her husband’s neck. He was astonished to see that her eyes were filled with tears.

“Oh, Hugh,” she cried, “it’s too perfect! It almost makes me afraid.”

“We will be very happy, dearest,” he said, and as he kissed her he laughed at the fates.

“I hope so—I pray so,” she said, as she clung to him. “But—don’t laugh,—I can’t bear it.”



He patted her cheek.

“What a strange little girl you are!” he said. “I suppose I shouldn’t be mad about you if you weren’t that way. Sometimes I wonder how many women I have married.”

She smiled at him through her tears.

“Isn’t that polygamy, Hugh?” she asked.

It was all like a breathless tale out of one of the wonder books of youth. So, at least, it seemed to Honora as she stood, refreshed with a new white linen gown, hesitating on the threshold of her door before descending. Some time the bell must ring, or the cock crow, or the fairy beckon with a wand, and she would have to go back. Back where? She did not know—she could not remember. Cinderella dreaming by the embers, perhaps.

## Page 12

He was awaiting her in the little breakfast room, its glass casements open to the garden with the wall and the round stone seat. The simmering urn, the white cloth, the shining silver, the big green melons that the hot summer sun had ripened for them alone, and Hugh's eyes as they rested on her—such was her illusion. Nor was it quite dispelled when he lighted a pipe and they started to explore their Eden, wandering through chambers with, low ceilings in the old part of the house, and larger, higher apartments in the portion that was called new. In the great darkened library, side by side against the Spanish leather on the walls, hung the portraits of his father and mother in heavy frames of gilt.

Her husband was pleased that she should remain so long before them. And for a while, as she stood lost in contemplation, he did not speak. Once she glanced at him, and then back at the stern face of the General, —stern, yet kindly. The eyes, deep-set under bushy brows, like Hugh's, were full of fire; and yet the artist had made them human, too. A dark, reddish brown, close-trimmed mustache and beard hid the mouth and chin. Hugh had inherited the nose, but the father's forehead was wider and fuller. Hugh was at once a newer type, and an older. The face and figure of the General were characteristic of the mid-century American of the northern states, a mixture of boldness and caution and Puritanism, who had won his battles in war and commerce by a certain native quality of mind.

"I never appreciated him," said Hugh at length, "until after he died —long after. Until now, in fact. At times we were good friends, and then something he would say or do would infuriate me, and I would purposely make him angry. He had a time and a rule for everything, and I could not bear rules. Breakfast was on the minute, an hour in his study to attend to affairs about the place, so many hours in his office at the mills, in the president's room at the bank, vestry and charity meetings at regular intervals. No movement in all this country round about was ever set on foot without him. He was one to be finally reckoned with. And since his death, many proofs have come to me of the things he did for people of which the world was ignorant. I have found out at last that his way of life was, in the main, the right way. But I know now, Honora," he added soberly, slipping his hand within her arm, "I know now that without you I never could do all I intend to do."

"Oh, don't say that!" she cried. "Don't say that!"

"Why not?" he asked, smiling at her vehemence. "It is not a confession of weakness. I had the determination, it is true. I could—I should have done something, but my deeds would have lacked the one thing needful to lift them above the commonplace—at least for me. You are the inspiration. With you here beside me, I feel that I can take up this work with joy. Do you understand?"

She pressed his hand with her arm.



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“Hugh,” she said slowly, “I hope that I shall be a help, and not—not a hindrance.”

“A hindrance!” he exclaimed. “You don’t know, you can’t realize, what you are to me.”

She was silent, and when she lifted her eyes it was to rest them on the portrait of his mother. And she seemed to read in the sweet, sad eyes a question—a question not to be put into words. Chiltern, following her gaze, did not speak: for a space they looked at the portrait together, and in silence . . . .

From one end of the house to the other they went, Hugh reviving at the sight of familiar objects a hundred memories of his childhood; and she trying to imagine that childhood, so different from her own, passed in this wonderful place. In the glass cases of the gun room, among the shining, blue barrels which he had used in all parts of the world, was the little shotgun his father had had made for him when he was twelve years old. Hugh locked the door after them when they came out, and smiled as he put the key in his pocket.

“My destroying days are over,” he declared.

Honora put on a linen hat and they took the gravelled path to the stables, where the horses, one by one, were brought out into the courtyard for their inspection. In anticipation of this hour there was a blood bay for Honora, which Chiltern had bought in New York. She gave a little cry of delight when she saw the horse shining in the sunlight, his nostrils in the air, his brown eyes clear, his tapering neck patterned with veins. And then there was the dairy, with the fawn-coloured cows and calves; and the hillside pastures that ran down to the river, and the farm lands where the stubbled grain was yellowing. They came back by the path that wound through the trees and shrubbery bordering the lake to the walled garden, ablaze in the mellow sunlight with reds and purples, salvias and zinnias, dahlias, gladioli, and asters.

Here he left her for a while, sitting dreamily on the stone bench. Mrs. Hugh Chiltern, of Grenoble! Over and over she repeated that name to herself, and it refused somehow to merge with her identity. Yet was she mistress of this fair domain; of that house which had sheltered them race for a century, and the lines of which her eye caressed with a loving reverence; and the Chiltern pearls even then lay hidden around her throat.

Her thoughts went back, at this, to the gentle lady to whom they had belonged, and whose look began again to haunt her. Honora’s superstition startled her. What did it mean, that look? She tried to recall where she had seen it before, and suddenly remembered that the eyes of the old butler had held something not unlike it. Compassionate—this was the only word that would describe it. No, it had not proclaimed her an intruder, though it may have been ready to do so the moment before her appearance; for there was a note of surprise in it—surprise and compassion.



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This was the lady in whose footsteps she was to walk, whose charities and household cares she was to assume! Tradition, order, observance, responsibility, authority it was difficult to imagine these as a logical part of the natural sequence of her life. She would begin to-day, if God would only grant her these things she had once contemned, and that seemed now so precious. Her life—her real life would begin to-day. Why not? How hard she would strive to be worthy of this incomparable gift! It was hers, hers! She listened, but the only answer was the humming of the bees in the still September morning.

Chiltern's voice aroused her. He was standing in the breakfast room talking to the old butler.

"You're sure there were no other letters, Starling, besides these bills?"

Honora became tense.

"No, sir," she heard the butler say, and she seemed to detect in his deferential voice the note of anxiety suppressed in the other's. "I'm most particular about letters, sir, as one who lived so many years with your father would be. All that came were put in your study, Mr. Hugh."

"It doesn't matter," answered Chiltern, carelessly, and stepped out into the garden. He caught sight of her, hesitated the fraction of a moment, and as he came forward again the cloud in his eyes vanished. And yet she was aware that he was regarding her curiously.

"What," he said gayly, "still here?"

"It is too beautiful!" she cried. "I could sit here forever."

She lifted her face trustfully, smilingly, to his, and he stooped down and kissed it . . . .

To give the jealous fates not the least chance to take offence, the higher life they were to lead began at once. And yet it seemed at times to Honora as though this higher life were the gift the fates would most begrudge: a gift reserved for others, the pretensions to which were a kind of knavery. Merriment, forgetfulness, music, the dance; the cup of pleasure and the feast of Babylon—these might more readily have been vouchsafed; even deemed to have been bargained for. But to take that which supposedly had been renounced—virtue, sobriety, security, respect—would this be endured? She went about it breathlessly, like a thief.

Never was there a more exemplary household. They rose at half-past seven, they breakfasted at a quarter after eight; at nine, young Mr. Manning, the farm superintendent, was in waiting, and Hugh spent two or more hours in his company, inspecting, correcting, planning; for two thousand acres of the original Chiltern estate



still remained. Two thousand acres which, since the General's death, had been at sixes and sevens. The General's study, which was Hugh's now, was piled high with new and bulky books on cattle and cultivation of the soil. Government and state and private experts came and made tests and went away again; new machinery arrived, and Hugh passed hours in the sun, often with Honora by his side, installing it. General Chiltern had been president and founder of the Grenoble National Bank, and Hugh took up his duties as a director.

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Honora sought, with an energy that had in it an element of desperation, to keep pace with her husband. For she was determined that he should have no interests in which she did not share. In those first days it was her dread that he might grow away from her, and instinct told her that now or never must the effort be made. She, too, studied farming; not from books, but from him. In their afternoon ride along the shady river road, which was the event of her day, she encouraged him to talk of his plans and problems, that he might thus early form the habit of bringing them to her. And the unsuspecting male in him responded, innocent of the simple subterfuge. After an exhaustive discourse on the elements lacking in the valley soil, to which she had listened in silent intensity, he would exclaim:

“By George, Honora, you’re a continual surprise to me. I had no idea a woman would take an interest in these things, or grasp them the way you do.”

Lordly commendations these, and she would receive them with a flush of gratitude.

Nor was it ever too hot, or she too busy with household cares, for her to follow him to the scene of his operations, whatever these might be: she would gladly stand for an hour listening to a consultation with the veterinary about an ailing cow. Her fear was lest some matter of like importance should escape her. She had private conversations with Mr. Manning, that she might surprise her husband by an unsuspected knowledge. Such were her ruses.

The housekeeper who had come up from New York was the subject of a conjugal conversation.

“I am going to send her away, Hugh,” Honora announced. “I don’t believe —your mother had one.”

The housekeeper’s departure was the beginning of Honora’s real intimacy with Starling. Complicity, perhaps, would be a better word for the commencement of this relationship. First of all, there was an inspection of the family treasures: the table-linen, the silver, and the china —Sevres, Royal Worcester, and Minton, and the priceless dinner-set, of Lowestoft which had belonged to Alexander Chiltern, reserved, for great occasions only: occasions that Starling knew by heart; their dates, and the guests the Lowestoft had honoured. His air was ceremonial as he laid, reverently, the sample pieces on the table before her, but it seemed to Honora that he spoke as one who recalls departed glories, who held a conviction that the Lowestoft would never be used again.

Although by unalterable custom he submitted, at breakfast, the menus of the day to Hugh, the old butler came afterwards to Honora’s boudoir during her struggle with the account books. Sometimes she would look up and surprise his eyes fixed upon her, and one day she found at her elbow a long list made out in a painstaking hand.



“What’s this, Starling?” she asked.

“If you please, madame,” he answered, “they’re the current prices in the markets—here.”



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She thanked him. Nor was his exquisite delicacy in laying stress upon the locality lost upon her. That he realized the magnitude—for her—of the task to which she had set herself; that he sympathized deeply with the spirit which had undertaken it, she was as sure as though he had said so. He helped her thus in a dozen unobtrusive ways, never once recognizing her ignorance; but he made her feel the more that that ignorance was a shameful thing not to be spoken of. Speculations upon him were irresistible. She was continually forgetting the nature of his situation, and he grew gradually to typify in her mind the Grenoble of the past. She knew his principles as well as though he had spoken them—which he never did. For him, the world had become awry; he abhorred divorce, and that this modern abomination had touched the house of Chiltern was a calamity that had shaken the very foundations of his soul. In spite of this, he had remained. Why? Perhaps from habit, perhaps from love of the family and Hugh,—perhaps to see!

And having stayed, fascination had laid hold of him,—of that she was sure,—and his affections had incomprehensibly become involved. He was as one assisting at a high tragedy not unworthy of him, the outcome of which he never for an instant doubted. And he gave Honora the impression that he alone, inscrutable, could have pulled aside the curtain and revealed the end.

## CHAPTER XIII

### OF THE WORLD BEYOND THE GATES

Honora paused in her toilet, and contemplated for a moment the white skirt that her maid presented.

“I think I’ll wear the blue pongee to-day, Mathilde,” she said.

The decision for the blue pongee was the culmination of a struggle begun with the opening of her eyes that morning. It was Sunday, and the time was at hand when she must face the world. Might it not be delayed a little while—a week longer? For the remembrance of the staring eyes which had greeted her on her arrival at the station at Grenoble troubled her. It seemed to her a cruel thing that the house of God should hold such terrors for her: to-day she had a longing for it that she had never felt in her life before.

Chiltern was walking in the garden, waiting for her to breakfast with him, and her pose must have had in it an element of the self-conscious when she appeared, smilingly, at the door.

“Why, you’re all dressed up,” he said.

“It’s Sunday, Hugh.”



“So it is,” he agreed, with what may have been a studied lightness—she could not tell.

“I’m going to church,” she said bravely.

“I can’t say much for old Stopford,” declared her husband. “His sermons used to arouse all the original sin in me, when I had to listen to them.”

She poured out his coffee.

“I suppose one has to take one’s clergyman as one does the weather,” she said. “We go to church for something else besides the sermon—don’t we?”



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"I suppose so, if we go at all," he replied. "Old Stopford imposes a pretty heavy penalty."

"Too heavy for you?" she asked, and smiled at him as she handed him the cup.

"Too heavy for me," he said, returning her smile. "To tell you the truth, Honora, I had an overdose of church in my youth, here and at school, and I've been trying to even up ever since."

"You'd like me to go, wouldn't you, Hugh?" she ventured, after a silence.

"Indeed I should," he answered, and again she wondered to what extent his cordiality was studied, or whether it were studied at all. "I'm very fond of that church, in spite of the fact that—that I may be said to dissemble my fondness." She laughed with him, and he became serious. "I still contribute—the family's share toward its support. My father was very proud of it, but it is really my mother's church. It was due to her that it was built."

Thus was comedy played—and Honora by no means sure that it was a comedy. Even her alert instinct had not been able to detect the acting, and the intervening hours were spent in speculating whether her fears had not been overdone. Nevertheless, under the eyes of Starling, at twenty minutes to eleven she stepped into the victoria with an outward courage, and drove down the shady avenue towards the gates. Sweet-toned bells were ringing as she reached the residence portion of the town, and subdued pedestrians in groups and couples made their way along the sidewalks. They stared at her; and she in turn, with heightened colour, stared at her coachman's back. After all, this first Sunday would be the most difficult.

The carriage turned into a street arched by old elms, and flanked by the houses of the most prosperous townspeople. Some of these were of the old-fashioned, classic type, and others new examples of a national architecture seeking to find itself,—white and yellow colonial, roughcast modifications of the Shakespearian period, and nondescript mixtures of cobblestones and shingles. Each was surrounded by trim lawns and shrubbery. The church itself was set back from the street. It was of bluish stone, and half covered with Virginia creeper.

At this point, had the opportunity for a secret retreat presented itself, Honora would have embraced it, for until now she had not realized the full extent of the ordeal. Had her arrival been heralded by sounding trumpets, the sensation it caused could not have been greater. In her Eden, the world had been forgotten; the hum of gossip beyond the gates had not reached her. But now, as the horses approached the curb, their restive feet clattering on the hard pavement, in the darkened interior of the church she saw faces turned, and entering worshippers pausing in the doorway. Something of what the

event meant for Grenoble dawned upon her: something, not all; but all that she could bear.



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If it be true that there is no courage equal to that which a great love begets in a woman, Honora's at that moment was sublime. Her cheeks tingled, and her knees weakened under her as she ran the gantlet to the church door, where she was met by a gentleman on whose face she read astonishment unalloyed: amazement, perhaps, is not too strong a word for the sensation it conveyed to her, and it occurred to her afterwards that there was an element in it of outrage. It was a countenance peculiarly adapted to such an expression—yellow, smooth-shaven, heavy-jowled, with one drooping eye; and she needed not to be told that she had encountered, at the outset, the very pillar of pillars. The frock coat, the heavy watch chain, the square-toed boots, all combined to make a Presence.

An instinctive sense of drama amongst the onlookers seemed to create a hush, as though these had been the unwilling witnesses to an approaching collision and were awaiting the crash. The gentleman stood planted in the inner doorway, his drooping eye fixed on hers.

"I am Mrs. Chiltern," she faltered.

He hesitated the fraction of an instant, but he somehow managed to make it plain that the information was superfluous. He turned without a word and marched majestically up the aisle before her to the fourth pew from the front on the right. There he faced about and laid a protesting hand on the carved walnut, as though absolving himself in the sight of his God and his fellow-citizens. Honora fell on her knees.

She strove to calm herself by prayer: but the glances of a congregation focussed between her shoulder-blades seemed to burn her back, and the thought of the concentration of so many minds upon her distracted her own. She could think of no definite prayer. Was this God's tabernacle? or the market-place, and she at the tail of a cart? And was she not Hugh Chiltern's wife, entitled to his seat in the place of worship of his fathers? She rose from her knees, and her eyes fell on the softly glowing colours of a stained-glass window: In memoriam—Alicia Reyburn Chiltern. Hugh's mother, the lady in whose seat she sat.

The organist, a sprightly young man, came in and began turning over his music, and the choir took their-places, in the old-fashioned' manner. Then came the clergyman. His beard was white, his face long and narrow and shrivelled, his forehead protruding, his eyes of the cold blue of a winter's sky. The service began, and Honora repeated the familiar prayers which she had learned by heart in childhood—until her attention was arrested by the words she spoke: "We have offended against Thy holy laws." Had she? Would not God bless her marriage? It was not until then that she began to pray with an intensity that blotted out the world that He would not punish her if she had done wrong in His sight. Surely, if she lived henceforth in fear of Him, He would let her keep this priceless love which had come to her! And it was impossible that He should regard it as an inordinate and sinful affection—since it had filled her life with light. As the wife



of Hugh Chiltern she sought a blessing. Would God withhold it? He would not, she was sure, if they lived a sober and a righteous life. He would take that into account, for He was just.



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Then she grew calmer, and it was not until after the doctrinal sermon which Hugh had predicted that her heart began to beat painfully once more, when the gentleman who had conducted her to her seat passed her the plate. He inspired her with an instinctive fear; and she tried to imagine, in contrast, the erect and soldierly figure of General Chiltern performing the same office. Would he have looked on her more kindly?

When the benediction was pronounced, she made her way out of the church with downcast eyes. The people parted at the door to let her pass, and she quickened her step, gained the carriage at last, and drove away—seemingly leaving at her back a buzz of comment. Would she ever have the courage to do it again?

The old butler, as he flung open the doors at her approach, seemed to be scrutinizing her.

“Where’s Mr. Chiltern, Starling?” she asked.

“He’s gone for a ride, madame.”

Hugh had gone for a ride!

She did not see him until lunch was announced, when he came to the table in his riding clothes. It may have been that he began to talk a little eagerly about the excursion he had made to an outlying farm and the conversation he had had with the farmer who leased it.

“His lease is out in April,” said Chiltern, “and when I told him I thought I’d turn the land into the rest of the estate he tried to bribe me into a renewal.”

“Bribe you?”

Chiltern laughed.

“Only in joke, of course. The man’s a character, and he’s something of a politician in these parts. He intimated that there would be a vacancy in this congressional district next year, that Grierson was going to resign, and that a man with a long purse who belonged to the soil might have a chance. I suppose he thinks I would buy it.”

“And—would you like to go to Congress, Hugh?”

“Well,” he said, smiling, “a man never can tell when he may have to eat his words. I don’t say I shouldn’t—in the distant future. It would have pleased the General. But if I go,” he added with characteristic vigour, “it will be in spite of the politicians, not because of them. If I go I shan’t go bound, and I’ll fight for it. I should enjoy that.”

And she was able to accord him the smile of encouragement he expected.



“I am sure you would,” she replied. “I think you might have waited until this afternoon and taken me,” she reproached him. “You know how I enjoy going with you to those places.”

It was not until later in the meal that he anticipated, in an admirably accidental manner, the casual remark she had intended to make about church.

“Your predictions were fulfilled,” she answered; “the sermon wasn’t thrilling.”

He glanced at her. And instead of avoiding his eyes, she smiled into them.

“Did you see the First Citizen of Grenoble?” he inquired.

“I am sure of it,” she laughed, “if he’s yellow, with a drooping eye and a presence; he was kind enough to conduct me to the pew.”



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“Yes,” he exclaimed, “that’s Israel Simpson—you couldn’t miss him. How I used to hate him when I was a boy! I haven’t quite got over it yet. I used to outdo myself to make things uncomfortable for him when he came up here—I think it was because he always seemed to be truckling. He was ridiculously servile and polite in those days. He’s changed since,” added Hugh, dryly. “He must quite have forgotten by this time that the General made him.”

“Is—is he so much?” said Honora.

Her husband laughed.

“Is it possible that you have seen him and still ask that?” said he. “He is Grenoble. Once the Chilterns were. He is the head of the honoured firm of Israel Simpson and Sons, the president of the Grenoble National Bank, the senior warden of the church, a director in the railway. Twice a year, in the columns of the New York newspapers dedicated to the prominent arrivals at the hotels, you may read the name of Israel Simpson of Grenoble. Three times has he been abroad, respectably accompanied by Maria, who invariably returns to read a paper on the cathedrals and art before the Woman’s Club.”

Maria is his wife, I suppose.”

“Yes. Didn’t you run across Maria? She’s quite as pronounced, in her way, as Israel. A very tower of virtue.”

“I didn’t meet anybody, Hugh,” said Honora. “I’ll—I’ll look for her next Sunday. I hurried out. It was a little embarrassing the first time,” she added, “your family being so prominent in Grenoble.”

Upon this framework, the prominence of his family, she built up during the coning week a new structure of hope. It was strange she had never thought before of this quite obvious explanation for the curiosity of Grenoble. Perhaps—perhaps it was not prejudice, after all—or not all of it. The wife of the Chiltern heir would naturally inspire a considerable interest in any event, and Mrs. Hugh Chiltern in particular. And these people would shortly understand, if they did not now understand, that Hugh had come back voluntarily and from a sense of duty to assume the burdens and responsibilities that so many of his generation and class had shirked. This would tell in their favour, surely. At this point in her meditations she consulted the mirror, to behold a modest, slim-waisted young woman becomingly arrayed in white linen, whose cheeks were aglow with health, whose eyes seemingly reflected the fire of a distant high vision. Not a Poppaea, certainly, nor a Delila. No, it was unbelievable that this, the very field itself of their future labours, should be denied them. Her heart, at the mere conjecture, turned to stone.



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During the cruise of the Adhemar she had often watched, in the gathering darkness, those revolving lights on headland or shoal that spread now a bright band across the sea, and again left the waters desolate in the night. Thus, ceaselessly revolving from white hope to darker doubt, were her thoughts, until sometimes she feared to be alone with them, and surprised him by her presence in his busiest moments. For he was going ahead on the path they had marked out with a faith in which she could perceive no flaw. If faint and shadowy forms had already come between them, he gave no evidence of having as yet discerned these. There was the absence of news from his family, for instance,—the Graingers, the Stranger, the Shorters, and the Pendletons, whom she had never seen; he had never spoken to her of this, and he seemed to hold it as of no account. Her instinct whispered that it had left its mark, a hidden mark. And while she knew that consideration for her prompted him to hold his peace, she told herself that she would have been happier had he spoken of it.

Always she was brought back to Grenoble when she saw him thus, manlike, with his gaze steadily fixed on the task. If New York itself withheld recognition, could Grenoble—provincial and conservative Grenoble, preserving still the ideas of the last century for which his family had so unflinchingly stood—be expected to accord it? New York! New York was many, many things, she knew. The great house could have been filled from weekend to week-end from New York; but not with Graingers and Pendletons and Stranger; not with those around the walls of whose fortresses the currents of modernity still swept impotently; not with those who, while not contemning pleasure, still acknowledged duty; not with those whose assured future was that for which she might have sold her soul itself. Social free lances, undoubtedly, and unattached men; those who lived in the world of fashion but were not squeamish—Mrs. Kame, for example; and ladies like Mrs. Eustace Rindge, who had tried a second throw for happiness,—such votaries of excitement would undoubtedly have been more than glad to avail themselves of the secluded hospitality of Grenoble for that which they would have been pleased to designate as “a lively time.” Honora shuddered at the thought: And, as though the shudder had been prophetic, one morning the mail contained a letter from Mrs. Kame herself.

Mercifully Hugh had not noticed it. Honora did not recognize the handwriting, but she slipped the envelope into her lap, fearful of what it might contain, and, when she gained the privacy of her rooms, read it with quickening breath. Mrs. Kame’s touch was light and her imagination sympathetic; she was the most adaptable of the feminine portion of her nation, and since the demise of her husband she had lived, abroad and at home, among men and women of a world that does not dot its i’s or cross its t’s. Nevertheless, the letter filled Honora with a deep apprehension and a deeper resentment. Plainly and clearly stamped between its delicately worded lines was the claim of a comradeship born of Honora’s recent act. She tore the paper into strips and threw it into the flames and opened the window to the cool air of the autumn morning. She had a feeling of contamination that was intolerable.



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Mrs. Kame had proposed herself—again the word “delicately” must be used—for one of Honora’s first house-parties. Only an acute perception could have read in the lady’s praise of Hugh a masterly avoidance of that part of his career already registered on the social slate. Mrs. Kame had thought about them and their wonderful happiness in these autumn days at Grenoble; to intrude on that happiness yet awhile would be a sacrilege. Later, perhaps, they would relent and see something of their friends, and throw open again the gates of a beautiful place long closed to the world. And—without the air of having picked the single instance, but of having chosen from many—Mrs. Kame added that she had only lately seen Elsie Shorter, whose admiration for Honora was greater than ever. A sentiment, Honora reflected a little bitterly, that Mrs. Shorter herself had not taken the pains to convey. Consistency was not Elsie’s jewel.

It must perhaps be added for the sake of enlightenment that since going to Newport Honora’s view of the writer of this letter had changed. In other words, enlarging ideals had dwarfed her somewhat; it was strictly true that the lady was a boon companion of everybody. Her Catholicism had two limitations only: that she must be amused, and that she must not—in what she deemed the vulgar sense—be shocked.

Honora made several attempts at an answer before she succeeded in saying, simply, that Hugh was too absorbed in his work of reconstruction of the estate for them to have house-parties this autumn. And even this was a concession hard for her pride to swallow. She would have preferred not to reply at all, and this slightest of references to his work—and hers—seemed to degrade it. Before she folded the sheet she looked again at that word “reconstruction” and thought of eliminating it. It was too obviously allied to “redemption”; and she felt that Mrs. Kame could not understand redemption, and would ridicule it. Honora went downstairs and dropped her reply guiltily into the mail-bag. It was for Hugh’s sake she was sending it, and from his eyes she was hiding it.

And, while we are dealing with letters, one, or part of one, from Honora’s aunt, may perhaps be inserted here. It was an answer to one that Honora had written a few days after her installation at Grenoble, the contents of which need not be gone into: we, who know her, would neither laugh nor weep at reading it, and its purport may be more or less accurately surmised from her aunt’s reply.

“As I wrote you at the time, my dear,”—so it ran “the shock which your sudden marriage with Mr. Chiltern caused us was great—so great that I cannot express it in words. I realize that I am growing old, and perhaps the world is changing faster than I imagine. And I wrote you, too, that I would not be true to myself if I told you that what you have done was right in my eyes. I have asked myself whether my horror of divorce and remarriage may



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not in some degree be due to the happiness of my life with your uncle. I am, undoubtedly, an exceptionally fortunate woman; and as I look backwards I see that the struggles and trials which we have shared together were really blessings. "Nevertheless, dear Honora, you are, as your uncle wrote you, our child, and nothing can alter that fact in our hearts. We can only pray with all our strength that you may find happiness and peace in your new life. I try to imagine, as I think of you and what has happened to you in the few years since you have left us—how long they seem!—I try to imagine some of the temptations that have assailed you in that world of which I know nothing. If I cannot, it is because God made us different. I know what you have suffered, and my heart aches for you. "You say that experience has taught you much that you could not have—learned in any other way. I do not doubt it. You tell me that your new life, just begun, will be a dutiful one. Let me repeat that it is my anxious prayer that you have not builded upon sand, that regrets may not come. I cannot say more. I cannot dissemble. Perhaps I have already said too much.

"Your loving

*"Aunt Mary."*

An autumn wind was blowing, and Honora gazed out of the window at the steel-blue, ruffled waters of the lake. Unconsciously she repeated the words to herself:

"Builded upon sand!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### CONTAINING PHILOSOPHY FROM MR. GRAINGER

Swiftly came the autumn days, and swiftly went. A bewildering, ever changing, and glorious panorama presented itself, green hillsides struck first with flaming crimsons and yellows, and later mellowing into a wondrous blending of gentler, tenderer hues; lavender, and wine, and the faintest of rose colours where the bare beeches massed. Thus the slopes were spread as with priceless carpets for a festival. Sometimes Honora, watching, beheld from her window the russet dawn on the eastern ridge, and the white mists crouching in strange, ghostly shapes abode the lake and the rushing river: and she saw these same mists gather again, shivering, at nightfall. In the afternoon they threaded valleys, silent save for the talk between them and the stirring of the leaves under their horses' feet.

So the Indian summer passed—that breathless season when even happiness has its premonitions and its pangs. The umber fields, all ploughed and harrowed, lay patiently awaiting the coming again of the quickening spring. Then fell the rain, the first, cold



winter rain that shrouded the valley and beat down upon the defenceless, dismantled garden and made pools in the hollows of the stone seat: that flung itself against Honora's window as though begrudging her the warmth and comfort within. Sometimes she listened to it in the night.



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She was watching. How intent was that vigil, how alert and sharpened her senses, a woman who has watched alone may answer. Now, she felt, was the crisis at hand: the moment when her future, and his was to hang in the balance. The work on the farms, which had hitherto left Chiltern but little time for thought, had relaxed. In these wet days had he begun to brood a little? Did he show signs of a reversion to that other personality, the Chiltern she had not known, yet glimpses of whom she had had? She recalled the third time she had seen him, the morning at the Lilacs in Newport, that had left upon her the curious sense of having looked on a superimposed portrait. That Chiltern which she called her Viking, and which, with a woman's perversity, she had perhaps loved most of all, was but one expression of the other man of days gone by. The life of that man was a closed book she had never wished to open. Was he dead, or sleeping? And if sleeping, would he awake? How softly she tread!

And in these days, with what exquisite, yet tremulous skill and courage did she bring up the subject of that other labour they were to undertake together—the life and letters of his father. In the early dusk, when they had returned from their long rides, she contrived to draw Chiltern into his study. The cheerfulness, the hopefulness, the delight with which she approached the task, the increasing enthusiasm she displayed for the character of the General as she read and sorted the letters and documents, and the traits of his she lovingly traced in Hugh, were not without their effect. It was thus she fanned, ceaselessly and with a smile, and with an art the rarest women possess, the drooping flame. And the flame responded.

How feverishly she worked, unknown to him, he never guessed; so carefully and unobtrusively planted her suggestions that they were born again in glory as his inspiration. The mist had lifted a little, and she beheld the next stage beyond. To reach that stage was to keep him intent on this work—and—after that, to publish! Ah, if he would only have patience, or if she could keep him distracted through this winter and their night, she might save him. Love such as hers can even summon genius to its aid, and she took fire herself at the thought of a book worthy of that love, of a book—though signed by him that would redeem them, and bring a scoffing world to its knees in praise. She spent hours in the big library preparing for Chiltern's coming, with volumes in her lap and a note-book by her side.

One night, as they sat by the blazing logs in his study, which had been the General's, Chiltern arose impulsively, opened the big safe in the corner, and took out a leather-bound book and laid it on her lap. Honora stared at it: it was marked: Highlawns, Visitors' Book."

"It's curious I never thought of it before," he said, "but my father, had a habit of jotting down notes in it on important occasions. It may be of some use to us Honora."



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She opened it at random and read: "July 5, 1893, Picnic at Psalter's Falls. Temperature 71 at 9 A.M. Bar. 30. Weather clear. Charles left for Washington, summons from President, in the midst of it. Agatha and Victor again look at the Farrar property. Hugh has a ducking. P.S. At dinner night Bessie announces her engagement to Cecil Grainger. Present Sarah and George Grenfell, Agatha and Victor Strange, Gerald Shorter, Lord Kylie—"

Honora looked up. Hugh was at her shoulder, with his eyes on the page.

"Psalter's Falls!" he exclaimed. "How well I remember that day! I was just home from my junior year at Harvard."

"Who was 'Charles'?" inquired Honora.

"Senator Pendleton—Bessie's father. Just after I jumped into the mill-pond the telegram came for him to go to Washington, and I drove him home in my wet clothes. The old man had a terrible tongue, a whip-lash kind of humour, and he scored me for being a fool. But he rather liked me, on the whole. He told me if I'd only straighten out I could be anything, in reason."

"What made you jump in the mill-pond?" Honora asked, laughing.

"Bessie Grainger. She had a devil in her, too, in those days, but she always kept her head, and I didn't." He smiled. "I'm willing to admit that I was madly in love with her, and she treated me outrageously. We were standing on the bridge—I remember it as though it were yesterday—and the water was about eight feet deep, with a clear sand bottom. She took off a gold bracelet and bet me I wouldn't get it if she threw it in. That night, right in the middle of dinner, when there was a pause in the conversation, she told us she was engaged to Cecil Grainger. It turned out, by the way, to have been his bracelet I rescued. I could have wrung his neck, and I didn't speak to her for a month."

Honora repressed an impulse to comment on this incident. With his arm over her shoulder, he turned the pages idly, and the long lists of guests which bore witness to the former life and importance of Highlawns passed before her eyes. Distinguished foreigners, peers of England, churchmen, and men renowned in literature: famous American statesmen, scientists, and names that represented more than one generation of wealth and achievement—all were here. There were his school and college friends, five and six at a time, and besides them those of young girls who were now women, some of whom Honora had met and known in New York or Newport.

Presently he closed the book abruptly and returned it to the safe. To her sharpened senses, the very act itself was significant. There were other and blank pages in it for future years; and under different circumstances he might have laid it in its time-honoured place, on the great table in the library.



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It was not until some weeks later that Honora was seated one afternoon in the study waiting for him to come in, and sorting over some of the letters that they had not yet examined, when she came across a new lot thrust carelessly at the bottom of the older pile. She undid the elastic. Tucked away in one of the envelopes she was surprised to find a letter of recent date—October. She glanced at it, read involuntarily the first lines, and then, with a little cry, turned it over. It was from Cecil Grainger. She put it back into the envelope whence it came, and sat still.

After a while, she could not tell how long, she heard Hugh stamping the snow from his feet in the little entry beside the study. And in a few moments he entered, rubbing his hands and holding them out to the blaze.

“Hello, Honora,” he said; “are you still at it? What’s the matter—a hitch?”

She reached mechanically into the envelope, took out the letter, and handed it to him.

“I found it just now, Hugh. I didn’t read much of it—I didn’t mean to read any. It’s from Mr. Grainger, and you must have overlooked it.”

He took it.

“From Cecil?” he said, in an odd voice. “I wasn’t aware that he had sent me anything—recently.”

As he read, she felt the anger rise within him, she saw it in his eyes fixed upon the sheet, and the sense of fear, of irreparable loss, that had come over her as she had sat alone awaiting him, deepened. And yet, long expected verdicts are sometimes received in a spirit of recklessness: He finished the letter, and flung it in her lap.

“Read it,” he said.

“Oh, Hugh!” she protested tremulously. “Perhaps—perhaps I’d better not.” He laughed, and that frightened her the more. It was the laugh, she was sure, of the other man she had not known.

“I’ve always suspected that Cecil was a fool—now I’m sure of it. Read it!” he repeated, in a note of command that went oddly with his next sentence; “You will find that it is only ridiculous.”

This assurance of the comedy it contained, however, did not serve to fortify her misgivings. It was written from a club.

“*Dear Hugh:* Herewith a few letters for the magnum opus which I have extracted from Aunt Agatha, Judge Gaines, and others, and to send you my humble congratulations. By George, my boy, you have dashed off with a prize, and no mistake. I’ve never made



any secret, you know, of my admiration for Honora—I hope I may call her so now. And I just thought I'd tell you you could count on me for a friend at court. Not that I'm any use now, old boy. I'll have to be frank with you—I always was. Discreet silence, and all that sort of thing: as much as my head is worth to open my mouth. But I had an idea it would be an act of friendship to let you know how things stand. Let time and works speak, and Cecil will give the thing a push at the proper moment. I understand from



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one of the intellectual journals I read that you have gone in for simple life and scientific farming. A deuced canny move. And for the love of heaven, old man, keep it up for a while, anyhow. I know it's difficult, but keep it up. I speak as a friend. "They received your letters all right, announcing your marriage. You always enjoyed a row—I wish you could have been on hand to see and hear this one. It was no place for a man of peace, and I spent two nights at the club. I've never made any secret, you know, of the fact that I think the Pendleton connection hide-bound. And you understand Bessie—there's no good of my explaining her. You'd have thought divorce a brand-new invention of the devil, instead of a comparatively old institution. And if you don't mind my saying so, my boy, you took this fence a bit on the run, the way you do everything." "The fact is, divorce is going out of fashion. Maybe it's because the Pendleton-Grenfell element have always set their patrician faces against it; maybe its been a bit overdone. Most people who have tried it have discovered that the fire is no better than the frying-pan—both hot as soon as they warm up. Of course, old boy, there's nothing personal in this. Sit tight, and stick to the simple life—that's your game as I see it. No news—I've never known things to be so quiet. Jerry won over two thousand night before last—he made it no trumps in his own hand four times running.

"Yours,

*"Cecil."*

Honora returned this somewhat unique epistle to her husband, and he crushed it. There was an ill-repressed, terrifying savagery in the act, and her heart was torn between fear and pity for this lone message of good-will. Whatever its wording, such it was. A dark red flush had mounted his forehead to the roots of his short curly hair.

"Well?" he said.

She was fighting for her presence of mind. Flashes of his temper she had known, but she had never seen the cruel, fiendish thing—his anger. Not his anger, but the anger of the destroyer that she beheld waking now after its long sleep, and taking possession of him, and transforming him before her very eyes. She had been able to cope with the new man, but she felt numb and powerless before the resuscitated demon of the old.

"What do you expect me to say, Hugh?" she faltered, with a queer feeling that she was not addressing him.

"Anything you like," he replied.

"Defend Cecil."

"Why should I defend him?" she said dully.



“Because you have no pride.”

A few seconds elapsed before the full import and brutality of this insult reached her intelligence, and she cried out his name in a voice shrill with anguish. But he seemed to delight in the pain he had caused.

“You couldn’t be expected, I suppose, to see that this letter is a d—d impertinence, filled with an outrageous flippancy, a deliberate affront, an implication that our marriage does not exist.”



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She sat stunned, knowing that the real pain would come later. That which slowly awoke in her now, as he paced the room, was a high sense of danger, and a persistent inability to regard the man who had insulted her as her husband. He was rather an enemy to them both, and he would overturn, if he could, the frail craft of their happiness in the storm. She cried out to Hugh as across the waters.

“No,—I have no pride, Hugh,—it is gone. I have thought of you only. The fear that I might separate you from your family, from your friends, and ruin your future has killed my pride. He—Mr. Grainger meant to be kind. He is always like that—it’s his way of saying things. He wishes to show that he is friendly to you—to me—”

“In spite of my relations,” cried Chiltern, stopping in the middle of the room. “They cease to be my relations from this day. I disown them. I say it deliberately. So long as I live, not one of them shall come into this house. All my life they have begged me to settle down, to come up here and live the life my father did. Very well, now I’ve done it. And I wrote to them and told them that I intended to live henceforth like a gentleman and a decent citizen—more than some of them do. No, I wash my hands of them. If they were to crawl up here from the gate on their knees, I’d turn them out.”

Although he could not hear her, she continued to plead.

“Hugh, try to think of how—how our marriage must have appeared to them. Not that I blame you for being angry. We only thought of one thing—our love—” her voice broke at the word, “and our own happiness. We did not consider others. It is that which sometimes has made me afraid, that we believed ourselves above the law. And now that we have—begun so well, don’t spoil it, Hugh! Give them time, let them see by our works that we are in earnest, that we intend to live useful lives.

“I don’t mean to beg them,” she cried, at sight of his eyes. “Oh, I don’t mean that. I don’t mean to entreat them, or even to communicate with them. But they are your flesh and blood—you must remember that. Let us prove that we are—not—like the others,” she said, lifting her head, “and then it cannot matter to us what any one thinks. We shall have justified our act to ourselves.”

But he was striding up and down the room again. It was as she feared—her plea—had fallen on unheeding ears. A sudden convulsive leaping of the inner fires sent him to his desk, and he seized some note-paper from the rack. Honora rose to her feet, and took a step towards him.

“Hugh—what are you going to do?”

“Do!” he cried, swinging in his chair and facing her, “I’m going to do what any man with an ounce of self-respect would do under the circumstances. I’m going to do what I was a fool not to have done three months ago—what I should have done if it hadn’t been for

you. If in their contemptible, pharisaical notions of morality they choose to forget what my mother and father were to them, they cease to exist for me. If it's the last act of my life I'm going to tell them so."



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She stood gazing at him, but she was as one of whom he took no account. He turned to the desk and began to write with a deliberation all the more terrible to her because of the white anger he felt. And still she stood. He pressed the button on his desk, and Starling responded.

“I want a man from the stable to be ready to take some letters to town in half an hour,” he said.

It was not until then that she turned and slowly left the room. A mortal sickness seemed to invade her vitals, and she went to her own chamber and flung herself, face downward, on the lace covering of the bed: and the sobs that shook her were the totterings of the foundations of her universe. For a while, in the intensity of her anguish, all thought was excluded. Presently, however, when the body was spent, the mind began to practise its subtle and intolerable torture, and she was invaded by a sense of loneliness colder than the space between the worlds.

Where was she to go, whither flee, now that his wrath was turned against her? On the strength of his love alone she had pinned her faith, discarded and scorned all other help. And at the first contact with that greater power which he had taught her so confidently to despise, that strength had broken!

Slowly, she gazed back over the path she had trod; where roses once had held up smiling heads. It was choked now by brambles that scratched her nakedness at every step. Ah, how easily she had been persuaded to enter it! “We have the right to happiness,” he had said, and she had looked into his eyes and believed him. What was this strange, elusive happiness, that she had so pantingly pursued and never overtaken? that essence pure and unalloyed with baser things? Ecstasy, perhaps, she had found—for was it delirium? Fear was the boon companion of these; or better, the pestilence that stalked behind them, ever ready to strike.

Then, as though some one had turned on a light—a sickening, yet penetrating blue light—she looked at Hugh Chiltern. She did not wish to look, but that which had turned on the light and bade her was stronger than she. She beheld, as it were, the elements of his being, the very sources of the ceaseless, restless energy that was driving him on. And scan as she would, no traces of the vaunted illimitable power that is called love could she discern. Love he possessed; that she had not doubted, and did not doubt, even now. But it had been given her to see that these springs had existed before love had come, and would flow, perchance, after it had departed. Now she understood his anger; it was like the anger of a fiercely rushing river striving to break a dam and invade the lands below with devastating floods. All these months the waters had been mounting . . . .

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Turning at length from the consideration of this figure, she asked herself whether, if with her present knowledge she had her choice to make over again, she would have chosen differently. The answer was a startling negative. She loved him. Incomprehensible, unreasonable, and unreasoning sentiment! That she had received a wound, she knew; whether it were mortal, or whether it would heal and leave a scar, she could not say. One salient, awful fact she began gradually to realize, that if she sank back upon the pillows she was lost. Little it would profit her to save her body. She had no choice between her present precarious foothold and the abyss, and wounded as she was she would have to fight. There was no retreat:

She sat up, and presently got to her feet and went to the window and stared through the panes until she distinguished the blue whiteness of the fallen snow on her little balcony. The night, despite the clouds, had a certain luminous quality. Then she drew the curtains, searched for the switch, and flooded the room with a soft glow—that beautiful room in which he had so proudly installed her four months before. She smoothed the bed, and walking to the mirror gazed intently at her face, and then she bathed it. Afterwards she opened her window again, admitting a flurry of snow, and stood for some minutes breathing in the sharp air.

Three quarters of an hour later she was dressed and descending the stairs, and as she entered the library dinner was announced. Let us spare Honora the account of that repast or rather a recital of the conversation that accompanied it. What she found to say under the eyes of the servants is of little value, although the fact itself deserves to be commended as a high accomplishment; and while she talked, she studied the brooding mystery that he presented, and could make nothing of it. His mood was new. It was not sullenness, nor repressed rage; and his answers were brief, but he was not taciturn. It struck her that in spite of a concentration such as she had never in her life bestowed on any other subject, her knowledge of him of the Chiltern she had married—was still woefully incomplete, and that in proportion to the lack of perfection of that knowledge her danger was great. Perhaps the Chiltern she had married was as yet in a formative state. Be this as it may, what she saw depicted on his face to-night corresponded to no former experience.

They went back to the library. Coffee was brought and carried off, and Honora was standing before the fire. Suddenly he rose from his chair, crossed the room, and before she could draw away seized and crushed her in his arms without a word. She lay there, inert, bewildered as in the grip of an unknown force, until presently she was aware of the beating of his heart, and a glimmering of what he felt came to her. Nor was it an understandable thing, except to the woman who loved him. And yet and yet she feared it even in that instant of glory.



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When at last she dared to look up, he kissed away the tears from her cheeks.

“I love you,” he said. “You must never doubt it—do you understand?”

“Yes, Hugh.”

“You must never doubt it,” he repeated roughly.

His contrition was a strange thing—if it were contrition. And love—woman’s love—is sometimes the counsellor of wisdom. Her sole reproach was to return his kiss.

Presently she chose a book, and he read to her.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY

One morning, as he gathered up his mail, Chiltern left lying on the breakfast table a printed circular, an appeal from the trustees of the Grenoble Hospital. As Honora read it she remembered that this institution had been the favourite charity of his mother; and that Mrs. Chiltern, at her death, had bequeathed an endowment which at the time had been ample. But Grenoble having grown since then, the deficit for this year was something under two thousand dollars, and in a lower corner was a request that contributions be sent to Mrs. Israel Simpson.

With the circular in her hand, Honora went thoughtfully up the stairs to her sitting-room. The month was February, the day overcast and muggy, and she stood for a while apparently watching the holes made in the snow by the steady drip from the cap of the garden wall. What she really saw was the face of Mrs. Israel Simpson, a face that had haunted her these many months. For Mrs. Simpson had gradually grown, in Honora’s mind, to typify the hardness of heart of Grenoble. With Grenoble obdurate, what would become of the larger ambitions of Hugh Chiltern?

Mrs. Simpson was indeed a redoubtable lady, whose virtue shone with a particular high brightness on the Sabbath. Her lamp was brimming with oil against the judgment day, and she was as one divinely appointed to be the chastener of the unrighteous. So, at least, Honora beheld her. Her attire was rich but not gaudy, and had the air of proclaiming the prosperity of Israel Simpson alone as its unimpeachable source: her nose was long, her lip slightly marked by a masculine and masterful emblem, and her eyes protruded in such a manner as to give the impression of watchfulness on all sides.

It was this watchfulness that our heroine grew to regard as a salient characteristic. It never slept—even during Mr. Stopford’s sermons. She was aware of it when she entered the church, and she was sure that it escorted her as far as the carriage on her



departure. It seemed to oppress the congregation. And Honora had an idea that if it could have been withdrawn, her cruel proscription would have ended. For at times she thought that she read in the eyes of some of those who made way for her, friendliness and even compassion.



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It was but natural, perhaps, in the situation in which our heroine found herself, that she should have lost her sense of proportion to the extent of regarding this lady in the light of a remorseless dragon barring her only path to peace. And those who might have helped her—if any there were—feared the dragon as much as she. Mrs. Simpson undoubtedly would not have relished this characterization, and she is not to have the opportunity of presenting her side of the case. We are looking at it from Honora's view, and Honora beheld chimeras. The woman changed, for Honora, the very aspect of the house of God; it was she who appeared to preside there, or rather to rule by terror. And Honora, as she glanced at her during the lessons, often wondered if she realized the appalling extent of her cruelty. Was this woman, who begged so audibly to be delivered from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy, in reality a Christian? Honora hated her, and yet she prayed that God would soften her heart. Was there no way in which she could be propitiated, appeased? For the sake of the thing desired, and which it was given this woman to withhold, she was willing to humble herself in the dust.

Honora laid the hospital circular on the desk beside her account book. She had an ample allowance from Hugh; but lying in a New York bank was what remained of the unexpected legacy she had received from her father, and it was from this that she presently drew a cheque for five hundred dollars,—a little sacrifice that warmed her blood as she wrote. Not for the unfortunate in the hospital was she making it, but for him: and that she could do this from the little store that was her very own gave her a thrill of pride. She would never need it again. If he deserted her, it mattered little what became of her. If he deserted her!

She sat gazing out of the window over the snow, and a new question was in her heart. Was it as a husband—that he loved her? Did their intercourse have that intangible quality of safety that belonged to married life? And was it not as a mistress rather than a wife that, in their isolation, she watched his moods so jealously? A mistress! Her lips parted, and she repeated the word aloud, for self-torture is human.

Her mind dwelt upon their intercourse. There were the days they spent together, and the evenings, working or reading. Ah, but had the time ever been when, in the depths of her being, she had felt the real security of a wife? When she had not always been dimly conscious of a desire to please him, of a struggle to keep him interested and contented? And there were the days when he rode alone, the nights when he read or wrote alone, when her joy was turned to misery; there were the alternating periods of passion and alienation. Alienation, perhaps, was too strong a word. Nevertheless, at such times, her feeling was one of desolation.

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His heart, she knew, was bent upon success at Grenoble, and one of the books which they had recently read together was a masterly treatise, by an Englishman, on the life-work of an American statesman. The vast width of the country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, was stirred with politics: a better era was coming, the pulse of the nation beating with renewed life; a stronger generation was arising to take the Republic into its own hands. A campaign was in progress in the State, and twice her husband had gone some distance to hear the man who embodied the new ideas, and had come back moody and restless, like a warrior condemned to step aside. Suppose his hopes were blighted—what would happen? Would the spirit of reckless adventure seize him again? Would the wilds call him? or the city? She did not dare to think.

It was not until two mornings later that Hugh tossed her across the breakfast table a pink envelope with a wide flap and rough edges. Its sender had taken advantage of the law that permits one-cent stamps for local use.

“Who’s your friend, Honora?” he asked.

She tried to look calmly at the envelope that contained her fate.

“It’s probably a dressmaker’s advertisement,” she answered, and went on with the pretence of eating her breakfast.

“Or an invitation to dine with Mrs. Simpson,” he suggested, laughingly, as he rose. “It’s just the stationery she would choose.”

Honora dropped her spoon in her egg-cup. It instantly became evident, however, that his remark was casual and not serious, for he gathered up his mail and departed. Her hand trembled a little as she opened the letter, and for a moment the large gold monogram of its sender danced before her eyes.

“Dear Madam, Permit me to thank you in the name of the Trustees of the Grenoble Hospital for your generous contribution, and believe me, Sincerely yours,

*“Maria W. Simpson.”*

The sheet fluttered to the floor.

When Sunday came, for the first time her courage failed her. She had heard the wind complaining in the night, and the day dawned wild and wet. She got so far as to put on a hat and veil and waterproof coat; Starling had opened the doors, and through the frame of the doorway, on the wet steps, she saw the footman in his long mackintosh, his umbrella raised to escort her to the carriage. Then she halted, irresolute. The impassive old butler stood on the sill, a silent witness, she knew, to the struggle going



on within her. It seemed ridiculous indeed to play out the comedy with him, who could have recited the lines. And yet she turned to him.

“Starling, you may send the coachman back to the stable.”

“Very good, madam.”



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As she climbed the stairs she saw him gravely closing the doors. She paused on the landing, her sense of relief overborne by a greater sense of defeat. There was still time! She heard the wheels of the carriage on the circle—yet she listened to them die away. Startling softly caught the latch, and glanced up. For an instant their looks crossed, and she hurried on with palpitating breast, reached her boudoir, and closed the door. The walls seemed to frown on her, and she remembered that the sitting-room in St. Louis had worn that same look when, as a child, she had feigned illness in order to miss a day at school. With a leaden heart she gazed out on the waste of melting snow, and then tried in vain to read a novel that a review had declared amusing. But a question always came between her and the pages: was this the turning point of that silent but terrible struggle, when she must acknowledge to herself that the world had been too strong for her? After a while her loneliness became unbearable. Chiltern was in the library.

“Home from church?” he inquired.

“I didn’t go, Hugh.”

He looked up in surprise.

“Why, I thought I saw you start,” he said.

“It’s such a dreary day, Hugh.”

“But that has never prevented you before.”

“Don’t you think I’m entitled to one holiday?” she asked.

But it was by a supreme effort she kept back the tears. He looked at her attentively, and got up suddenly and put his hands upon her shoulders. She could not meet his eyes, and trembled under his touch.

“Honora,” he said, “why don’t you tell me the truth?”

“What do you mean, Hugh?”

“I have been wondering how long you’d stand it. I mean that these women, who call themselves Christians, have been brutal to you. They haven’t so much as spoken to you in church, and not one of them has been to this house to call. Isn’t that so?”

“Don’t let us judge them yet, Hugh,” she begged, a little wildly, feeling again the gathering of another destroying storm in him that might now sweep the last vestige of hope away. And she seized the arguments as they came. “Some of them may be prejudiced, I know. But others—others I am sure are kind, and they have had no reason to believe I should like to know them—to work among them. I—I could not go to see



them first, I am glad to wait patiently until some accident brings me near them. And remember, Hugh, the atmosphere in which we both lived before we came here—an atmosphere they regard as frivolous and pleasure-loving. People who are accustomed to it are not usually supposed to care to make friends in a village, or to bother their heads about the improvement of a community. Society is not what it was in your mother's day, who knew these people or their mothers, and took an interest in what they were doing. Perhaps they think me—haughty." She tried to smile. "I have never had an opportunity to show them that I am not."



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She paused, breathless, and saw that he was unconvinced.

“Do you believe that, Honora?” he demanded.

“I—I want to believe it. And I am sure, that if it is not true now, it will become so, if we only wait.”

He shook his head.

“Never,” he said, and dropped his hands and walked over to the fire. She stood where he had left her.

“I understand,” she heard him say, “I understand that you sent Mrs. Simpson five hundred dollars for the hospital. Simpson told me so yesterday, at the bank.”

“I had a little money of my own—from my father and I was glad to do it, Hugh. That was your mother’s charity.”

Her self-control was taxed to the utmost by the fact that he was moved. She could not see his face, but his voice betrayed it.

“And Mrs. Simpson?” he asked, after a moment.

“Mrs. Simpson?”

“She thanked you?”

“She acknowledged the cheque, as president. I was not giving it to her, but to the hospital.”

“Let me see the letter.”

“I—I have destroyed it.”

He brought his hands together forcibly, and swung about and faced her.

“Damn them!” he cried, “from this day I forbid you to have anything to do with them, do you hear. I forbid you! They’re a set of confounded, self-righteous hypocrites. Give them time! In all conscience they have had time enough, and opportunity enough to know what our intentions are. How long do they expect us to fawn at their feet for a word of recognition? What have we done that we should be outlawed in this way by the very people who may thank my family for their prosperity? Where would Israel Simpson be to-day if my father had not set him up in business? Without knowing anything of our lives they pretend to sit in judgment on us. Why? Because you have been divorced, and I married you. I’ll make them pay for this!”



“No!” she begged, taking a step towards him. “You don’t know what you’re saying, Hugh. I implore you not to do anything. Wait a little while! Oh, it is worth trying!” So far the effort carried her, and no farther. Perhaps, at sight of the relentlessness in his eyes, hope left her, and she sank down on a chair and buried her face in her hands, her voice broken by sobs. “It is my fault, and I am justly punished. I have no right to you—I was wicked, I was selfish to marry you. I have ruined your life.”

He went to her, and lifted her up, but she was like a child whom passionate weeping has carried beyond the reach of words. He could say nothing to console her, plead as he might, assume the blame, and swear eternal fealty. One fearful, supreme fact possessed her, the wreck of Chiltern breaking against the rocks, driven there by her . . . .

That she eventually grew calm again deserves to be set down as a tribute to the organism of the human body.



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That she was able to breathe, to move, to talk, to go through the pretence of eating, was to her in the nature of a mild surprise. Life went on, but it seemed to Honora in the hours following this scene that it was life only. Of the ability to feel she was utterly bereft. Her calmness must have been appalling: her own indifference to what might happen now,—if she could have realized it,—even more so. And in the afternoon, wandering about the house, she found herself in the conservatory. It had been built on against the library, and sometimes, on stormy afternoons, she had tea there with Hugh in the red-cushioned chairs beside the trickling fountain, the flowers giving them an illusion of summer.

Under ordinary circumstances the sound of wheels on the gravel would have aroused her, for Hugh scarcely ever drove. And it was not until she glanced through the open doors into the library that she knew that a visitor had come to Highlawns. He stood beside the rack for the magazines and reviews, somewhat nervously fingering a heavy watch charm, his large silk hat bottom upward on the chair behind him. It was Mr. Israel Simpson. She could see him plainly, and she was by no means hidden from him by the leaves, and yet she did not move. He had come to see Hugh, she understood; and she was probably going to stay where she was and listen. It seemed of no use repeating to herself that this conversation would be of vital importance; for the mechanism that formerly had recorded these alarms and spread them, refused to work. She saw Chiltern enter, and she read on his face that he meant to destroy. It was no news to her. She had known it for a long, long time—in fact, ever since she had come to Grenoble. Her curiosity, strangely enough—or so it seemed afterwards—was centred on Mr. Simpson, as though he were an actor she had been very curious to see.

It was this man, and not her husband, whom she perceived from the first was master of the situation. His geniality was that of the commander of an overwhelming besieging force who could afford to be generous. She seemed to discern the cloudy ranks of the legions behind him, and they encircled the world. He was aware of these legions, and their presence completely annihilated the ancient habit of subserviency with which in former years he had been wont to enter this room and listen to the instructions of that formidable old lion, the General: so much was plain from the orchestra. He went forward with a cheerful, if ponderous bonhomie.

“Ah, Hugh,” said he, “I got your message just in time. I was on the point of going over to see old Murdock. Seriously ill—you know—last time, I’m afraid,” and Mr. Simpson shook his head. He held out his hand. Hugh did not appear to notice it.

“Sit down, Mr. Simpson,” he said.

Mr. Simpson sat down. Chiltern took a stand before him.

“You asked me the other day whether I would take a certain amount of the stock and bonds of the Grenoble Light and Power Company, in which you are interested, and

which is, I believe, to supply the town with electric light, the present source being inadequate.”



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“So I did,” replied Mr. Simpson, urbanely, “and I believe the investment to be a good one. There is no better power in this part of the country than Psalter’s Falls.”

“I wished to inform you that I do not intend to go into the Light and Power Company,” said Chiltern.

“I am sorry to hear it,” Mr. Simpson declared. “In my opinion, if you searched the state for a more profitable or safer thing, you could not find it.”

“I have no doubt the investment is all that could be desired, Mr. Simpson. I merely wished you to know, as soon as possible, that I did not intend to put my money into it. There are one or two other little matters which you have mentioned during the week. You pointed out that it would be an advantage to Grenoble to revive the county fair, and you asked me to subscribe five thousand dollars to the Fair Association.”

This time Mr. Simpson remained silent.

“I have come to the conclusion, to-day, not to subscribe a cent. I also intend to notify the church treasurer that I will not any longer rent a pew, or take any further interest in the affairs of St. John’s church. My wife was kind enough, I believe, to send five hundred dollars to the Grenoble hospital. That will be the last subscription from any member of my family. I will resign as a director of the Grenoble Bank to-morrow, and my stock will be put on the market. And finally I wished to tell you that henceforth I do not mean to aid in any way any enterprise in Grenoble.”

During this announcement, which had been made with an ominous calmness, Mr. Simpson had gazed steadily at the brass andirons. He cleared his throat.

“My dear Hugh,” said he, “what you have said pains me excessively-excessively. I—ahem—fail to grasp it. As an old friend of your family—of your father—I take the liberty of begging you to reconsider your words.”

Chiltern’s eyes blazed.

“Since you have mentioned my father, Mr. Simpson,” he exclaimed, “I may remind you that his son might reasonably have expected at your hands a different treatment than that you have accorded him. You have asked me to reconsider my decision, but I notice that you have failed to inquire into my reasons for making it. I came back here to Grenoble with every intention of devoting the best efforts of my life in aiding to build up the community, as my father had done. It was natural, perhaps, that I should expect a little tolerance, a little friendliness, a little recognition in return. My wife was prepared to help me. We did not ask much. But you have treated us like outcasts. Neither you nor Mrs. Simpson, from whom in all conscience I looked for consideration and friendship, have as much as spoken to Mrs. Chiltern in church. You have made it clear that, while

you are willing to accept our contributions, you cared to have nothing to do with us whatever. If I have overstated the case, please correct me.”



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Mr. Simpson rose protestingly.

“My dear Hugh,” he said. “This is very painful. I beg that you will spare me.”

“My name is Chiltern,” answered Hugh, shortly. “Will you kindly explain, if you can, why the town of Grenoble has ignored us?”

Israel Simpson hesitated a moment. He seemed older when he looked at Chiltern again, and in his face commiseration and indignation were oddly intermingled. His hand sought his watch chain.

“Yes, I will tell you,” he replied slowly, “although in all my life no crueller duty has fallen on me. It is because we in Grenoble are old-fashioned in our views of morality, and I thank God we are so. It is because you have married a divorced woman under circumstances that have shocked us. The Church to which I belong, and whose teachings I respect, does not recognize such a marriage. And you have, in my opinion, committed an offence against society. To recognize you by social intercourse would be to condone that offence, to open the door to practices that would lead, in a short time, to the decay of our people.”

Israel Simpson turned, and pointed a shaking forefinger at the portrait of General August Chiltern.

“And I affirm here, fearlessly before you, that he, your father, would have been the last to recognize such a marriage.”

Chiltern took a step forward, and his fingers tightened.

“You will oblige me by leaving my father’s name out of this discussion,” he said.

But Israel Simpson did not recoil.

“If we learn anything by example in this world, Mr. Chiltern,” he continued, “and it is my notion that we do, I am indebted to your father for more than my start in life. Through many years of intercourse with him, and contemplation of his character, I have gained more than riches. —You have forced me to say this thing. I am sorry if I have pained you. But I should not be true to the principles to which he himself was consistent in life, and which he taught by example so many others, if I ventured to hope that social recognition in Grenoble would be accorded you, or to aid in any way such recognition. As long as I live I will oppose it. There are, apparently, larger places in the world and less humble people who will be glad to receive you. I can only hope, as an old friend and well-wisher of your family, that you may find happiness.”



Israel Simpson fumbled for his hat, picked it up, and left the room. For a moment Chiltern stood like a man turned to stone, and then he pressed the button on the wall behind him.