A Modern Chronicle, Book II

Winston Churchill

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BOOK II

CHAPTER I. SO LONG AS YE BOTH SHALL LIVE!

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

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

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

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

After that an illogical series of events and pictures passed before her. She was in a corner of the carriage, her veil raised, gazing at her husband, who had kissed her passionately. He was there beside her, looking extremely well in his top hat and frock−coat, with a white flower in his buttonhole. He was the representative of the future she had deliberately chosen. And yet, by virtue of the strange ceremony through which they had passed, he seemed to

have changed. In her attempt to seize upon a reality she looked out of the window. They were just passing the Hanbury mansion in Wayland Square, and her eyes fell upon the playroom windows under the wide cornice; and she wondered whether the doll's house were still in its place, its mute inhabitants waiting to be called by the names she had given them, and quickened into life once more.

Next she recalled the arrival at the little house that had been her home, summer and winter, for so many years of her life. A red and white awning, stretching up the length of the walk which once had run beside the tall pear trees, gave it an unrecognizable, gala air. Long had it stood there, patient, unpretentious, content that the great things should pass it by! And now, modest still, it had been singled out from amongst its neighbours and honoured. Was it honoured? It seemed to Honora, so fanciful this day, that its unwonted air of festival was unnatural. Why should the hour of departure from such a harbour of peace be celebrated?

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

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

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

"Catherine," said Aunt Mary, reprovingly, "what ideas you put into the child's head!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Women beat me," he said. "They're the most erratic stock in the market."

It is worthy of remark how soon the human, and especially the feminine brain adjusts itself to new conditions. In a day or two life became real again, or rather romantic. For the American husband in his proper place is an auxiliary who makes all things possible. His ability to "get things done," before it ceases to be a novelty, is a quality to be admired. Honora admired. An intimacy if the word be not too strong − sprang up between them. They wandered through the quaint streets of New Orleans, that most foreign of American cities, searching out the tumble−down French houses; and Honora was never tired of imagining the romances and tragedies which must have taken place in them. The new scenes excited her, the quaint cafés with their delicious, peppery Créole cooking, and she

would sit talking for a quarter of an hour at a time with Alphonse, who outdid himself to please the palate of a lady with such allure. He called her "Madame"; but well he knew, this student of human kind, that the title had not been of long duration.

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

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

"I believe you care more for those horrid stocks than for me," she said. "I I am just a novelty." His answer, since they were alone in their sitting−room, was obvious.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Bowker is one of the big men in the Faith Insurance Company, and Tyler is president of the Gotham Trust." He paused to light a cigarette, and smiled at her significantly. "If you can jolly the ladies along once in a while,

Honora, it won't do any harm," he added. "You have a way with you, you know, when you want to."

Honora grew scarlet.

"Howard!" she exclaimed.

He looked somewhat shamefaced.

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

"I am always polite," she answered a little coldly.

Honeymoons, after all, are matters of conjecture, and what proportion of them contain disenchantments will never be known. Honora lay awake for a long time that night, and the poignant and ever recurring remembrance of her husband's remark sent the blood to her face like a flame. Would Peter, or George Hanbury, or any of the intimate friends of her childhood have said such a thing?

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

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

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

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

"Who?" asked Honora. "That young Mrs. Freddy Maitland, sitting on the rail. She's the rudest woman in New York."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To his astonishment she smiled.

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

He looked relieved, and patted her on the arm.

"We'll go to−night, old girl," he said.

CHAPTER II. "STAFFORD PARK"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, yes," replied Honora.

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

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

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

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

"Oh, Howard, it's so much pleasanter lunching alone to−day. I'm glad you didn't. And then afterwards?"

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

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

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

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

"It's in the country!" she exclaimed.

To lunch at Delmonico's for eight dollars and live in Rivington! Howard appeared disturbed. More than that, he appeared astonished, solicitous.

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

"In a flat!" repeated Honora, with a shudder.

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

"But Howard," she protested, "why didn't you talk it over with me?"

"Because I wanted to surprise you," he replied. "I spent a month and a half looking for that house. And you never seemed to care. It didn't occur to me that you would care for the first few years," he added, and there was in his voice a note of reproach that did not escape her. "You never seemed inclined to discuss business with me, Honora. I didn't think you were interested. Dallam and I are making money. We expect some day to be on Easy Street so to speak or Fifth Avenue. Some day, I hope, you can show some of these people the road. But just now what capital we have has to go into the business."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I thought you'd be pleased when you saw it, my dear," he said.

CHAPTER III. THE GREAT UNATTACHED

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It would be interesting to know, likewise, just at what period the intention of moving away from Rivington became fixed in Honora's mind. Honora circumscribed, Honora limited, Honora admitting defeat, and this chronicle would be finished. The gods exist somewhere, though many incarnations may be necessary to achieve their companionship. And no prison walls loom so high as to appall our heroine's soul. To exchange one prison

for another is in itself something of a feat, and an argument that the thing may be done again. Neither do the wise ones beat themselves uselessly against brick or stone. Howard poor man! is fatuous enough to regard a great problem as being settled once and for all by a marriage certificate and a benediction; and labours under the delusion that henceforth he may come and go as he pleases, eat his breakfast in silence, sleep after dinner, and spend his Sundays at the Rivington Golf Club. It is as well to leave him, at present, in blissful ignorance of his future.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although she lived in an apartment in a most attractive one, to be sure there could be no doubt about it that Lily Dallam was fashionable. She had a way with her, and her costumes were marvellous. She could have made her fortune either as a dressmaker or a house decorator, and she bought everything from "little" men and women whom she discovered herself. It was a curious fact that all of these small tradespeople eventually became fashionable, too. Lily was kind to Honora, and gave her their addresses before they grew to be great and insolent and careless whether one patronized them or not.

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

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

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

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

Howard roused himself.

"Where are we now?" he asked.

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

"What about him?" demanded her husband.

"Nothing except that be is one of Lily's friends, and she said she knew I should like him. I wish you would be more interested in people. Who is he?" "One of the best−known operators in the market," Howard answered, and his air implied that a lack of knowledge of Mr. Brent was ignorance indeed; "a daring gambler. He cornered cotton once, and raked in over a million. He's a sport, too."

"How old is he?"

"About forty−three."

"Is he married?" inquired Honora.

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

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

in black−walnut cases, and the sun pouring in, assisted in making this effect.

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

"You should join us, my dear," said Mrs. Holt; "I am sure you would be interested in our work." "I'd be so glad to, Mrs. Holt," replied Honora, "if only I didn't live in the country."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," Honora faltered, "I I haven't kept any books. Howard just pays the bills."

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

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

"I'll write to Howard myself to−night," declared Mrs. Holt.

"Please don't, Mrs. Holt. I'll I'll speak to him," said Honora.

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

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

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

"For the future?" Honora repeated.

Mrs. Holt playfully pinched her cheek.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Save me so much!" he echoed.

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

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

"If you go on saving that way," said he, "we'll be in the hands of a receiver by Christmas. I can't see any difference between buying one suit from Ridley whoever he maybe and three from Lily Dallam's 'little man,' except that you spend more than three times as much money."

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

"I can't see anything wrong with their clothes," he maintained.

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

"To please me!"

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

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

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

"You've ordered another dinner gown!"

"Only a little one," said Honora, "the simplest kind. But if you're poor −"

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV. THE NEW DOCTRINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You are a deuced good−looking woman, I'll say that for you, Honora," he admitted.

"Thanks," she answered, mockingly, and put her hands behind her back. "If I had only known you were going to settle down in Rivington and get fat and bald and wear dressing gowns and be a bear, I never should have married you never, never, never! Oh, how young and simple and foolish I was! And the magnificent way you talked about 188

HE LOOKED UP AT HER AS SHE STOOD FACING HIM

189 New York, and intimated that you were going to conquer the world. I believed you. Wasn't I a little idiot not to know that you'd make for a place like this and dig a hole and stay in it, and let the world go hang?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Her husband got up.

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

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

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

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

He drew her down on the arm of his chair.

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

"Oh, Howard, it is such a dear house. I had no idea that so much could be done with so narrow a front. It's all French, with mirrors and big white panels and satin chairs and sofas, and a carved gilt piano that she got for nothing from a dealer she knows; and church candlesticks. The mirrors give it the effect of being larger than it really is. I've only two criticisms to make: it's too far from Fifth Avenue, and one can scarcely turn around in it

without knocking something down a photograph frame or a flower vase or one of her spindle−legged chairs. It was only a hideous, old−fashioned stone front when she bought it. I suppose nobody but Reggie Farwell could have made anything out of it."

"Who's Reggie Farwell?" inquired her husband.

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

"Why not right away?" asked Howard.

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

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

Honora sprang to her feet.

"Get up, Howard," she cried, "remember that we're going out for dinner and you'll never be ready."

"Hold on," he protested, "I don't know about this Quicksands proposition. Let's talk it over a little more −"

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

"For my own good!"

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

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

Either course might have saved him. One trouble with the unfortunate man was that he realized but dimly the gravity of the crisis. He had laboured under the delusion that matrimonial conditions were still what they had been in the Eighteenth Century although it is doubtful whether he had ever thought of that century. Characteristically, he considered the troublesome affair chiefly from its business side. His ambition, if we may use so large a word for the sentiment that had filled his breast, had been coincident with his prenuptial passion for Honora. And she had contrived, after four years, in some mysterious way to stir up that ambition once more; to make him uncomfortable; to compel him to ask himself whether he were not sliding downhill; to wonder whether living at Quicksands might not bring him in touch with important interests which had as yet eluded him. And, above all, if the idea be put a little more crudely and definitely than it occurred in his thoughts, he awoke to the realization

that his wife was an asset he had hitherto utterly neglected. Inconceivable though it were (a middle−of−the−night reflection), if he insisted on trying to keep such a woman bottled up in Rivington she might some day pack up and leave him. One never could tell what a woman would do in these days. Les sacrées femmes.

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

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

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

"Is he full grown?" asked Honora.

Lilly Dallam burst out laughing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"All your things are exquisite."

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

Honora, indeed, had not perjured herself. Only the hypercritical, when Mrs. Dallam was dressed, had the impression of a performed miracle. She was the most finished of finished products. Her complexion was high and (be it added) natural, her hair wonderfully onduléd, and she had withal the sweetest and kindest of smiles and the most engaging laughter in the world. It was impossible not to love her.

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

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

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

"Ask Howard," replied Honora, demurely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What harm can it do?" she asked plaintively. "Howard doesn't have to rent the house, although it would be a sin if he didn't. Find out the rent in the morning, Sid, and we'll all four go down on Sunday and look at it, and lunch at

the Quicksands Club. I'm sure I can get out of my engagement at Laura Dean's this is so important. What do you say, Honora?"

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

CHAPTER V. QUICKSANDS

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

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

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

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

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

If the world had been searched, perhaps, no greater contrast to Rivington could have been found than this delightful colony of Quicksands, full of life and motion and colour, where everybody was beautifully dressed and enjoying themselves. For a whole week after her instalment Honora was in a continual state of excitement and anticipation, and the sound of wheels and voices on the highroad beyond the hedge sent her peeping to her curtains a dozen times a day. The waking hours, instead of burdens, were so many fleeting joys. In the morning she awoke to breathe a new, perplexing, and delicious perfume the salt sea breeze stirring her curtains: later, she was on the gay, yellow−ochre beach with Lily Dallam, making new acquaintances; and presently stepping, with a quiver of fear akin to delight, into the restless, limitless blue water that stretched southward under a milky haze: luncheon somewhere, more new acquaintances, and then, perhaps, in Lily's light wood victoria to meet the train of trains. For at half−past five the little station, forlorn all day long in the midst of the twisted cedars that grew out of the heated sand, assumed an air of gayety and animation. Vehicles of all sorts drew up in the open space before it, wagonettes, phaëtons, victorias, high wheeled hackney carts, and low Hempstead carts: women in white summer gowns and veils compared notes, or shouted invitations to dinner from carriage to carriage. The engine rolled in

with a great cloud of dust, the horses danced, the husbands and the overnight guests, grimy and brandishing evening newspapers, poured out of the special car where they had sat in arm−chairs and talked stocks all the way from Long Island City. Some were driven home, it is true; some to the beach, and others to the Quicksands Club, where they continued their discussions over whiskey−and−sodas until it was time to have a cocktail and dress for dinner.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Trixy!" cried his hostess, threading her way with considerable skill across the room and dragging Honora after her, "Trixy, I want to introduce you to Mrs. Spence. Now aren't you glad you came!" It was partly, no doubt, by such informal introductions that Lily Dallam had made her reputation as the mistress of a house where one and all had such a good time. Honora, of course, blushed to her temples, and everybody laughed even Mrs. Chandos.

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

"Isn't he irrepressible?" demanded Lily Dallam, delightedly, "he's always teasing."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He laughed again.

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

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

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

"I smell the brimstone," said Honora.

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

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

It was Honora's turn to laugh.

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

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

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

"What's your husband like?" he demanded abruptly.

Honora was a little taken aback, but recovered sufficiently to retort:

"You'd hardly expect me to give you an unprejudiced judgment."

"That's true," he agreed significantly.

"He's everything," added Honora, "that is to be expected in a husband."

"Which isn't much, in these days," declared Mr. Brent. "On the contrary," said Honora.

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

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

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

"What about?"

"That you won't stay in Quicksands more than six months," he answered.

"Why do you say that?" she asked curiously.

He shook his head.

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

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

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

"Don't you think it's time for you to talk to Mrs. Chandos?" she asked.

"What for?"

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

"Lily doesn't care," he said.

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

He made a gesture of indifference.

"And how about me?" Honora continued. "Perhaps I'd like to talk to Mr. Dallam."

"Have you ever tried it?" he demanded.

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

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

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

"Oh," cried Honora, "if you're going to−night mayn't I go with you? I'd love to see him in bed."

"Of course I'll take you," said Sidney Dallam, and he looked at her so gratefully that she coloured gain.

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

"We were talking about children," replied Honora, innocently.

"Children!"

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

"And did you talk to Trixy about children, too?" cried Lily, laughing, with a mischievous glance at Mrs. Chandos. "Is he interested in them?" asked Honora.

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

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

"Apparently he is," she said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where's Daddy?" he demanded.

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

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

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

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

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

"It's against all rules, Mr. Dallam," said the nurse, "but he's been very lonesome to−day."

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

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

The child shut his eyes very tight.

"Like that," he promised.

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

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

Sidney Dallam had dreamed!

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

"Well, Honora," he asked, "how do you like the whirl of fashion?"

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

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

Being a man, he qualified his approval.

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

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

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

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

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

When she had risen to leave, he had followed her into the entry. She recalled him vividly as he had stood before her then, a cigar in one hand and a lighted match in the other, his eyes fixed upon her with a singularly disquieting look that was tinged, however, with amusement.

"I'm coming to see you," he announced.

"Do be careful," she had cried, "you'll burn yourself!" "That," he answered, tossing away the match, "is to be expected."

She laughed nervously.

"Good night," he added, "and remember my bet."

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

CHAPTER VI. GAD AND MENI

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

"Where have you been?" said he.

"To church," replied Honora, demurely.

"Such virtue is unheard of in Quicksands."

"It isn't virtue," said Honora.

"I had my doubts about that, too," he declared.

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

"Dissatisfaction," was his prompt reply.

"I don't see why you say that," she protested.

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

"I wish you wouldn't talk nonsense," said Honora, "and besides, I can't knit."

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

"Won't you come, in?" she asked. "I'm sorry Howard isn't home."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Brent threw back his head and laughed.

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

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

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

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

"Do you ride?" he demanded. "I'm devoted to it," she declared.

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

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

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

Brent turned to his coachman.

"Put a pair in the victoria right away and drive Mrs. Chandos to Mrs. Darlington's," he said.

She looked at him, and her lip quivered.

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

"My dear Lula," he replied, "if there's any other carriage you prefer −?"

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

"What do you think of him?" he asked.

"He's adorable," declared Honora.

"Would you like to try him?"

"Oh might I? Sometime?" "Why not to−day now?" he said. "I'll send him over to your house and have your saddle put on him."

Before Honora could protest Mrs. Chandos came forward.

"It's awfully sweet of you, Trixy, to offer to send me to Fanny's, but Warry says he will drive me over. Good−by, my dear," she added, holding out her hand to Honora. "I hope you enjoy your ride."

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

"Poor Lula!" he said. "Most women could have done it better than that couldn't they?"

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

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

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

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

"Do you know," she said slowly, "I'm beginning to think you are a brute."

"That's encouraging," he replied.

"And fickle."

"Still more encouraging. Most men are fickle. We're predatory animals."

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

Emperor's scrutiny. The picture had suggested a probable future for the lady. "How long will it take you to dress?" he asked.

"To dress for what?"

"To ride with me."

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

"Why not?" he demanded.

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

"Lily never keeps an engagement," he said.

"That's no reason why I shouldn't," Honora answered.

"I'm beginning to think you're deuced clever," said he.

"How unfortunate for me!" she exclaimed.

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

"Deuced clever," he repeated.

"An experienced moth," suggested Honora; "perhaps one that has been singed a little, once or twice. Good−by I've enjoyed myself immensely."

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

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

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

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

"What? No but every one calls him Trixy. What's the matter with you?"

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

"I thought you liked Quicksands," he retorted. "You weren't happy until you got down here."

"It's infinitely better than Rivington," she said. "I suppose," he remarked, with a little irritation unusual in him, "that you'll be wanting to go to Newport next."

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

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

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

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

"How decent?" he repeated.

"Yes."

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

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

"What do you mean, Honora?"

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

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

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

"Don't talk nonsense," he said.

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

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

"Why would you care?"

"Why? What a darned idiotic question!"

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

"To what?"

"To compete."

"But but we're married."

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

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

He snapped his cigarette case.

"Darn it, Honora, you're getting too deep for me!" he exclaimed. "You never liked those Browning women down at Rivington, but if this isn't Browning I'm hanged if I know what it is. An attack of nerves, perhaps. They tell me that women go all to pieces nowadays over nothing at all."

"That's just it," she agreed, "nothing at all!"

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

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

"The panacea!" she said.

He laughed a little, boyishly, as he stood looking down at her. "Sometimes I can't make you out," he said. "You've changed a good deal since I married you."

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

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

"Nothing," she replied, "would give me greater pleasure."

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

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

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

Two of the preliminary contests we have already witnessed. Others, more or less similar, followed during a period of two months or more. Nothing inducing the excessive wagging of tongues, Honora saw to that, although Mrs. Chandos kindly took the trouble to warn our heroine, a scene for which there is unfortunately no space in this chronicle; an entirely amicable, almost honeyed scene, in Honora's boudoir. Nor can a complete picture of life at

Quicksands be undertaken. Multiply Mrs. Dallam's dinner−party by one hundred, Howard Spence's Sundays at the Club by twenty, and one has a very fair idea of it. It was not precisely intellectual. "Happy," says Montesquieu, "the people whose annals are blank in history's book." Let us leave it at that.

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

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

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

"I felt it."

He drew his horse a little nearer.

"Sometimes you're positively uncanny," she added.

He laughed.

"I rather like that castles−in−Spain expression you wore," he declared.

"Castles in Spain?"

"Or in some other place where the real estate is more valuable. Certainly not in Quicksands." "You are uncanny," proclaimed Honora, with conviction.

"I told you you wouldn't like Quicksands," said he.

"I've never said I didn't like it," she replied. "I can't see why you assume that I don't."

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

She made him a bow from the saddle.

"You came here by mistake."

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

"I have," said he.

Honora smiled.

"I'm going to be your good angel, and help you get out of it," he continued.

"Get out of what?"

"Quicksands."

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

"It will be easier with my help," he answered. "You're clever enough to realize that Honora."

She was silent awhile.

"You say the most extraordinary things," she remarked presently. "Sometimes I think they are almost −"

"Indelicate," he supplied.

She coloured.

"Yes, indelicate."

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

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

"Onwards and upwards," he cried. "Veni, vidi, vici, ascendi." "It seems to me," she laughed, "that so much education is thrown away on the stock market."

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

"My excuse is," replied Honora, "that I was very young, and I hadn't met you."

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

Howard Spence entered in the midst of the lesson.

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VII. OF CERTAIN DELICATE MATTERS

IN the religious cult of Gad and Meni, practised with such enthusiasm at Quicksands, the Saints' days were polo

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

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

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

"That stock isn't worth a d−n!"

"She's gone to South Dakota."

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

The view from the veranda, at least, appealed to our heroine's artistic sense. The marshes in the middle distance, the shimmering sea beyond, and the polo field laid down like a vast green carpet in the foreground; while the players, in white breeches and bright shirts, on the agile little horses that darted hither and thither across the turf lent an added touch of colour and movement to the scene. Amongst them, Trixton Brent most frequently caught the eye and held it. Once Honora perceived him flying the length of the field, madly pursued, his mallet poised lightly, his shirt bulging in the wind, his close−cropped head bereft of a cap, regardless of the havoc and confusion behind him. He played, indeed, with the cocksureness and individuality one might have expected; and Honora, forgetting at moments the disturbing elements by which she was surrounded, followed him with fascination. Occasionally his name rippled from one end of the crowded veranda to the other, and she experienced a curious and uncomfortable sensation when she heard it in the mouths of these strangers.

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

"That's Reggie Farwell, who did my house in town," she whispered to Honora. "He's never been near me since it was finished. He's utterly ruined."

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

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

For Honora had risen.

"I think I'll go home, Lily," she said; "I'm rather tired."

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

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

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

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

"Hel−lo!" he cried. "Hoity−toity! Where are we going in such a hurry?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I've scarcely been here long enough," replied Honora, "to have acquired all of the Quicksands habits."

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

"Perhaps she thinks you've forgotten her," said Honora.

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

"So I should have thought," said Honora.

Trixton Brent laughed, and Mrs. Kame, too, after a moment's hesitation. She laid her hand familiarly on Mr. Brent's arm. "I haven't seen you all summer, Trixy," she said. "I hear you've been here at Quicksands, stewing in that little packing−case of yours. Aren't you coming into our steeplechase at Banbury?"

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

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

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

Honora did not enlighten him.

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

Mrs. Kame saved her the embarrassment of replying.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well?" he said.

"Well," repeated Honora.

"Nice people," said Mr. Brent, in his peculiar way.

Honora bridled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No," said Brent, coming very close to her, "no, you don't. That's the extraordinary part of it. The trouble with you, Honora, is that you want something badly very badly and you haven't yet found out what it is. And you won't find out," he added, "until you have tried everything. Therefore am I a good Samaritan, or something like it."

She looked at him with startled eyes, breathing deeply.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Honora started.

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

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

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

"Even so," he said.

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

It was some time before her husband responded to the call; and then he explained that if Honora didn't object, he was going to a man's dinner in a private room. The statement was not unusual. "But, Howard," she said, "I I wanted you particularly to−night."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He acknowledged with a laugh the justice of this observation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well," he said, "we speak according to our experiences that is, if we're not inclined to be hypocritical. Most women are." Honora was silent. He had thrown away his cigar, and she could no longer see his face. She wondered whither he was leading.

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

"Howard president of a trust company?" she exclaimed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It did. But Honora did not say so.

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

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

Honora sat up.

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

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

"To me?"

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

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

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

CHAPTER VIII. OF MENTAL PROCESSES FEMININE AND INSOLUBLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

But Mrs. Dallam did not move.

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

"Giving me a chance?" said Honora.

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

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

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

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

"I was," began Honora, fruitlessly.

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

"Lily, please don't say such things!" Honora implored, revolted.

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

"If you'll only be reasonable a moment, Lily, −" said Honora.

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

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

"Invite themselves?"

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

Mrs. Dallam was silent a moment.

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

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

Another brief silence, broken by Lily Dallam.

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Dallam's reproaches presented themselves to Honora in new aspects. She began to feel now, with an intensity that frightened her, distaste and rebellion. It was intolerable that she should be called to account for the people she chose to have in her house, that any sort of pressure should be brought to bear on her to confine her friends to Quicksands. Treason, heresy, disloyalty to the cult of that community in reality these, and not a breach of engagement, were the things of which she had been accused. She saw now. She would not be tied to Quicksands she would not, she would not, she would not! She owed it no allegiance. Her very soul rebelled at the thought, and cried out that she was made for something better, something higher than the life she had been leading. She would permit no one forcibly to restrict her horizon.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Mr. Cuthbert!" she cried.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Not at all," said Honora, laughing.

Mr. Shorter was a jovial gentleman in loose−fitting clothes, and he was exceedingly glad to meet Mr. Cuthbert's friend. "What kind of a house do you want, Mrs. Spence?" he asked. "Cuthbert tells me this morning that the Whitworth house has come into the market. You couldn't have a better location than that, on the Avenue between the Cathedral and the Park."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where's my hat?" he demanded.

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

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

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

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

"Jerry's a joker," he observed as they drove off, "you mustn't mind him."

"I think he's delightful," said Honora.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Cuthbert smiled broadly, and Honora smiled too. Indeed, there was something ludicrous in the remark. He assumed an attitude of reflection.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"To Seattle."

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

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

"I'm sorry," said Honora.

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

"You'll never guess!" she exclaimed.

"Preparing for the exodus," he hazarded.

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

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

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

He laughed.

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

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

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

"When do you move to town?" he inquired.

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

"Somebody has told you that I've been looking at houses!" she exclaimed.

"Have you found one?"

She hesitated.

"Yes I have found one. It belongs to some people named Farnham they're divorced."

"Dicky Farnham's ex−wife," he supplied. "I know where it is unexceptionable neighbourhood and all that sort of thing."

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

"Only −" repeated Trixton Brent, smiling.

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

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

"My eternal friendship," she laughed.

"That's not enough," said Trixton Brent.

CHAPTER IX. INTRODUCING A REVOLUTIONIZING VEHICLE

"HOWARD," said Honora that evening, "I've been going through houses to−day."

"Houses!" he exclaimed, looking up from his newspaper.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How do you know?" he demanded unguardedly.

"Quicksands tells me," she said. "It is a little humiliating not to have more of your confidence, and to hear such things from outsiders." "You never seemed interested in business matters," he answered uneasily.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But you do interest me," he protested.

She shook her head.

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

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

"I don't care anything about the house," said Honora. "I don't want it."

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

Her quick ear, however, detected an undertone which, if not precisely resentment, was akin to the vexation that an elderly gentleman might be justified in feeling who has taken the same walk for twenty years, and is one day struck by a falling brick. Howard had not thought of consulting her in regard to remaining all winter in Quicksands. And, although he might not realize it himself, if he should consent to go to New York one reason for his acquiescence would be that the country in winter offered a more or less favourable atmosphere for the recurrence of similar unpleasant and unaccountable domestic convulsions. Business demands peace at any price. And the ultimatum at Rivington, though delivered in so different a manner, recurred to him. The morning sunlight, as is well known, is a dispeller of moods, a disintegrator of the night's fantasies. It awoke Honora at what for her was a comparatively early hour, and as she dressed rapidly she heard her husband whistling in his room. It is idle to speculate on the phenomenon taking place within her, and it may merely be remarked in passing that she possessed a quality which, in a man, leads to a career and fame. Unimagined numbers of America's women possess that quality a fact that is becoming more and more apparent every day.

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

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

He readjusted his newspaper against the carafe.

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

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

"Old Marshall left her five million dollars."

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

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

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

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

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

"Why don't you?" he said. "It would do you good."

"And you?" she asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, I do wish you had it," said Honora, relieved by the change of subject. "To drive in one must be such a wonderful sensation." "I'll let you know when it stops shooting up the garage and consents to move out," he said. "I'll take you down to Quicksands in it."

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

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

Perhaps it was her husband who was the disillusionizing note as he stood on the polished floor of the sun−flooded drawing−room. Although bare of furniture, it was eloquent to Honora of a kind of taste not to be found at Quicksands: it carried her back, by undiscernible channels of thought, to the impression which, in her childhood, the Hanbury mansion had always made. Howard, in her present whimsical fancy, even seemed a little grotesque in such a setting. His inevitable pink shirt and obviously prosperous clothes made discord there, and she knew in this moment that he was appraising the house from a commercial standpoint. His comment confirmed her guess. "If I were starting out to blow myself, or you, Honora," he said, poking with his stick a marmouset of the carved stone mantel, "I'd get a little more for my money while I was about it."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Honora, who had been listening uneasily, knew that a shrewder or more disturbing argument could not have been used on her husband; and it came from Trixton Brent to Howard at least ex cathedrâ. She was filled with a sense of shame, which was due not solely to the fact that she was a little conscience−stricken because of her innocent complicity, nor that her husband did not resent an obvious attempt of a high−handed man to browbeat him; but also to the feeling that the character of the discussion had in some strange way degraded the house itself. Why was it that everything she touched seemed to become contaminated?

"There's no use staying any longer," she said. "Howard doesn't like it −"

"I didn't say so," he interrupted. "There's something about the place that grows on you. If I felt I could afford it −"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Honora took the eleven o'clock train, which gave her an hour after she arrived in New York to do as she pleased. Her first idea, as she stood for a moment amidst the clamour of the traffic in front of the ferry house, was to call on Mrs. Holt at that lady's hotel; and then she remembered that the Charities Conference began at eleven, and decided to pay a visit to Madame Dumond, who made a specialty of importing novelties in dress. Her costume for the prospective excursion in the automobile had cost Honora some thought that morning. As the day was cool, she had brought along an ulster that was irreproachable. But how about the hat and veil?

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

"Sixty dollars!" exclaimed Honora.

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

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

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

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

A certain pity possessed Honora as she shook her head.

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

Honora's pity turned into a definite contempt.

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

"There he is now, at the entrance to the café," she exclaimed.

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

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

"You're a dream in that veil, my dear," Mrs. Chandos called after her. "Don't forget that we're all dining with you to−night in Quicksands."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Are you sure?" she asked anxiously. "I have people for dinner to−night."

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

"Easily," said Trixton Brent.

CHAPTER X. ON THE ART OF LION TAMING

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

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

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

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

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

"Why don't you?" he demanded.

She smiled.

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

"Why?"

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm perfectly serious," continued Honora, slowly. "I'd really like to know."

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

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

He laughed.

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

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

"I shouldn't call you precisely eligible, either," she retorted.

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

"Are these harsh words the reward for my charity?" he asked. "I'm by no means sure it's charity," she said. "That's what is troubling me. And you have no right to say such things about my husband."

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

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

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

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

Trixton Brent looked at her queerly.

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

She did not reply.

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

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

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

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

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

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

At this crucial instant what had been a gliding flight of the automobile became, suddenly, a more or less uneven and jerky progress, accompanied by violent explosions. At the first of these Honora, in alarm, leaped to her feet.

And the machine, after what seemed an heroic attempt to continue, came to a dead stop. They were on the outskirts of a village; children coming home from school surrounded them in a ring. Brent jumped out, the chauffeur opened the hood, and they peered together into what was, to Honora, an inexplicable tangle of machinery. There followed a colloquy, in technical French, between the master and the man.

"What's the matter?" asked Honora, anxiously.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Honora!"

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

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

"Oh you mustn't say that!" she cried.

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

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

Brent made a motion of disdain with his free band.

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

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

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

"I don't pretend to say how it is, or why it is," he went on, paying no heed to her protests. "I suppose there's one woman for every man in the world though I didn't use to think so. I always had another idea of woman before I met you. I've thought I was in love with 'em, but now I understand it was only something else. I say, I don't know what it is in you that makes me feel differently. I can't analyze it, and I don't want to. You're not perfect, by a good deal, and God knows I'm not. You're ambitious, but if you weren't, you'd be humdrum yet there's no pitiful artifice in you as in other women that any idiot can see through. And it would have paralyzed forever any ordinary woman to have married Howard Spence."

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

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

"Oh!" she cried, trembling.

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

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

"I gloried in it," he replied. "I shall remember it as long as I live, and I'll do it again." She did not answer him. She dropped her veil, and for a long space was silent while they rapidly threaded the traffic, and at length turned into upper Fifth Avenue, skirting the Park. She did not so much as glance at him. But he seemed content to watch her veiled profile in the dusk.

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

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

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

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

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

"Honora?" he said.

She did not answer.

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

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

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

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

Trixton Brent hailed one of the hotel servants.

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

Honora stopped the boy at the elevator door.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sit down, my dear, and tell me how you happen to be here," said Mrs. Holt. "I suppose Howard is downstairs."
"No, he isn't," said Honora, rather breathlessly; "that's the reason I came here. That's one reason, I mean. I was coming to see you this morning, but I simply didn't have time for a call after I got to town."

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

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

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

"Cecil Grainger?" demanded Mrs. Holt.

Honora trembled.

"Yes," she said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I never heard of her," said Mrs. Holt, and Honora thanked her stars. "And Howard approves of these mixed lunches, my dear? When I was young, husbands and wives usually went to parties together."

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

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

"The Paul Jones Faunces?" Mrs. Holt interrupted. "What a nice woman that young Mrs. Faunce is! She was Kitty Esterbrook, you know. Both of them very old families."

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

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

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

"Who?" inquired Mrs. Holt.

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

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the elder lady.

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

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

"And what makes it worse," said Honora, "is that the wires are down to Quicksands, and I can't telephone Howard, and we have people to dinner, and they don't know I went to Westchester, and there's no use

telegraphing: it wouldn't be delivered till midnight or morning." "There, there, my dear, don't worry. I know how anxious you feel on your husband's account −"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After Mrs. Holt had given instructions to her maid to pack, and Honora had brushed some of the dust of the roads from her costume, they descended to the ladies' parlour. At the far end of it a waiter holding a card was standing respectfully, and Trixton Brent was pacing up and down between the windows. When he caught sight of them he stopped in his tracks, and stared, and stood as if rooted to the carpet. Honora came forward. "Oh, Mr. Brent!" she cried, "my old friend, Mrs. Holt, is here, and she's going to take dinner with us and come down to Quicksands for the night. May I introduce Mr. Brent."

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

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

"A relief?" he asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Anything, Mrs. Holt," said Honora.

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

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

"Two, sir?" he asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well," said Trixton Brent, laughing in spite of himself, "like the working girls, I have to have a little excitement occasionally. And I find it easier to get off in the summer than in the winter." "Men cover a multitude of sins under the plea of business," said Mrs. Holt, shaking her head. "I can't say I think much of your method of distraction. Why any one desires to get into an automobile, I don't see."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"There might be some hope for you if you fell into the hands of a good woman," said Mrs. Holt. "I take it you are a bachelor. Mark my words, the longer you remain one, the more steeped in selfishness you are likely to become in this modern and complex and sense−satisfying life which so many people lead." Honora trembled for what he might say to this, remembering his bitter references of that afternoon to his own matrimonial experience. Visions of a scene arose before her in the event that Mrs. Holt should discover his status. But evidently Trixton Brent had no intention of discussing his marriage.

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

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

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

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

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

He shook his head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And a most dangerous one," continued Mrs. Holt. "He has probably, in his day, disturbed the peace of mind of a great many young women. Not that I haven't the highest confidence in you, Honora, but honesty forces me to confess that you are young and pleasure−loving and a little heedless. And the atmosphere in which you live is not likely to correct those tendencies. If you will take my advice, you will not see too much of Mr. Trixton Brent when your husband is not present." Indeed, as to the probable effect of this incident on the relations between Mr. Brent and herself Honora was wholly in the dark. Although, from her point of view, what she had done had been amply justified by the plea of self−defence, it could not be expected that he would accept it in the same spirit. The apparent pleasure he had taken in the present situation, once his amazement had been overcome, profoundly puzzled her.

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

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

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

Mrs. Holt was the first of the three to appear at the door of the drawing−room, and Mrs. Barclay caught sight of her, and stopped in the middle of a bar, with her mouth open. Some of the guests had left. A table in the corner, where Lula Chandos had insisted on playing bridge, was covered with scattered cards and some bills, a decanter of whiskey, two soda bottles, and two glasses. The blue curling smoke from Mrs. Chandos' cigarette mingled with the haze that hung between the ceiling and the floor, and that lady was in the act of saying cheerfully to Howard, who sat opposite,

"Trixy's run off with her."

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Holt made no attempt to enter, but stared fixedly at the cigarette that Mrs. Chandos still held in her trembling fingers. Howard crossed the room in the midst of an intense silence. "Glad to see you, Mrs. Holt," he said. "Er won't you come in and and sit down?"

"Thank you, Howard," she replied, "I do not wish to interrupt your − party. It is my usual hour for retiring. And I think, my dear," she added, turning to Honora, "that I'll ask you to excuse me, and show me to my room."

"Certainly, Mrs. Holt," said Honora, breathlessly. "Howard, ring the bell."

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

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

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

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she said, on the verge of tears, "I don't want to go to them. Really, I don't." "It must be confessed," said Mrs. Holt, opening her handbag and taking out the copy of the mission report, which had been carefully folded, "that they seem to be able to get along very well without you. I suppose I am too old to understand this modern way of living. How well I remember one night it was in 1886 I missed the train to Silverdale, and my telegram miscarried. Poor Mr. Holt was nearly out of his head."

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

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

"At at any time you like."

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

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

CHAPTER XI. CONTAINING SOME REVELATIONS

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

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

And she got into her carriage.

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

Howard laughed.

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

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

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

"No, not in there!" she cried sharply.

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

"Don't you feel well?" he asked.

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

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

"High and dry," she repeated.

"What?"

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

He laughed.

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

"You didn't take it seriously?"

"No why should I?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"When did he come to you?" she asked breathlessly.

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

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

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

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

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

she knew so well, that always seemed to have an enigma behind it. At sight and touch of him the memory of what she had prepared to say vanished.

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

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

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

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

"I want the truth," she craved.

"I never lie to a woman," he said.

"My life my future depends upon it," she went on. "I'd rather scrub floors, I'd rather beg than to have it so. You must believe me!"

"I do believe you," he affirmed. And he said it with a gentleness and a sincerity that startled her.

"Thank you," she answered simply. And speech became very difficult. "If if I haven't been quite fair with you Mr. Brent, I am sorry. I − I liked you, and I like you to−day better than ever before. And I can quite see now how I must have misled you into thinking queer things about me. I didn't mean to. I have learned a lesson."

She took a deep, involuntary breath. The touch of lightness in his reply served to emphasize the hitherto unsuspected fact that sportsmanship in Trixton Brent was not merely a code, but assumed something of the grandeur of a principle.

"I, too, have learned a lesson," he replied. "I have learned the difference between nature and art. I am something of a connoisseur in art. I bow to nature, and pay my bets."

"Your bets?" she asked, with a look.

"My renunciations, forfeits, whatever you choose to call them. I have been fairly and squarely beaten but by nature, not by art. That is my consolation."

Laughter struck into her eyes like a shaft of sunlight into a well; her emotions were no longer to be distinguished. And in that moment she wondered what would have happened if she had loved this man, and why she had not. And when next he spoke, she started.

"How is my elderly dove−coloured friend this morning?" he asked. "That dinner with her was one of the great events of my life. I didn't suppose such people existed any more." "Perhaps you'll stay to breakfast with her," suggested Honora, smiling. "I know she'd like to see you again."

"No, thanks," he said, taking her hand, "I'm on my way to the train − I'd quite forgotten it. Au revoir!" He reached the end of the porch, turned, and called back, "As a dea ex machina, she has never been equalled."

Honora stood for a while looking after him, until she heard a footstep behind her, Mrs. Holt's.

"Who was that, my dear?" she asked, "Howard?"

"Howard has gone, Mrs. Holt," Honora replied, rousing herself. "I must make his apologies. It was Mr. Brent."

"Mr. Brent!" the good lady repeated, with a slight upward lift of the faint eyebrows. "Does he often call this early?"

Honora coloured a little, and laughed.

"I asked him to breakfast with you, but he had to catch a train. He − wished to be remembered. He took such a fancy to you."

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Holt, "that his fancy is a thing to be avoided. Are you coming to Silverdale with me, Honora?"

"Yes, Mrs. Holt," she replied, slipping her arm through that of her friend, "for as long as you will let me stay."

And she left a note for Howard to that effect.